



the
mindfulness
bell

Can Mother Earth Count On Us?

ISSUE 92 - 2023

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Welcome Letter

Thầy's vow to help us wake up to our profound interconnection with each other and the Earth, like the sound of the rising tide, continues to swell to a roar of waves crashing onto the shore of liberation. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Thầy experimented with community living in the Central Highlands of Vietnam at Phương Bối (Fragrant Palm Leaves) Hermitage. He supported the ecological social justice work of the School of Youth for Social Service in the mid sixties, and later, in 1971, the Đại Đồng Thể Giới (World of Great Togetherness) Movement and the Menton Message on the environment. He and the community planted the 1,250 plum trees that gave Plum Village—a continuation of Phương Bối—its name. And more: in 2007, Thầy introduced the Earth Peace Treaty, established Car-Free Days, and made a request for the community to stop serving animal-derived foods. These waves of action culminated in the love letter Thầy wrote to Mother Earth in 2011.

Thầy's beautiful response to centuries of violence toward the Earth continues in the work of his students: the Earth Holder Community, the Happy Farm movement, and the book and online course *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet*. In this issue, as we face ever more dire consequences stemming from our way of life, we give homage to Thầy's vision of deep ecology and our role as its direct continuation. Mindfulness of what is going on in the present moment is what we urgently need: mindfulness that helps us take care of the difficult emotions—anxiety, fear, anger—that arise as we embrace with nonfear catastrophic climate change and the accelerated destruction of biological diversity.

Will the age of humans be marked by radical culture change that restores balance to Gaia, or will we continue our addiction to consumption and extraction? Every breath, every step we take with awareness brings us, along with our ancestors and descendents, into the world we all want to live in: a world of peace, of understanding, of harmony, and of balance—a world where all can thrive. We hope the visions shared in this issue will encourage each of us to engage with our world and each other mindfully and lovingly, as Thầy's students and as his continuation.

Brother Pháp Lưu
ADVISOR AND EDITOR



Ordained in 2003, Brother Pháp Lưu (Brother Stream) received Transmission of the Lamp from Thầy to teach in 2011. He helped start Wake Up, the Plum Village movement for young people, as well as the Happy Farm, Plum Village's organic farming community, and has been working with Wake Up Schools since its inception in 2012 to bring mindfulness to schools. He has served as a monastic editor for a number of Thầy's books, including *Happy Teachers Change the World*, *Stepping into Freedom*, *The Admonitions and Encouraging Words of Master Guishan*, *How to Focus*, and *Cracking the Walnut*. Brother Pháp Lưu leads mindful backpacking retreats in nature around Deer Park Monastery in Escondido, California, US; Joshua Tree National Park; the Sierra Nevada; and on the Appalachian Trail.

Opposite photo by Brandy Sacks



DHARMA TALK

A Love Letter to the Planet

THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH



Thích Nhất Hạnh planting a bodhi
tree in India, 2008; photo courtesy of
monastic Sangha

**Thích Nhất Hạnh shares
intimate conversations with
Mother Earth.**

INTERBEING—OUR TRUE NATURE

Dear Mother, every time I step on the Earth, I am now able to transcend the notions of mind and matter. Your sublime reality also transcends the notions of mind and matter. Matter and mind are just ideas, two faces of the same reality. The pine tree is not just matter, as it possesses a sense of knowing. A dust particle is not just matter, since each of its atoms has intelligence and is a living reality. Our nature is your nature, which is the nature of the cosmos. This is the nature of interbeing—of no-being and no-nonbeing, no-birth and no-death, no increasing or decreasing, no matter and no mind, no inside or outside, no coming or going. Earth is thought to be one of the four basic elements, but Mother Earth is also composed of the other three non-earth elements—water, air, and fire. The four elements carry in themselves time, space, and consciousness. Each step reveals to us the Buddha nature that is not only present in humans but in all things.

Dear Mother, you are a great Bodhisattva, giving birth to countless buddhas and bodhisattvas. Your heart embraces the whole cosmos and your wisdom radiates in the ten directions. We cannot compare our capacity to understand and to love with yours. Some of us resent you for giving birth to them, causing them to endure suffering, because they are not yet able to understand and appreciate you. With the practice of looking deeply, we see that we can overcome all of our suffering and resentment. Getting in touch deeply with the historical dimension, we can see the ultimate dimension and thus come to better understand what is happening in the historical dimension.

In the ultimate dimension, there is no birth, no death, no suffering, no happiness, no coming, no going, no good, and no evil. We must learn to look at the world of signs and appearances from the perspective of the ultimate dimension. In the historical dimension, if there is no death, there will be no birth. If there is no suffering, there will be no happiness. Without evil, good cannot be; without the mud, lotuses will not grow. Mud and lotus are not enemies. Lotus and mud depend on each other to manifest. The same is true for suffering and happiness, good and evil. But since our understanding of good and evil is still very dualistic, some of us resent, blame, and reproach the Earth and the Sky.¹ We use our small minds to judge the great mind of the Earth and the Sky.

... without the mud,
lotuses will not grow.
Mud and lotus are not
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other to manifest.

The floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis are not punishments or manifestations of your anger, but are things that must occur on occasion in the historical dimension, out of necessity, so that balance can be reestablished; the same is true of a shooting star. For balance in nature to be achieved, at times some species have to endure loss. But when the need to survive is replaced with greed and pride, there is violence, which always brings about unnecessary devastation. We have seen that when one species develops too rapidly, exceeding its natural limit, causing great loss and

damage, threatening the lives of other species, then naturally causes and conditions will arise to bring about the destruction and annihilation of that species. Equilibrium can then be restored among the remaining species. These causes and conditions often surface from within the very species causing the destruction. We have learned the lesson that when we perpetrate violence toward our own and other species, we are violent toward ourselves; when we know how to protect all beings, we are protecting ourselves.



CONTINUING THE MIND OF LOVE

Dear Mother, each of us has Buddha nature because we are all your offspring, whether we are humans, animals, plants, or minerals. We humans are often proud of our mind consciousness, but this is only one of the many functions of mind, such as Store Consciousness² and Vimala (pure, non-defiled) Consciousness. Our mind consciousness gives us the ability to recognize our own presence and the presence of the cosmos in this moment, but it is limited by our habitual tendency to differentiate between being and nonbeing, birth and death, inside and outside, individual and collective. Some of us have practiced, contemplated, and purified ourselves, and attained the wisdom of nondiscrimination. We are able to be in touch with *nirvana*, with the nature of no-birth and no-death in ourselves. You must be very proud of those of us who are able to continue you on the path of evolution, those who have the capacity to guide and to lead others toward the insight of nonduality, transforming all differentiation, discrimination, fear, hatred, and despair.

You have given birth to many great buddhas and bodhisattvas. We make the deep vow to follow those who have gone before us on this path. We make the vow to confidently embody your wondrous and sublime consciousness, so as to be worthy of calling ourselves your children. We understand that all things are impermanent and without a separate self-nature; you, the Sun, and all buddhas and bodhisattvas are of the same nature. We know that in the ultimate dimension, your lifespan, Father's, and that of all beings, including leaves and budding flowers, are limitless—transcending birth and death, being and nonbeing. Yet in the historical dimension, we still want to protect you, our Mother Earth, so that you can continue for a long time in this beautiful and precious form, not just five hundred million years, but even beyond. We want to protect you so that you can be here with us, within this cozy solar system, for a very long time.

RETURNING TO INTIMACY WITH MOTHER EARTH

Respected Mother, some of us ask what will happen to them once their physical form disintegrates. We know clearly that we will return to you. It is only natural. If we know how to contemplate, to look deeply, we will recognize the true no-coming and no-going nature of all things. We will no longer have any questions about coming and going. Knowing that we have manifested from you in the past and that we will continue to manifest from you again and again in the future, each time fresh and new, we have no more worries, no more fears.

Dear respected Mother, I see the whole cosmos in you, and you in me. Although you are the mother of all species, as humans we are capable of conversing intimately with you, capable of seeing you and understanding you. We know that you want us to live in such a way that in each moment of our daily lives we can produce the energies of mindfulness, peace, solidity, and love. We vow to obey your wish and respond to your love. We have the conviction that if we keep producing these wholesome energies, we will be able to help reduce suffering on Earth, especially the suffering

We know that when we suffer, you also suffer in us. At these times, we have turned to you, dear Mother, and asked you whether or not we could count on you, on your stability and compassion.

caused by war, hunger, and illness. We will learn to appreciate and enjoy our own presence and the presence of the cosmos. With these wholesome energies we can help reduce the number of natural disasters like floods, storms, earthquakes, and tsunamis.

Dear Mother, there have been times when your children suffered greatly as a result of natural disasters. We know that when we suffer, you also suffer in us. At these times, we have turned to you, dear Mother, and asked you whether or not we could count on you, on your stability and compassion. You did not answer us right away. And then, looking at us with great compassion, you said, “Yes, of course, you can count on your Mother. I will always be there for you. But, dear children, you must ask yourselves whether your Mother can count on you.” Dear Mother, we have passed many nights without sleeping because of this koan given to us. Today, our faces covered in tears, we come to kneel before you, compassionate and holy Mother, to tell you that, “Yes, Mother, you can count on us.”

¹ In Taoist cosmology, the world of man and Heaven.

² In Buddhist psychology, one of the eight parts of consciousness; a field in which every kind of seed-potential can be planted—such as seeds of suffering, sorrow, fear, happiness, or compassion; in Western psychology, the unconscious mind.

This is an excerpt from A Love Letter to the Planet, published by Parallax Press.

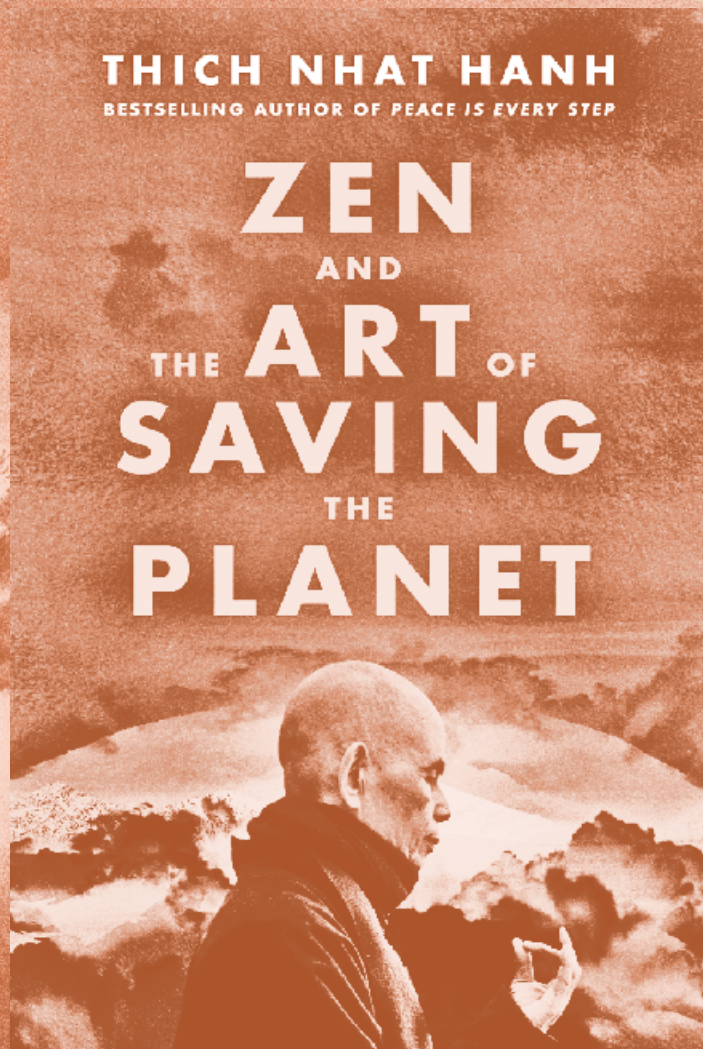


Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh is one of the most revered and influential teachers in the world today. Born in Vietnam in 1926, he became a Zen Buddhist monk at the age of sixteen. Over seven decades of teaching, he published more than one hundred titles on meditation, mindfulness, and Engaged Buddhism, as well as poems, children's stories, and commentaries on ancient Buddhist texts. After his exile from Vietnam in 1966, he became a pioneer in bringing Buddhism to the West. He founded the Plum Village tradition of meditation practice, which today has ten monasteries and dozens of practice centers in the United States, Asia, Australia, and Europe, as well as more than 1,500 local mindfulness practice communities. He built a thriving community of over seven hundred monks and nuns worldwide, who, together with his tens of thousands of lay students, apply his teachings on mindfulness, peacemaking, and community-building in schools, workplaces, prisons, politics, and businesses throughout the world. Our beloved teacher passed away peacefully on January 22, 2022, at Từ Hiếu Temple in Huế, Vietnam, at the age of ninety-five.

How Zen Can Help Save the Planet

BROTHER PHÁP DUNG

An excerpt from a Dharma talk shared by Brother Pháp Dung in the Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet (ZASP) online course, a transformative learning journey to cultivate insight, compassion, community, and action in service of the Earth.





We have different kinds of energy that we can have access to and that can help us in our daily lives—in the work that we need to do and in our service to humanity and the planet.

In the title *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet* ... the word Zen is a Japanese word, and it means meditation. It's a translation from the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*, which means meditation or cultivation. So meditation is not the exact translation of Zen; the word cultivation is even more appropriate. Here we are cultivating the mind, cultivating our lives, and cultivating a certain kind of energy. So the word Zen can be kind of like a cultivated person: someone whose mind is developed, who is matured, and who has been trained in a certain way. And the energy we use is mindfulness, right? This energy is a very internal, spiritual energy.

When I learned about meditation, especially in the Vietnamese tradition, the word used for Zen was *thiền*. If you've trained enough in meditation or in the monastery, people look at you, whether

you're a meditator, a monastic, or a practitioner, and they say you have the *thiền vị*—the flavor, the taste, of Zen. So someone can have a Zen flavor. In our work—whether in our lives, in our service, in activist work, or in our engagement for social change—when we look at the current situation, we need more of that Zen flavor. That's why I like the word Zen in the title of this course. It asks: How can we bring more of a Zen flavor to the work of bettering our environment, bettering our humanity, and bettering our relationship with Mother Earth?

Brother Pháp Linh (Brother Spirit) and I had a chance to attend the COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland. What we brought there was our practice. We brought our practice in the way we walked and the way we participated—a kind of Zen energy. It was a way of being at the conference. And it was quite a contrast: there were a lot of people rushing around, working to organize and recalculate our relationship in terms of carbon footprint or to find other ways to help lower our impact on our planet.

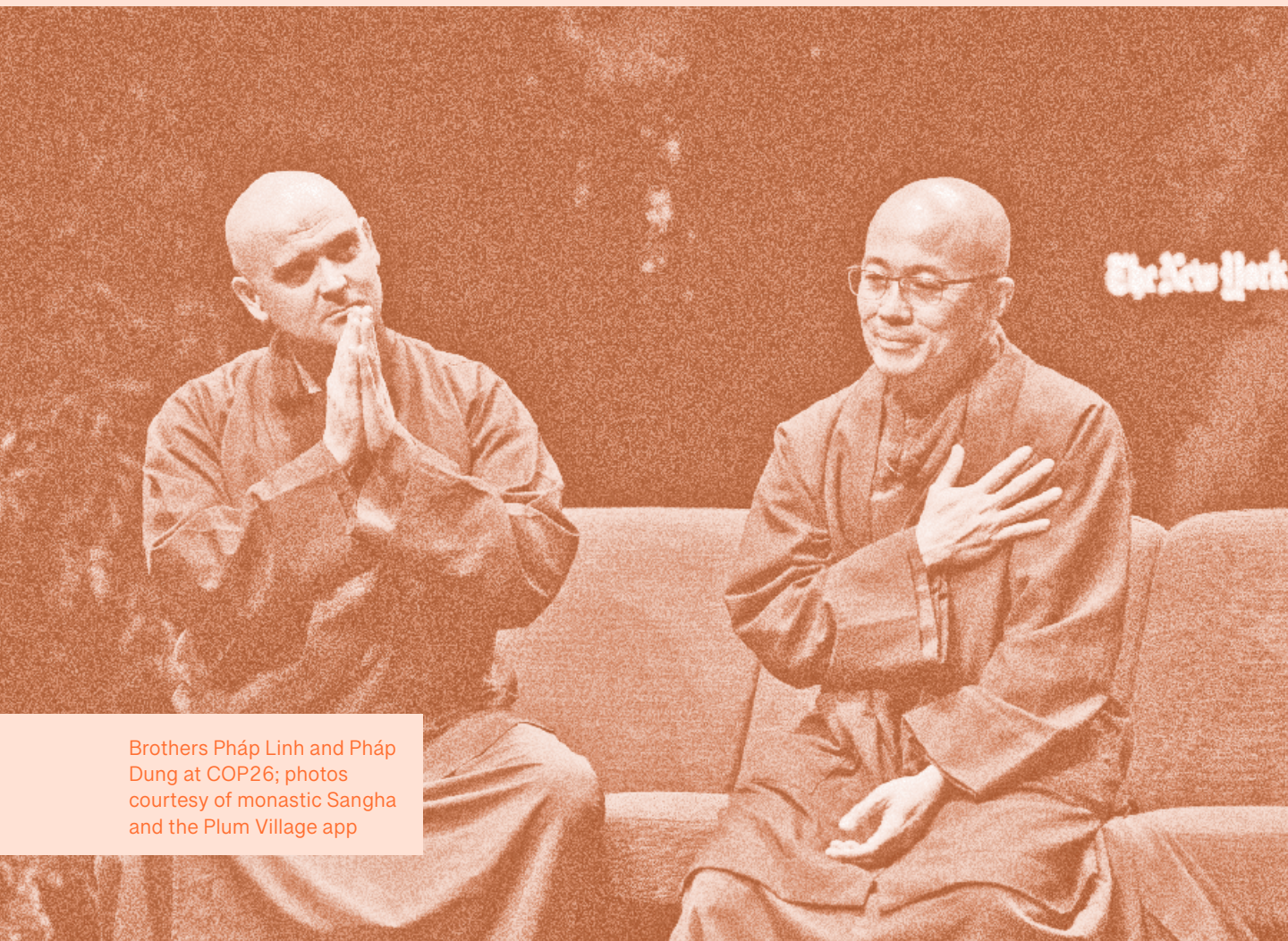
How can we bring more of a Zen flavor to the work of bettering our environment, bettering our humanity, and bettering our relationship with Mother Earth?

There was a lot of stress, a lot of anger, and a lot of confrontation. We felt a lot of tension in people, both in their bodies and in their minds.

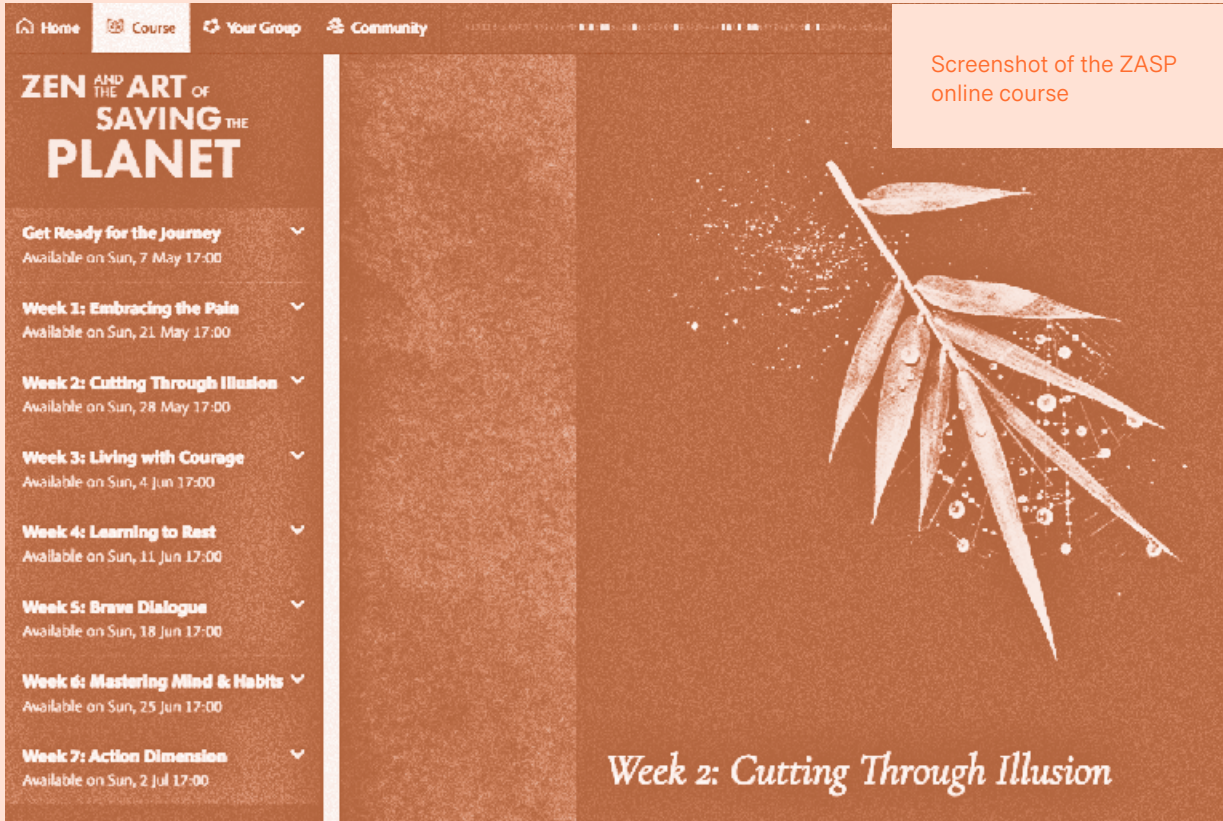
And so my brother and I, we led meditation every morning. And that is to bring that sense of, yes, we need work, and there is important work that needs to be done, but *how* do we do it? Does it have a flavor of Zen? The flavor of Zen here is a kind of lightness. Yes, it's dire. Yes, it is urgent, this situation that we and our planet find ourselves in. Yes, it is important for us to do the work we need to do. But how do we do it? Do we sacrifice our relationships, sacrifice the present moment, to achieve our goal? To have the Zen flavor in our work is to be at ease and to be free. In our approach, we don't sacrifice the present moment or sacrifice our relation-

ships in order to achieve our goal. The kind of mentality that has brought us into trouble is this very striving and tense approach. What it means to have the Zen flavor is a kind of core spiritual energy.

The energy of a meditator can support a sense of clarity. When we are still, we are less reactive. We have clarity about what is happening in the room and what is happening with our planet. We are not fooled by misinformation. This is the power of meditation. We are not moved to react to information and news too quickly. When something touches us and makes us suffer or feel pain, we don't react right away; we come back to our breathing. In the *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet* course, we learn ways to stop, ways to calm ourselves, to take care of our feelings and our body.



Brothers Pháp Linh and Pháp Dung at COP26; photos courtesy of monastic Sangha and the Plum Village app



In our work as activists, or in our work in society, this energy of meditation can help us have more stillness. This is the Zen flavor: someone who is very still. Whatever is happening at work with our colleagues, with the environment, or with the news, we are not too quick to react to our emotions like sadness or anger. When you look at someone, you can see Zen flavor: they are still, and they're very clear. When they share, their words come from a place of insight. What is this insight? When we can look, we can touch more deeply the reality of non-separation. A lot of us experience separation in our work, the dualistic idea of an enemy. We are fueled by this view, and we don't see deeply that we're all victims. As a meditator, we begin to see more nondualistically or nondiscriminatively. When we move from this place of less discrimination, we are more cooperative. We see that those causing harm are also victims.

The insight cuts through our illusion of separation, which we'll learn more about [in the Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet online course] as we study the Diamond Sutra and these concepts as well as the ideas we have about ourselves, other people, the planet, and other living beings.

The energy of meditation can support insight that will help us to avoid othering people—different groups, different people, and different ways. The planet and the environment as well. We stop seeing things as separate from us.

This insight, when we have time to meditate, can really fuel us, it can give us energy. This is the “diamond” of a meditator. It's what we cultivate, it's what we mine for. The diamond is the insight that helps us break through our suffering and our pain, that allows us to see the pain and the suffering in the world. This insight moves us to action.

Do you have a deep sense of care for the Earth and want to find ways to bring mindfulness to your climate response? This new online course harnesses the wisdom of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh to teach us how to face these challenging feelings and create a sense of freedom and possibility. It is a seven-week course and offers talks and practices to enjoy at your own pace as well as small sharing groups and a series of interactive events with monastics. The course is designed to empower the human resilience we need to face our current situation.

Find out more via plumvillage.org/zasp.

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We stop seeing things as separate from us.

Brother Pháp Dung, Dharma Embrace, is a Vietnamese American monk ordained by Thầy in 1998. He received a professional BA in architecture from the University of Southern California and worked as an architect and designer for four years before becoming a monk. He helped establish Deer Park Monastery and many other US centers by creating meditation programs and retreats for children, teens, families, and young adults as well as planning halls and infrastructures. He was the abbot of Deer Park Monastery from 2001 until 2010. He received the Lamp Transmission from Thích Nhất Hạnh to become a Dharma teacher in 2004. Brother Pháp Dung is inspired by meditation as a method of examining and cultivating the individual and collective mind in support of community building that heals and develops society.



Answering the Call of the Heart

J E M



Now a lay Dharma teacher, Jem offers insights from his deep Earth-holding practice, surviving stage four cancer, and disrobing after eighteen years as a monk.

From out of nowhere, the question arose in me: “If I look back at my life in ten or twenty years, will I regret anything?” This was in 2013.

The question took me by surprise, as I was very happy with my life. I had even told some friends recently, “I love my life.”

Since 2006, I had lived at Deer Park Monastery where, among other things, I loved living in nature

surrounded by much undeveloped space. I was nourished and inspired by Sangha life and our daily schedule. I had good communication and relationships with many monks, nuns, and friends. In 2010 I received the Dharma Lamp Transmission, which had given me an indescribable boost of energy and empowerment. As a Dharma teacher and acting abbot, I had plenty of opportunity to practice, grow, and offer my gifts. My engagement with the Wake Up community, including organizing and participating in Wake Up tours in 2011 and 2012, was especially nourishing.

My question arose from consciousness, from my deep heart and volition: If I look back at my life in ten or twenty years, will I regret anything? The



Walking at Mundekulla;
photo courtesy of Jem

answer was clear and immediate: I want to find a way to bring our mindfulness practice to climate change.

Since childhood, I enjoyed taking refuge in nature; I always felt most content and connected while roaming in meadows, forests, and rocky hills or sitting by a creek. I heard Thầy's teaching during his 2007 US tour (which resulted in his book *The World We Have*) and I had been touched by the energy and inspiration arising in the Sangha around a vegan diet, consuming less, car-free days, alternatively fueled cars, solar panels, and more. At that time, though, I had limited energy; I still needed to deepen my personal practice and take care of deep wounds and suffering. Nevertheless, I was

profoundly affected by the way Thầy so openly, plainly, and strongly presented both the reports from the United Nations concerning pollution and the unsustainability of raising animals for food. He offered us all encouragement to consume less and to touch our interbeing nature with Mother Earth and life itself.

Through years of practice and community living, I had come to trust that when conditions are sufficient, manifestation happens. My question and answer had not arisen out of the blue; there were plenty of conditions.

When I shared with the Dharma teachers that I wanted to start a blog *Earth Protection Here & Now*,¹ there was full support. I set up a free Word-

press blog with much confidence and humility. I am not a biologist, climate expert, or activist. I am simply a human who sees the need for understanding our interconnectedness to all of life and to the Earth. I saw climate change as a catalyst for personal and collective healing and transformation.

When we start sharing, some will hear. Person by person, the lay Sanghas in the United States started to contact me. Of course, I was not the only one aspiring to apply mindfulness to climate change. When I started sharing in a blog, I had not

Lyn Fine also joined us. At one point in our sharing, it became clear to me that our engagement must come from love, not fear, and from togetherness, not separation. We must be aimless and diligent.

For me this is still so important. It is a compass for my life, practice, and service.

I have drawn much nourishment and support in my Earth Holder engagement from the writings of Joanna Macy and David Korten. Among many other insights they share are the possibilities of the Great Unraveling or the Great Turning. I have learned that



Earth Holders Retreat, Deer Park Monastery, April 2014; photo courtesy of Jem

planned for the theme weekend at Deer Park in 2014 or for the Earth Holder Retreats in 2016 at Deer Park, 2017 in New Mexico, 2018 in Minnesota, and 2020 at Deer Park. During the US tour of 2015, a real website emerged and an Earth Holder Care-Taking Council followed. The Sangha body made this happen. Aspiration sprouted and friendships were built and deepened.

At the end of the theme weekend in 2014, I had tea and sharing with Nomi Green and Heather Lyn Mann, both of whom were involved and instrumental during the retreats to follow. Dharma teacher

it isn't one or the other. My understanding of suffering/ill-being and happiness/well-being keeps deepening over the years. I left monastic life in part because of deep personal suffering that had not been able to be transformed. Since then, I have at times had support from healers and alternative therapists during the last three years. This support has helped me embrace that which I had unknowingly been ashamed of or not felt safe enough to meet head on. In the light of interbeing and personal experience, it is clearer to me now that for a Great Turning to happen, there have to be unravelings.

I remember becoming so happy the day I heard the term Earthlings, which refers to humans, animals, plants, and all organic living things on this planet. This term helped me see limited views and attachment to being a human being.

Many times, Thầy referred to the Sutra on the Diamond that Cuts Through Illusion as the earliest text on deep ecology. There are a couple of insights in this amazing teaching that always strike me in a pleasant and clarifying way. One aspect that is so helpful in all kinds of engagement is “*Bodhisattvas practice generosity without relying on form.*” This shows me how to be free from a separate self that gives and hopes for rewards or certain outcomes. It also draws me into the emptiness of transmission: the giver, the gift, and the receiver arise together; they cannot be separated. To stop and listen within, and to discern whether I am able to engage from this alignment of reality is often sobering and humbling, but also valuable and helpful.

I remember becoming so happy the day I heard the term Earthlings, which refers to humans, animals, plants, and all organic living things on this planet. This term helped me see limited views and attachment to being a human being. There is so

much collective baggage of superiority about being human—a beautiful manifestation and a wondrous possibility for spiritual growth for sure. The teaching in the Diamond Sutra asks us to consider if we are limited to or caught in views of a self, a person (human), a living being, or a life span. I like the guided meditation lines: “Aware of life inside and around me / Smiling to life inside and around me.” Life is not bound by birth and death, is not bound to matter. For me, Life is another word for the ultimate, for God, for Love.

My path of engagement has naturally changed over the years. One big shift was a diagnosis of stage four malignant melanoma cancer, which I received on the arrival day of the Earth Holder Retreat in Minnesota, US, August 2018. I chose to focus my energy, of which I had much less than usual, on the retreat. I shared about the diagnosis with only one brother, a day after I had heard. His long hug and whisper “You are strong, you’ll be

Can I see myself in the leaves, in the wind?
When the earth, water, and air are polluted,
of course, so am I.

okay,” helped me to let go, to feel supported, and to follow through with the retreat. In me I heard: *Can I see myself in the leaves, in the wind? When the earth, water, and air are polluted, of course, so am I.* I felt acceptance for this surprising and urgent unravelling.

A humbling insight from my time of sickness is that I had not found inner sustainability. Year by year my energy and capacity had grown, but so too had my responsibilities and engagements. I had confidence in my capacity to renew, to recharge, and to recuperate. But because I was not as generous with myself as I was with others and the Sangha, I did not have much energy in store, and this contributed to a dire health situation. Today, looking back, I see the gifts that have followed. So how can I say lucky or unlucky, right or wrong?

In my weakest moment during the cancer treatment, I asked myself, If this is it, am I ready to let go? I experienced light and clarity, knowing death is not the end and nothing is truly lost. There was a clear Yes, I can let go, but I knew it was not the time.

Several people around me at that time said it was a miracle I survived. When I sat and breathed hour after hour in a garden recliner chair in my room, deep suffering arose. I just noticed and promised myself to take this call seriously, if and when health would allow. What came up was shame of being weak and vulnerable as a child, and not accepting the way I had faced challenging situations. I was not free. A longing for a romantic relationship also made itself known. To live and serve in Sweden, my home country, was also

a clear call in my deep, wise heart. Not to answer these calls could not lead to a happy, loving, and free life.

So in August 2020, I disrobed. This meant leaving eighteen years as a monk in the Plum Village Sangha, which I treasure and love dearly. My last resistance was loyalty toward my teacher. I know, though, that I am a continuation of Thầy and that my teacher wants me to rely on internal love and understanding, on the inner teacher. With this knowledge, I could answer the call of my heart yet again and take a step.

In June 2023, I will return to a Plum Village practice center for the first time since leaving Deer Park in March 2020. Thanks to the “Love Is Freedom” Earth Retreat, everything fell into place. Life changes and continues. Maybe our paths will cross again.

In love and gratitude,

– Jem (Chân Pháp Hộ)

May 2023

¹*After the Bodhisattva Dharanimdhara, the one who holds and protects the Earth, that makes bridges, overcomes gaps and brings about connection and communication.*

... it became clear to me
that our engagement must come
from love, not fear, and from
togetherness, not separation.
We must be aimless and diligent.

Jem, Chân Pháp Hộ/True Dharma Protector, is currently living in Helsingborg in southwestern Sweden with his wife, Emma. He is an active Dharma teacher and offers teaching, meditation, and events in both Swedish and English: www.hjartatsgladje.se.



Continuing the True Source

Where are the paths through ancient redwood forests?

In me there is an old Giant Sequoia, whose limbs spread strong, wide, and fearlessly.

To what heights of freedom her branches reach, I do not know.

Her roots penetrate every earthen crevice, reaching even the very heart of Mother Earth.

Let us go and climb this tree together, until we find a thick mossy branch to sit upon where we can look clearly upon the world and see all things in equanimity and beauty.

Where do the Great Lakes flow?

In me, there is a vast open body of water, whose currents know no depths, and whose shores stretch to no beginning and no end.

Come, let us set foot upon our ancestors' raft, and paddle smoothly over the dark, glassy waters, until we have seen every full moon, shooting star, sunset, and smile unfold perfectly over her serene reflections.

One day we will arrive at a distant shore that our hearts have long been searching for.

How shall one cross the Mojave Desert?

In me a vast desert plain stretches as far as eyes can see. Her endless space, stillness, and solitude bring silence and awe to every corner of one's consciousness, yet also loneliness and doubt.

Offer me your hand as we walk through the night, and the ten thousand brightest stars will illumine our path.

Sister moon will sing ancestral stories to the rhythms of our steps, reminding us that journeying far always means journeying together.

Who shall I call my true siblings?

In me there is a young child whose eyes are luminous and kind, inviting us to go play out on the fields that lie far beyond notions of right and wrong.

Deep in the child's heart is the heart of all beings, including yours and mine.

Let us hold this beautiful child's hands, and go run and jump into the forgotten ponds of our childhood, and play freely upon wildflower meadows again.

Then let us ask the child together, "How do we live happily with ourselves and each other? What is the true source of loving kindness?"

The child simply smiles and, breathing in, pulls the whole world into their heart. Breathing out, they release their heart into the world.

Three tears roll down the child's cheeks like shining jewels. The fallen drops grow into a tiny stream, then a wide flowing river, transforming the deserts and valleys below into a vast fertile plain.

July 2022

Written at MorningSun Community

David Viafora, Chân Thiện Sơn/True Zen Mountain (pronouns he/him), has spent the last five years sauntering the forests and playing in ponds with beloved friends at MorningSun Community on the ancestral lands of the Abenaki (People of the Dawn Land) in New Hampshire, US. He and a few close friends are now building a mindfulness practice center and intentional mindfulness community, Greatwoods Zen, in Charlotte, North Carolina, US. His book, *Conscious Communities: The Transformative Power of Sangha*, is forthcoming from Parallax Press in 2024; to learn more, visit Sanghabuild.org.



Deep Listening in the Urban Forest

A scientist surrounded by urban sprawl, Nguyễn Bảo Châu connects to her grief of losing her father while she asks: How can I practice mindfulness to connect to nature, see through grief, and transform climate despair?

WHERE IS MY URBAN FOREST?

I see street trees and human-constructed buildings in my urban forest. I live, work, and play in this urban sprawl, called the Inland Empire (IE), as I have for most of my life. I drive over an hour south to retreat in Deer Park Monastery's chaparral a few times a year to heal in natural sounds. What can I do to connect to nature where I live, in a place without many natural sounds?

I arrive at *niệm* (mindfulness), *định* (concentration), and *tuệ* (wisdom) to recollect the beat of the forest. I invite you to read about my scientific inquiry process into how mindfulness practices enhance nature connections and transform climate crisis despair.

NIỆM: MINDFULNESS TO THE BEAT OF THE FOREST

I traveled to Thailand last summer on an Earth Expedition (EE), a Miami University study-abroad course that engages in grassroots conservation and sustainability. I studied in the forest of Khao Yai National Park with my graduate class.

We practiced various contemplative practices. In one exercise, we practiced deep listening in pairs. One person was the listener, and the other person was the speaker. We were to deeply listen without interruption for three minutes while one person told a life story. Afterwards, the other person was to retell the story we heard before switching roles.

When my turn came to speak, I felt strong emotions of grief about my dad's passing and asked to sit outside with my partner, Kim. A pair of hornbills flew and perched on the tree. Kim said, "The hornbill is a sign from your dad!" I connected with the possibility that my dad sent the hornbill to listen to my grief pour out.



peaceful with snail
by Alfonso Montellano Lopez

ĐỊNH: BE STILL AND KNOW

The koan “Be still and know” came to life when community-based conservation experts from the Thai Hornbill Foundation took us to the forest to do a one-hour solo meditation. Twenty of us walked, one in front of the other, like ants. If you stepped a few yards away from the trail, you could lose your way in the thick trees.

We slipped off one at a time into pre-scouted areas to sit. I unrolled my linoleum mat on the forest floor. Sitting, I saw a fallen log. Then, I saw a termite hill. I sat with attention and awareness to develop concentration, and I saw my dad in the termites. Fallen leaves or other creatures can mess up the termite hill, but the termites fall in line to work together and continue building. Culturally, my dad was raised to live out his role as a provider. He worked around obstacles that fell in his way to build a stable life for my family.

I lit three sticks of joss incense and offered three touchings of the earth. The incense smoke deterred mosquitoes from biting so I could sit with *định*, or concentration. I had performed this ritual of lighting incense at the family altar many times. That day, however, held a profound meaning. I saw my dad as a termite. I sat and saw butterflies, gnats, ants, centipedes, spiders, and birds. Then the forest canopy went quiet.

A shower of rain drummed softly on the leaves. I stood up to keep from getting drenched. I was uncomfortable in the rain. It poured down in waves. When the sun came out through the trees, its warmth was so pleasant. The weather made me aware of my body and that the natural environment gave me everything I needed. It gave me *ecoservices* like protection from the rain, shade from extreme heat, and climate moderation, and it offered a home for other living beings to exist. I was in good company.

TUÊ: THE WISDOM OF TERMITES AND TREES

My dad was like the fallen log I had seen when I arrived at my sitting spot. He had provided food and shelter for his family and relatives. He continues to give me strength and energy as his body returns to the earth, giving energy. I reflected on his connection to his neighbors and his role in my life. When I sat still and observed the life around me, I saw all the plants, insects, and animals living out their roles in the ecosystem. Rain quiets the earth and sunlight refreshes us with life. Wisdom, or tuê, arrived while sitting and standing in the forest and listening to birds and the life instructions from the trees around me.

RETURN TO THE URBAN FOREST WITH AN ASPIRATION

I returned to the cities of California with an aspiration to act. Hornbills do not live in California, but I followed my hornbill curiosity by listening to resident birds through the Merlin app on my phone. Scrub jays, hummingbirds, mockingbirds, warblers, and sparrows—I suddenly noticed more birds in the backyard. I stopped to listen to them and learned their names, songs, and silhouettes.

I sought out Clean and Green Pomona (C&GP), an environmental nonprofit, to volunteer and connect with environmentalists. We systematically investigate the city's environmental priorities and work toward finding solutions together. C&GP formed a dozen years ago and I had previously been aware of it; however, much like the trees and birds, now I finally saw the organization. With fresh eyes to see and ears to listen, my climate crisis despair grew smaller by being in a community. I volunteered to take photos at C&GP's tree plantings. While there, I learned about street trees and noticed them driving to my mom's house. I drove past these trees for years, but now they have names: California fan palm, sycamore, live oak, and crepe myrtle.

I read C&GP's published reports, reviewed their initiatives, and, in meetings, I noticed the organizational culture. C&GP invites and includes as many voices as possible. I visited the Parks and Recreation meetings and Planning Commission meetings with C&GP. I practiced listening deeply to the speakers. It was refreshing to be out of my head and focused on listening. The contemplative practice I did with my friend Kim from the EE course refreshed my mind so I could truly participate in civic meetings.

REFLECTIONS AND CLARITY FOR HOPE

The human body is composed of many living systems. It feels relaxed in nature. In a built-up environment, the body shows tension and stress from hearing the unnatural sounds of vehicles echoing on freeways. Tuning into our bodies, we can choose how to act. Will we notice our body's cues when under prolonged micro-stressors? Nature exists in urban spaces when we stop. Birds and street trees carry instructive seeds of joy. Will these seeds send you to the local Care-Taking Council or city commission?

I am a scientist seeing direct experiences as evidence. Even if my mind doesn't register things first, my body is full of living systems. When I sit still to know, I remember to work toward protecting stillness and natural sounds in my city.



Nguyễn Bảo Châu, Chân Xuân Sớm/True Early Spring (pronouns she/her), is a second-generation Vietnamese American. She teaches and learns by doing as a graduate student in biology at Miami University's Project Dragonfly. Châu, her husband Hiệu, daughter Bảo Ái, and their two dogs are guests living and working on traditional, unceded Tongva/Gabrielino lands and shared spaces of the Kizh, Serrano, Cahuilla, and Luiseño.

WE ARE THE EARTH



Photo by
Sarah Manion

Becoming Interwoven: Sewing My Brown Jacket as the Art of Practice

Sarah Manion shares about the interbeing, reverence for life, and meditation of crafting with natural materials.

In *Old Path White Clouds*, Thây recounts the origin story of the Buddha's patchwork robes. Overlooking a field of rice paddies, Buddha said to Ananda, "Ananda, how beautiful are the golden patches of rice that stretch to the horizon! Wouldn't it be nice to sew our robes in the same checkered pattern?" Ananda said, 'Lord, it is a wonderful idea. Sewing bhikkhus' robes in the same pattern as rice fields would be lovely.'"

I have been creating things with my hands all of my life. When I first learned the story of the Buddha's robes, I fell in love. I fell in love not only because the Buddha's community, like me, apparently had a practice of sewing their own clothes, but because the Buddha showed me how mindfulness, meditation, and interbeing can be integrated, illuminated, reflected, and worn in everything we do. To me, this insight was as beautiful as those rice paddies must have been to the Buddha and Ananda.

When I became an aspirant to the Order of Interbeing, I knew that hand-sewing my own brown jacket would be my way of honoring the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and my commitment to this path.

FABRIC OF LIFE

I see making as a form of engaged practice. Bringing materials together with needle and thread helps awaken wisdom in me: I am a complex collection of non-human fibers and filaments woven together to form the fabric of human experience. In my mind, the fabric of my work is the fabric of all life; everything integrated, everything interwoven. Looking at craft through the eyes of interbeing makes my work feel alive, the process of selecting the material for my brown jacket an act of reverence for life. As I flip through all the brown fabrics, I take a moment to look deeply into the origins of these materials. Where did they come from? How did their creation impact the people, places, and animals of which they were made? What stories do they tell?

My choice is a soft linen-wool that hangs on my arm like water. Touching the cloth for the first time, I consider the linen-ness of it: flax that grew in a field under sunny skies before the harvest. A plant with roots deep in soil that produced threads sturdy enough to yield fabric for working garments and pliable enough to flow gently around ankles and calves on a summer's walk through the woods. I touch the fabric again and feel the softness of wool interwoven with linen. I like the mix of plant and

animal fiber in this cloth. It reminds me of the enduring interrelationship between land and life, between the human and the more-than-human. And it doesn't hurt that I have a particular fondness for sheep! The integration of wool with linen means my jacket will be pliable, warm, and joyful—qualities I try to reflect in my practice.

MATERIAL PRACTICE

The Irish poet John O'Donohue said, "Every time you're creative, you're on holy ground because you're actively deepening, extending, and realizing creation."¹ I love working with the closeness and immediacy of my own hands. I like the meditative dance that unfolds across a piece of fabric when finger, needle, breath, and eyes move as one across the stage of cloth. It's an embodied practice that helps me to release into the wonder of being. When I'm sewing, it's easier for me to feel deeply how the body and mind are in perfect oneness. Each stitch is alive as an expression of creation. I find it delightful.

I am a slow maker. Not only because I believe that making something beautiful deserves to take time, but also because my everyday life is filled to the brim with busyness, and so sewing is a refuge. Each day, I spend a few moments with my brown-jacket-in-progress. I make a cup of tea and invite my busy mind to sit with my body a while. Once I am settled, I pick up my sewing and allow myself to release into the order and progression of one stitch after another. If I listen closely, I can hear the moving song of the stitch gatha: *Breathing in, needle meets fabric / Breathing out, stitching.*

DEEPLY WORN

Much has been written about what it means to wear the brown jacket of the Order of Interbeing. Over the course of my aspirancy, I found I needed to craft my own relationship to the brown jacket. Thầy encourages us to create a life that supports our practice, and this has been a profound invitation for me. For me, this means exploring the origins of what brings me real peace. The practice of

making helps support my spiritual practice by cultivating the energy of mindfulness and bringing me joy. It is a pattern of everyday practice that fits me.

When I wear this brown jacket, I will be putting on all the teachers and all the communities that have been woven into my life along this path. Each time I slip my arms into this coat, I will inhabit all the moments of connection experienced in sewing the garment; I will smile, knowing that I have this practice, that I am a part of this community. I will smile at all of the non-brown-jacket elements woven into the folds and creases of this one garment that clothe me in joyful, interwoven interbeing. As the African scholar Bayo Akomolafe writes, "We are not a crease in the fabric of things, we are the fabric of things."²

Craft and making is one way I have translated this practice into the language of my life. It is a personal act of reverence and gratitude for all the beings, elements, and conditions that have manifested to create this beautiful garment. I aspire to wear it fully and joyfully for myself and the world each day.

¹ John O'Donohue, 2012, "Imagination as the Path of the Spirit," YouTube. Accessed July 11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0bg7lNeKY4>

² Bayo Akomolafe, 2020, "Don't Be So Careful," Radical Discipleship. Accessed July 11. <https://radicaldiscipleship.net/tag/bayo-akomolafe/page/2/>



Sarah Manion, True Light of Courage (pronouns she/her), believes in joy as a spiritual pursuit. She lived in Africa for many years, working with artisan cooperatives and textile producers who showed her how making things with our hands embodies our innate sense of being interwoven with the world. She is a student of countless teachers, including Thích Nhất Hạnh, Robin Wall Kimmerer, David Abram, Mary Oliver, the Brewster flats, adrienne maree brown, Kate Fletcher, Dr. Larry Ward, her grandmother and aunt (both master knitters), her dog Lari, and all alpacas everywhere. Sarah lives on the ancestral lands of the Wampanoag (Cape Cod, Massachusetts, US) with her partner and all her yarn.

Nutrient for the Soul

Brother Minh Lượng tells us about the humanure composting efforts at Deer Park Monastery, helmed by facility manager Nikolay Amirov.

At the back of Deer Park Monastery's dusty soccer field, next to the trailhead that leads down into the valley, sits a big pile of straw, fenced into a square shape by walls of wooden pallets. Nikolay, Deer Park's facility manager of three years, wears an apron over his flannel shirt as he busily arranges rows of empty white buckets beside the pile. A friend approaches him.

"I noticed these buckets over here," he says, pointing to the rows. "They say 'HUMANURE.' What's that all about?"

Nikolay replies with a smile, "That's the recycling of human refuse!"

"Yeah? How does that work?"

"Well, just like composting," he explains, "You collect it, put it in a pile, and the pile heats up. You

can see right now, even though I've just added new material, steam is still coming out. Before I opened it, the pile was at 145 degrees Fahrenheit."

When Nikolay first started working at Deer Park, he had no experience or particular interest in compost. Asked about his relationship to climate change, he reflects, "Climate change was always a concern of mine, but I couldn't deal with the depth of it. It resulted in an ignorant approach, you know, sometimes it's just better not to think about [it]." For many years, Nikolay chose not to pay much attention to climate change and environmental concerns. But when his Deer Park workshop started producing excess sawdust, an excellent layering material for compost, he saw a new opportunity for action.



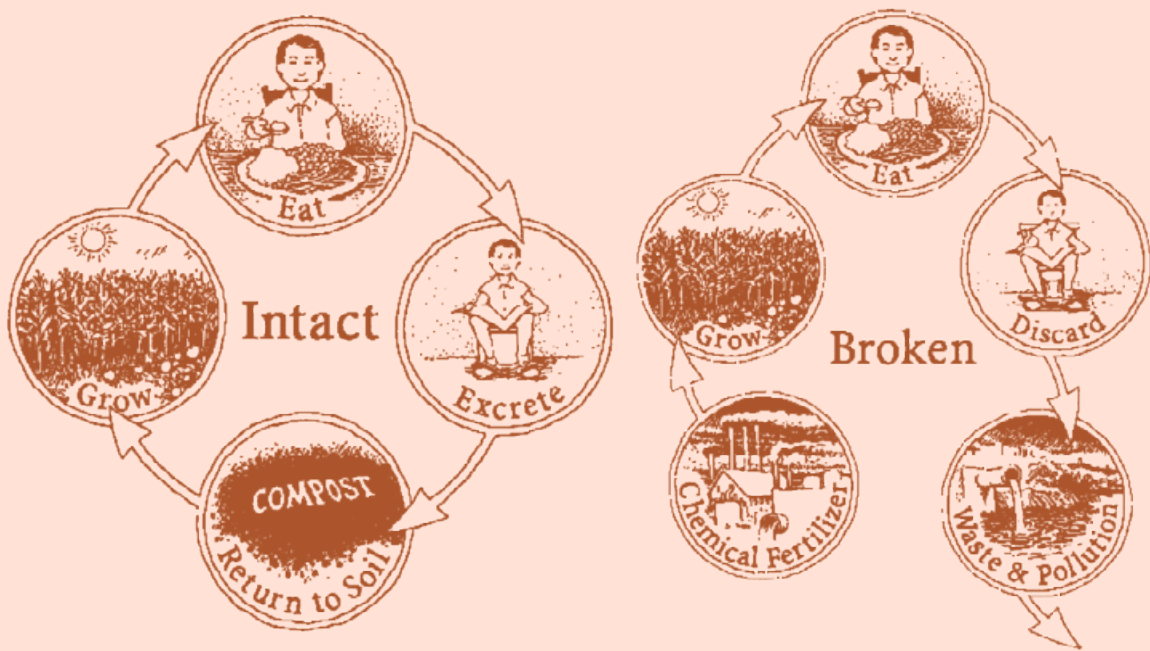
Photo courtesy of
Evermind Media

Initially, Nikolay's composting efforts didn't work so well. He took a trip to the library, looking for guidance, and found *The Humanure Handbook* by Joseph Jenkins. Nikolay was taken by the book's down-to-Earth language and the impressive scientific evidence backing up the humanure system. "Twenty-five percent of my way into the book, I said to myself, 'I am going to do this. I just need to get the details of how to do it,'" he explains.

How to compost human waste, it turns out, is rather simple. First, Nikolay built a handful of composting toilets at Deer Park. These toilets consist of two receptacles: one for deposits and one containing sawdust to scoop out and layer on top of each deposit. Sawdust is an excellent biofilter, removing odors from the deposits beneath it while pro-

viding carbon needed for the compost to "cook" later on. Humanure relies on four main ingredients to break down organic matter: carbon, water, air, and nitrogen (found in urine). Without enough air, the composting toilet sits waiting for the final condition to begin its transformation.¹

Once a week, Nikolay collects the buckets (or "receptacles," as he likes to call them) and empties them into his pile behind the soccer field. He uses a pitchfork to pull the straw to the edges and make space in the middle to dump the new material. Afterwards, he cleans the receptacles with a toilet brush and soapy water, which in turn gets emptied into the pile. Finally, he covers it all again with a new layer of straw. Blanketed by straw above, below, and around, the pile is penetrated by air from

Closing the human nutrient cycle.¹

outside, and begins to heat up. Once the temperature reaches 115 degrees Fahrenheit, a special kind of bacteria, called “thermophilic bacteria,” are activated. These powerful bacteria are the main driver of the organic matter’s transformation.

As he implemented the humanure system, Nikolay enjoyed learning about its benefits. The composting process eliminates the greenhouse gasses emitted by standard sewage systems that use energy-intensive treatment techniques. The thermophilic bacteria in the pile break down toxic chemicals, pathogens, and even pharmaceutical drugs, all of which would otherwise create pollution, as they are not broken down by the traditional septic system.

There are also benefits on the local level at Deer Park. Transforming excrement through humanuring diverts it from the monastery’s existing septic system, which expels excess liquid via underground leach fields and can thereby pollute the groundwater. Humanure, on the

other hand, produces organic fertilizer, which adds nutrients to the soil and improves water retention, protecting and nourishing plants and, by extension, the whole web of natural life at Deer Park. Recognizing composting as a means to protect life, Nikolay sees in it a concrete expression of the First Mindfulness Training. “At the beginning of The Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are invited to look for ways to protect the lives of animals, plants, and minerals, and that invitation was always very serious to me,” he explains. Thanks to the practice of humanure, Nikolay has a concrete way to act on that invitation.

Humanure is a new development at Deer Park, but the monastery is no stranger to green initiatives. In the late 2000s, there was a wave of enthusiasm among the monks for new projects to support the environment. Thầy had long wished for the brothers to install solar panels, and at that time the conditions came together to do so. “Thầy was very happy,” remembers Thầy Pháp Dung. “Af-



Nikolay Amirov;
photo courtesy of
Evermind Media

terwards, he kept mentioning it. He would say how the brothers in Solidity Hamlet are on 100 percent solar energy, even though we were not completely off-grid.”

Aware of droughts afflicting the state of California, the monastics also looked for ways to conserve water. Waterless urinals were installed, native plants began to replace thirsty, tropical varieties, and the cooking teams tried reusing the water for rinsing vegetables to do the dishes afterwards. Thầy Pháp Dung points out that a lot of water goes into our clothes and other possessions as well. He tries to use things as long as he can. “Everything has water in it. So when you throw something away, you’re not just making trash, but you’re throwing away a lot of water.”

Nikolay sees another reason to save water: “Did you know,” he asks me, “30 percent of the electricity California consumes is used to move water for us? Thirty percent of our electricity, just to pump water from one place to another; we’re

pumping a lot over very long distances. So our Californian water is very carbon heavy.”

Humanure composting fits well into Deer Park’s long-standing effort to conserve water. The practice saves water that would otherwise be used to flush the toilet. Nikolay calculated that the humanure pile processed 547 gallons of matter in a recent three-month period—an approximate water savings of 15,300 gallons! That’s equivalent to an average American’s water use for six months.² And this is only the beginning. So far, humanure has been adopted to a limited extent at the monastery. Only residents curious and eager to try the new system are using it. With greater adoption in the future, water savings could multiply.

Recently, Nikolay started learning more about climate change. He recounts, “About a month ago, all of a sudden my curiosity awakened, and I felt I have the capacity now to really fill my consciousness with information.” It’s no coincidence that Nikolay’s new enthusiasm to

learn and engage with climate change coincided with his new project. When we start to learn about a problem, it's easy to fall into despair if we don't see a solution. But when we find a solution and put it into practice, we have hope. We are no longer afraid of despair, and our mind opens up to receive the problem in all its ugly detail. As Nikolay learns about climate change, he remembers how humanure contributes to its solution, and rather than falling into despair, he feels encouraged and inspired.

There are so many ways to act, but for Nikolay, humanure composting is about doing something small and simple. He describes his joy at seeing that, although so much energy, time, and money are spent building and maintaining the world's septic systems. "We can do something so humble—just a receptacle, sawdust, a couple steps to the pile, and then in a year and a half this pile is wonderful nutriment for soil. I am very happy I discovered it," he beams. Compost nourishes the soil, but it also nourishes the one who makes it.

¹ Joseph Jenkins, *The Humanure Handbook: A Guide to Composting Human Manure*, (White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2005)

² United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2023, "Statistics and Facts," Accessed July 11. <https://www.epa.gov/watersense/statistics-and-facts>



Brother Minh Lương (Brother Generosity) is a monk at Deer Park Monastery in Southern California. He received ordination in 2018. He is currently the work coordinator at Deer Park and works closely with facility manager Nikolay Amirov.

Living with Joy in a Scary World

**Order of Interbeing member
Jane Ellen Combelic offers insights
on how to find joy when it seems
the world is on fire.**

There are many stories of early lives of the Buddha, when he incarnated in animal form before he was human. These are called Jataka tales, and one of my favorites is “The Brave Little Parrot.”

In a great forest there lived a beautiful little parrot. His feathers were all colors of the rainbow, and he loved nothing better than to fly through the treetops visiting all his friends. He was always full of joy and laughter. The other animals loved him.

One day, during a dry summer, a great storm broke out. A bolt of lightning struck a big dead tree and it erupted in flames. The fire spread quickly, scattering the animals in all directions. The little parrot flew above, calling out to them: “The river, run to the river!”

Most of the animals escaped, but some were trapped among the burning trees.

Frantically, the parrot wondered what he could do to save them. Then he remembered the river! He shot down like an arrow, dived in the water, and scooped a few drops into his beak. He flew back to the fire, dribbled the water out of his beak and shook the water off his wings.

This he did over and over again, until his wings were scorched black and his eyes were burning red.

Meanwhile, high above, the gods were sitting in their heavenly palace, eating sweet-meats and enjoying themselves. One of them looked down and saw the little parrot. “Look at that!” he said. “Have you ever seen anything so ridiculous? That tiny bird thinks he can put out that great forest fire.” And they all laughed.

All but one of the gods. He found himself strangely moved by the sight of the brave little parrot. He went away from the other gods, changed himself into a great eagle, flew down, and appeared next to the parrot. “Save yourself!” he cried. “There’s nothing you can do. Save yourself!”

“I don’t need advice!” replied the parrot. “What I need is help!”

At that, the god’s heart opened to the suffering of

**In the midst of such
suffering, how do we
find joy? Is it even
right to want joy?**

all beings and he began to weep. His tears fell to the ground and put out the fire.

All the animals were saved. They looked up and cheered: "Thank you to the brave little parrot! Thank you for this miraculous rain!"

Sometimes it seems like our world is on fire. Climate crisis, species extinctions, war, economic collapse, social unrest. No wonder there is so much fear and anxiety.

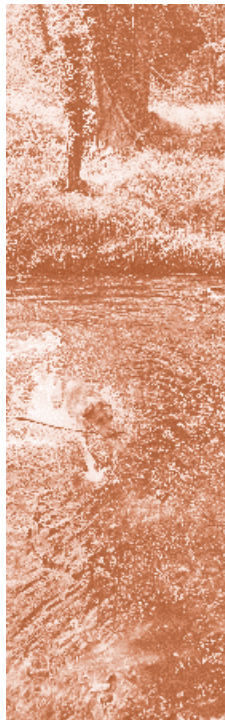
In the midst of such suffering, how do we find joy? Is it even right to want joy?

Paradoxically, we find joy through the fear, through the suffering. In *Wait: A Love Letter to Those in Despair*, Cuong Lu writes: "When you stay fully present with your feelings, your sensations, and the world around you, even when it seems dark and cold, joy will arise. Joy and suffering are two sides of the same coin."¹ This Cuong Lu knows from experience, having escaped from Vietnam as a child with his family and spent sixteen years as a monk with Thích Nhất Hạnh.

As Thầy says in *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm* "Most of us experience a life full of wonderful moments and difficult moments. But for many of us, even when we are most joyful, there is fear behind our joy.... We think that, to be happier, we should push away or ignore our fear.... The only way to ease our fear and be truly happy is to acknowledge our fear and look deeply at its source."²

Thầy gives us three steps for looking at our fear:

1. Recognize and acknowledge that what you're feeling is fear. Allow it to be there.
2. Name the particular fear and see where it comes from. Is it an old fear, projecting the past into a possible scary future? Or is it about something happening now in your life? Recognizing and naming the fear calms it.
3. Return to the present moment. There you can come back into your body and appreciate the gift of being alive.



In recent years, I've frequently suffered from anxiety at night. These three steps have been a huge help.

When I wake up in the middle of the night feeling unhappy and tense without knowing why, I try to come back to my breath. I notice that my body is contracted. Rather than shaming myself for feeling bad, I accept it. Then I make my anxiety even bigger, consciously feeling miserable. If I manage to identify that what I am feeling is fear, my body relaxes with a deep out-breath. "Ah, this is fear!" The next step is to dialog with the fear: "What are you afraid of?" I always get an answer—"I'm afraid of being alone" or "I'm afraid of failing." Most often I see that the fear does not reflect my life; it comes from the distant past. Finally, I let go of it and appreciate the life I have now—family and friends, a safe and comfortable home, worthwhile projects that stretch my abilities. My body relaxes and I go back to sleep.

Inner peace comes not from my head; I can't overcome my suffering or my fear by thinking about it. Rather, peace comes when I get out of my head and sink into my body, first by focusing on the breath, then by noticing what is going on in my body. This helps my body to relax. From this state, insight can arise. I can feel loving kindness for myself.

More and more, I realize that my deepest practice is to come back into my body. The Buddha taught The Four Establishments of Mindfulness, the first of which is mindfulness of the body in the body. This body is a miracle!

In a recent article in *The Guardian*, environmental journalist George Monbiot wrote that the chance of any one person being born is "one in ten to the power of 2,640,000. In other words, a ten followed by 2.6m zeros. It's an unimaginable, miraculous number. Yet here we are."³

After spending most of my life either operating from my head or yearning to be with spirit, I'm finally coming home to my body. I'm learning to open my senses, to follow my breath, and to be conscious of what I am doing and of the world around me. And it seems



Photos by
Jane Ellen Combelle

When I wake up in the middle of the night feeling unhappy and tense without knowing why, I try to come back to my breath. I notice that my body is contracted. Rather than shaming myself for feeling bad, I accept it.

that my body knows what to do. For instance, I open the door to look at the weather just when the postman arrives with a package. Or I walk into a café and suddenly feel uncomfortable, so I go to a different café and run into someone I wanted to see. Or I turn off a path with my young and excitable dog just before a cyclist comes speeding by.

“Many people forget their body,” says Thây. “They have so many plans and fears, so many agitations and dreams, and they don’t live in their body. While we’re caught in fear and trying to plan our way out of fear, we aren’t able to see all the beauty that Mother Earth offers us.”²

After decades of practice, I am feeling more and more joy in being incarnate in a human body. But I know that I can’t do this alone. I need the support of others on the path.

For many years after first going to Plum Village, France, I meditated on my own, but it was an intermittent and arduous task that did not bear much fruit. Then I attended my first retreat in the United States, at the YMCA conference center in Estes Park, Colorado. On the second day, I found myself in a small room with a dozen other retreatants and a monk. I happened to be sitting to Brother Pháp Tuệ’s left, so I was the first to introduce myself. I mentioned that I lived in Fort Collins, only an hour away—feeling rather smug after having met others who had travelled hundreds or thousands of miles. The next person said they were from Fort Collins, too, and then the next and the next, all the way around the circle!

That was how I came to Peaceful Hearts Sangha, which changed my practice—and my life. For the first few months, during Dharma sharing I only listened. Hearing what other Sangha members said about their practice showed me, to my surprise, that many of them struggled with similar mental difficulties as I did. When I got the courage to share, I was touched by the compassion that I received, and this nourished my compassion toward myself. Since then, I have devoted my life to Sangha building.

“Our beloved community, our Sangha, is a group of people who together practice generating mindfulness, concentration, and insight,” says Thây. “We breathe together, and with our combined energy of mindfulness we are able to recognize, embrace, and transform that pain.”² A Sangha doesn’t need to be a Buddhist group; it can be our family, friends, or any community where we can talk about our difficulties and listen to others with an open heart.

Most of my adult life I was a loner, joining group after group and leaving each one in disillusion. Today, I live near

After spending most of my life either operating from my head or yearning to be with spirit, I’m finally coming home to my body. I’m learning to open my senses, to follow my breath, and to be conscious of what I am doing and of the world around me.

Findhorn, a spiritual community and ecovillage, and have for over ten years. Here I am fortunate to participate in several overlapping communities: weekly spiritual services involving sacred songs and dances; the Community Caring Circle, which helps people in need of care; and a vibrant Sangha in Thầy's tradition. Being at Findhorn, I also connect with the communities of unseen beings—nature spirits, faery folk, angels.

I'm even happily married, something that I never would have believed possible. All this I owe to the practice, and especially to Sangha.

Though most days it is easy to forget, in my heart I know that life is good, that people are good. In my best moments, I know in my bones that the Earth and everything on it is made from love, made for love. That includes you and me.

The older I get, the more aware I am of the immeasurable suffering in the world and of the increasing fear that separates us. At the same time, I experience more joy than ever. We cannot have one without the other. In fact, the only way out of suffering is to feel our pain, to look deeply at our fears. Thầy says, "That is something we can learn only if we know how to practice. Our practice helps transform the suffering in ourselves, in our families, in our community, and in the world."²

For this we need Sangha, we need community. From community spring love and joy. Then we know what to do.

And who knows, one of the gods (or bodhisattvas or angels) may magically give us exactly what we need, at any moment.

¹ *Cuong Lu, Wait: A Love Letter to Those in Despair (Shambhala, 2021)*

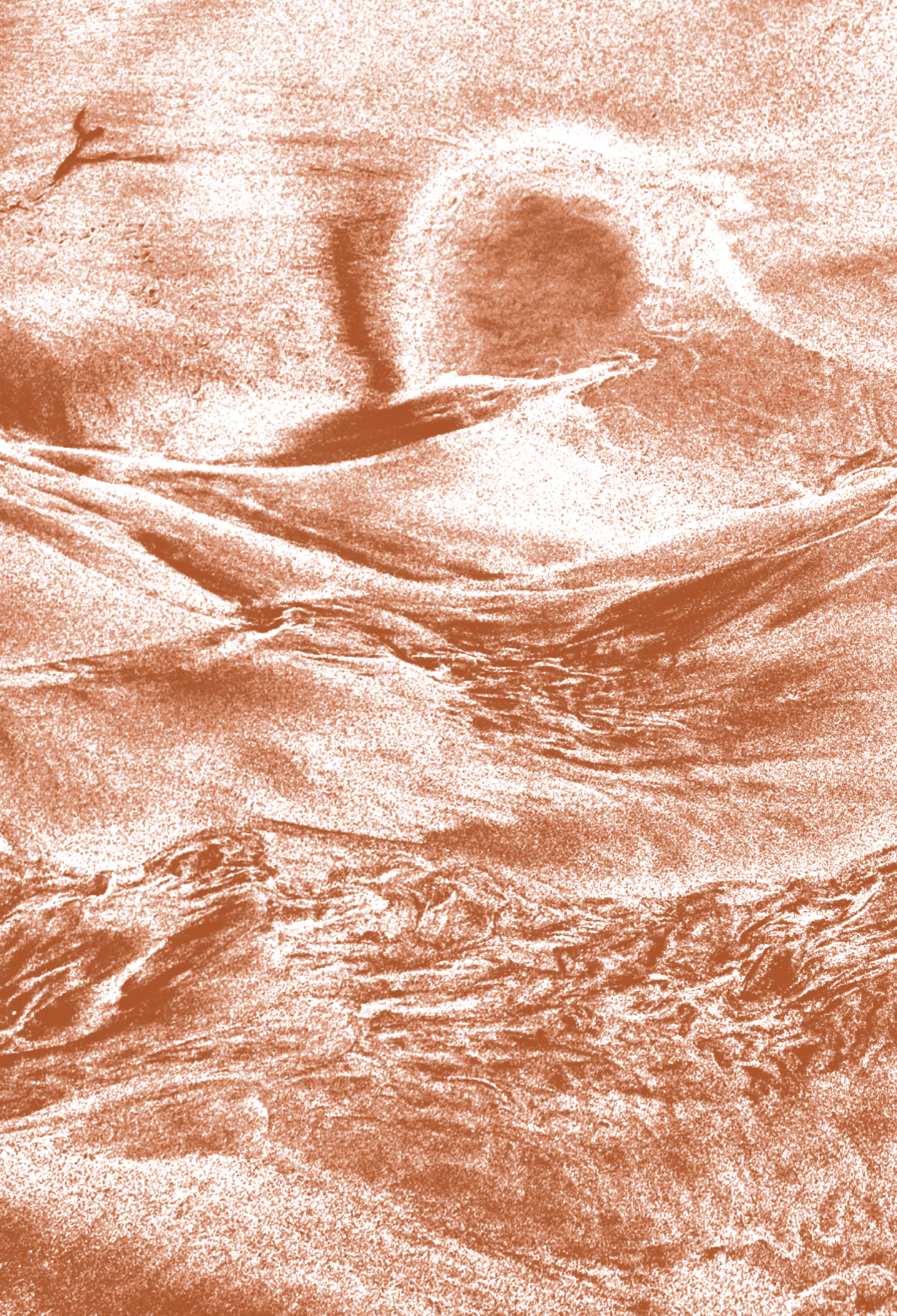
² *Thích Nhất Hạnh, Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm (New York: Harper One, 2012)*

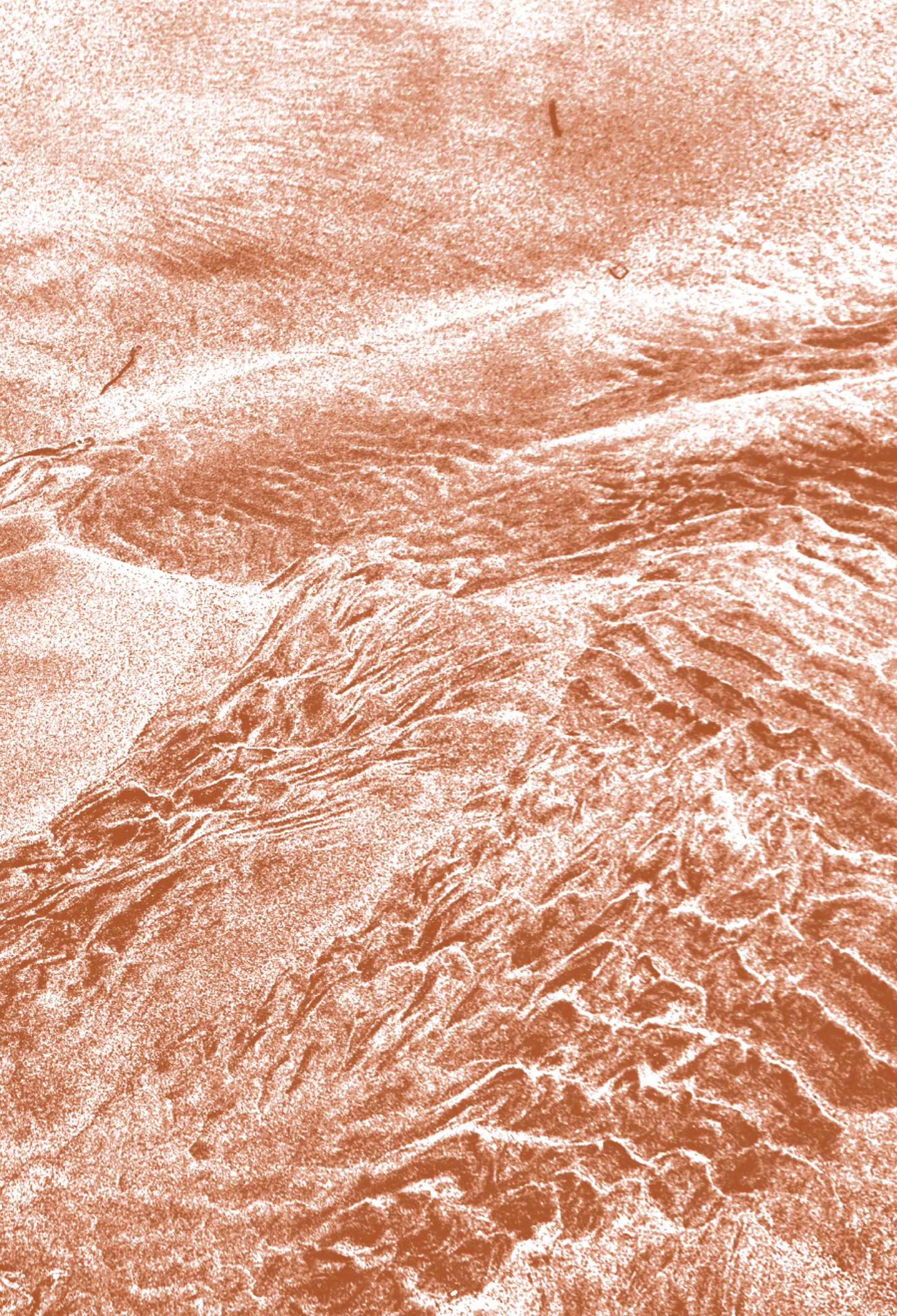
³ *George Monbiot, 2022, "Our leaders had a final chance to halt climate breakdown. They failed each and every one of us," The Guardian. Accessed July 11. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/nov/18/leaders-climate-breakdown-fail-power-cop27>*

Jane Ellen Combelic, True Lotus Meditation, lives in northern Scotland with her husband, two cats, and a young dog. She is a member of Northern Lights Sangha at Findhorn and author of a memoir, *No Coming, No Going*. This article is based on a sharing she gave at a Day of Mindfulness in Edinburgh. She can be reached at jecombelic@yahoo.com.

Following photo *Sand*;
photo by Katie Eberle







Earth Justice and Earth Holding

**Reflections from Dharma sisters
from the Global South, Maíra
Fernandes de Melo and
Chaya Ocampo Go**

As per The Global Witness Reports,
the Philippines and Brazil have notoriously been ranked among the top countries in the world that are deadliest for environmental defenders. Marginalized communities and Indigenous bodies are too often at the front lines of eco-social activism and bear the brunt of daily disasters of poverty, armed conflict, and state terror, including climate change. As Dharma sisters practicing mindfulness in the Plum Village tradition, we offer our reflections on Engaged Buddhism in Earth work.

WHAT IS “EARTH JUSTICE”?

CHAYA:

The term “Earth justice” for me names an awareness that ecological harm and climate change impact places and peoples in different ways. On one hand, as we all now live in a time of accelerating globalization, we can easily cultivate a kind of universal planetary consciousness; on the other hand, if one pays close attention to particular contexts and their local material realities, we see bodies and places unevenly impacted by harm. Social identities constructed by gender, class, race, and age interplay with political, economic, and social conditions. Stark differences are revealed in the historical dimension, though we may ultimately share the planet as a common home.

As a Filipina who has lived for many years as a migrant on stolen Indigenous lands in Canada, I have allowed our mindfulness practices to deepen my understanding of colonial violence—not as historical facts to intellectually know about, but as a truth to be embodied and contended with. For instance, when walking mindfully on the concrete pavement in downtown Toronto, my feet directly touch Indigenous burial grounds that have been desecrated by urbanization. I touch the colonial present we all live in.

MAÍRA:

I sometimes like to think about justice in terms of balance. The image of an European woman holding scales often seems more peaceful than the one of a Nigerian man holding axes, sending sparks of fire through rocky mountains. But maybe the Greek Themis is so peaceful only because she’s blindfolded, her eyes not seeing the global inequalities that Xangô, the Orixá of Justice in Brazilian Afrodisporic religions, is able to see. Earth justice, for me, embodies this awareness. It unveils a few truths behind the climate crisis.

Our current situation has manifested not only due to our societal addiction to fossil fuels. Oil and coal are more than just a “cause”; they are the dispositive of a way of living, thinking, and feeling. This way of relating to each other knows nothing but taking from one place/people/continent to satisfy other places/peoples/continents. As Thày taught us, “This is because that is.” Reparation is not just a matter of returning museum diamonds back to Africa—but if you are in a position to do so, please do—it’s understanding the social, economic, and political contexts that produced those historical inequalities. Earth justice is not only a matter of fair energy transition. One might change a gasoline car to an electric vehicle—and if you have the means, please do it! But the minerals used in batteries and engineering come from deforestation and mining in my country, from another nation in the Global South, or from the Indigenous lands of my grandparents (which are still home to many beings, very brave and beautiful people, and—at a high cost—the world’s leading biodiversity). The systemic change needed is not at the level of tools, changing oil for sunlight,

but at a deeper level. Could we simply not use private cars in our daily lives? Could we be organized enough to pledge better public transportation? Could we think of a different way of building our communities and utilizing space? These are only some examples.

I would love to do an experiment, to express “Earth justice” in these terms: “Aware of the suffering caused by centuries of co-

lonialism and imperialism in very diverse, subtle, and direct forms, I am committed to change my lifestyle. I’m determined to give up _____. I’ll practice deeply to be creative when imagining the changes to make.” Now, take three deep breaths and ask yourself: How would you fill in the blank?

WHAT IS “EARTH HOLDING”?

CHAYA:

One of Thày’s books is entitled *The World We Have*. Thày said that, if given the chance to change the title, he would call it *The World We Are*. The world we have today is the world we are. Over the years, I understand that my work for social change and environmental defense is much less about saving an external reality and much more about continuing to fall in love with the Earth. As the Earth holds me, I am holding the Earth. Just as a mother holds her children in an embrace is both tender and powerful, Earth holding is both the softness of comfort and the ferocity of protection. By falling in love, I fall into union—into relationship with the Earth—and we both are held by that embrace.

One small way I am cultivating this love since I have returned to Manila with my family is learning about the native trees in our urban ecologies. These species endemic to our lands have been threatened by colonial projects and urbanisation; many of their names have been forgotten by most of us locals, and they will continue to dwindle in numbers without our care and understanding. Remembering our native ecologies is a decolonial practice, a way to restore what has been lost, and a beautiful invitation to become the world that we yearn for.

MAÍRA:

As someone living in a MAPA territory (Most Affected People and Areas), I’m used to seeing communities struggling during and after environmental tragedies ... and I’m also used to seeing how we get out of it. The networks of solidarity created when these big events happen; the amazing skills people develop; the incredible speed of aid, mostly given within the community itself from people who already struggle with poverty and violence; the immense creativity with which people face such huge challenges. My comprehension of Earth holding comes from these moments. Human beings’ cosmic capacity to hold each other, to give a hand, to share resources—deep bonds of love and care are generated by those situations. My goal as an Earth holder is to generate this energy, to help create spaces where this solidarity emerges, but without the tragedies, so that no disaster is needed to activate our special power. I want to see our ability to love and care flourish without any tragic climate event.

Practicing Right Mindfulness, we can see the seeds of greed and fear that have put us in this situation grow not only in the world, but also inside ourselves. Earth holding means more than planting a tree—but if you can find some soil, please sow it! Earth holding is also

taking care of those gardens in the depths of our minds.

Since we are talking about justice, the Egyptian Goddess of Truth, Maat, is also sometimes depicted holding a scale that weighs human hearts against feathers on Doomsday. Earth holding for me means working with fierce compassion through the path of lightheartedness. When we practice interbeing with the

awareness that “man is not our enemy,”¹ we naturally build trust. With trust, destroying the Earth won’t be necessary anymore. The endless circle of taking will stop spinning!

¹Thích Nhất Hạnh, “Recommendation,” Plum Village. Accessed July 11. <https://plumvillage.org/articles/recommendation/>

Maíra Fernandes de Melo, Engaged Serenity of the Heart (pronouns she/her), is a Brazilian journalist, scholar, poet, activist, and Order of Interbeing aspirant. Born in the lands of Tupinambás, Rio de Janeiro, surrounded by the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the mountains of the Atlantic Forest, she has also lived in Argentina, land of Guaraníes, where the dense stream of the Paraná River embraced her body. She has Indigenous (Potiguara and Puri) and European (Portuguese and Spanish) human ancestors, and is a daughter of Oxóssi, Orisha of the forests in Brazilian Candomblé.



Chaya Ocampo Go, True Radiant Cloud (pronouns she/her), ordained as a member of the Order of Interbeing at Blue Cliff Monastery in 2019. She is a Filipina scholar and activist committed to well-being and survival in marginalized communities across the Philippines. Her doctoral research features three short films on women leading grassroots disaster response efforts: Barangay Magiting (Village Heroes) (2019).



Coming Home to Mother Earth

Mick McEvoy shares how we can heal the suffering of ourselves and our planet with the reconnecting practices of immersive deep ecology retreats in Plum Village, Upper Hamlet.



Photo by
Ocean

We are living through incredible times. Collectively, our planet's human and more-than-human family is in the midst of a climate and ecological emergency. As a human family, we are also in the midst of a social emergency. As a species, we have become disconnected from the natural world. We have forgotten how to live with our "original instructions," in harmony with the Earth and all those we share her with. This triple emergency is the root of deep suffering for many. In the fire of this crucible, we created our biannual Coming Home to Mother Earth Retreat in Plum Village, Upper Hamlet, France. This in-person retreat focuses on the teachings and practices of mindfulness, deep ecology, nature connection, and rewilding.

On these two-week-long, immersive, and experiential Coming Home to Mother Earth retreats, our guests and our teaching team collectively dive deeply into these themes, supported by the Upper Hamlet community and the Happy Farm family. Whilst we acknowledge there is ill-being and suffering, we also acknowledge that there is a path to well-being and healing; this path has been set out by the Buddha and continued by Thích Nhất Hạnh. As a

group, we take refuge in nature. During our service meditations, we explore and experience the regenerative cultures and practices of the Happy Farm, spending time outside on the twenty hectares of Plum Village land that we are rewilding. Together through practices, workshops, and service meditations, we bear witness to the teachings offered by this wild land, which run parallel to the teachings of Thầy and the Buddha and lead to healing, transformation, and regeneration.

As the aspiration to create and curate these retreats grew stronger, an insight ripened within me. I like to share this insight with our guests as we gather each morning before stepping out onto the wild lands: every human who experienced healing and transformation over the forty-one years of Plum Village's history has been held and supported in that experience by our silent partner, the Earth. In Plum Village we can practice walking meditation outdoors each day. The climate is so kind that we can sit outdoors in a circle and practice Dharma Sharing for practically the entire year. In Plum Village we can practice like the Buddha's Sangha, outdoors in the natural world, surrounded by the forest. With every retreat group, I take a moment to pause, to stop, and to acknowledge how this land, the land of Plum Village with the Earth under our feet and the blue sky above our heads, has acted as an agent of healing, transformation, and regeneration for hundreds of thousands of humans over four decades. Thầy knew. He took the Sangha out into nature. He led us outside from the meditation hall to practice walking meditation in the oak forests. He knew that the Earth heals us.

I always like to offer a land acknowledgement. "These are the unceded lands of the Wild Boar and Red Squirrel, the Kestrel, Black Winged Kite and Marsh Harrier,



Photo by the
Happy Farmers

... every human who experienced healing and transformation over the forty-one years of Plum Village's history has been held and supported in that experience by our silent partner, the Earth.

the Viper and Grass Snake, the Southern Swallowtail Butterfly and the Blue Carpenter Bee. We pay respect to them and all their kin—our kin. Of the four-legged, of those who crawl, those who fly, those who swim, and those who dwell in the soil, of our human and spiritual ancestors who lived on these lands: we ask permission to dwell together here.”

Our immersive workshops explore the confluence of rewilding and the Dharma. The titles of these workshops include: Interbeing, Emptiness, and Nonself; Impermanence and Letting Go; Practicing the Full Awareness of Breathing/Ānāpānasati Sutta in Nature; and Bearing Witness, Going Forth, and Nonfear.

I receive huge nourishment from the wild when I share the workshop called The Diamond Sutra in the Natural World. The Diamond Sutra is the earliest recorded teaching on deep ecology. I particularly enjoy sharing this teaching because I see that it has the potential to transmit a type of superpower to those who receive it. The Diamond Sutra exists to help uproot the notion that we are separate, isolated, and disconnected in our lives and in this world. It offers clarity—we are in fact empty of a separate self. With the rationality of science, the Diamond Sutra illuminates the reality that we are this Earth that carries us, that our bodies are made up of elements from all corners of the cosmos. We are deeply connected with all life on this planet and the entire cosmos. How can we ever be lonely again?





Photo by Simon H

The Diamond Sutra empowers us to uproot four notions to help us see our own true (wild) nature and the true nature of reality. These are the notion of “self,” the notion of “human being,” the notion of “living being,” and the notion of “life span.” For myself as the facilitator, I delight in the infinite ways that the wild illustrates the folly of these four notions. The notion of life span tells us a story that we and all beings are born and then we die. Death is the end. I lead the group deep into the forest amongst majestic green oaks—beautiful, sculptural, dead trees—and notice how the forest floor is covered by their fallen bodies. Are these trees dead or alive? This dead wood is full of life. Home to countless beings. It is full of beetles recycling the wood. They are food for woodpeckers and countless other birds. Mycelia of fungi penetrate these branches deeply. They are covered in lichens and moss. This dead wood is critical to the health of our woodland ecosystem. This dead wood is full of life. No birth, no death. Only continuation.

The notion of living beings assumes there are non-living beings. In the forest, I pause. I reach down and pick up a limestone rock, the kind of rock that makes up many of the Plum Village buildings that offer us shelter. Why is the calcium in this limestone a non-living being, yet the calcium in my teeth (the only part of my skeleton I can touch) a part of my living self? I am a living being, yet this rock of limestone is not? On and on we go together through the forest, a perfect place to explore and uproot our limiting notions.

The Diamond Sutra is the earliest recorded teaching on deep ecology. We are deeply connected with all life on this planet and the entire cosmos. How can we ever be lonely again?

Our efforts at ecosystem restoration on Plum Village's Happy Farm are not just about sequestering carbon dioxide. They are also exploring the importance of habitat.

The word "habitat" means the natural place or environment where a living organism makes its home.

The first Dharma Seal of Plum Village is: "I have arrived. I am home."

Thầy offered this deep teaching to help each of us come home to ourselves in the present moment. With joy, I have adapted this teaching for all of our more-than-human kin who are finding home here as the land heals, transforms, and regenerates: "They are arriving. They are coming home."

Together we help the land move towards its own true wild nature.

The motivation to offer these retreats twice a year is to empower our guests to realise deeply that they are the Earth; taking action for the Earth is taking action to heal themselves. With this prescription we can help heal the modern malaise of loneliness, disconnection, and isolation. You are the power of the cosmos, arising as pure intelligence and utter beauty. You are the extraordinary power that is life on Earth.

Healing, transformation, and regeneration for the land. Healing, transformation, and regeneration for ourselves. I invite you to join us one spring or autumn to explore these teachings in the wild together.



Mick McEvoy, True Pure Earth (pronouns he/him), an Irish native, lives, works, and studies in the community of Plum Village, France. Mick brings over twenty years of experience working with people, plants, and mindfulness practice to his management of the Happy Farm and rewilding projects. The farm welcomes hundreds of retreatants annually and combines mindfulness-based approaches with seasonal organic food production and land stewardship rooted in deep ecology.

No Wrong Way

Pay attention to the interruptions, the wrong turns,
the plans gone awry.
Bow to the rude waiter, the overdue bill,
All of the ways this world disappoints you.

This is the marrow of the practice,
the heartwood: knowing how to love an imperfect life.

Still your mind, slow your breath.
And witness the messy miracle of this moment
revealing itself to you
now

and now

and now.

Stephen Pradarelli, Deep Integration of the Source (pronouns he/him), is the communications director for the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation and an Order of Interbeing aspirant who loves communing with nature, reading, flying, and writing haiku. Stephen, pictured with his daughter, Emma, founded and co-facilitates the Winding Path Sangha where he lives in Iowa City, Iowa, US.



Education for the Ecological Crisis

A webinar excerpt with with Brother Pháp Dung, Bhante Bhikku Buddharakkita, and (Genla) Lobsang Phuntsok, edited by Orlaith O’Sullivan

ABOUT OUR INITIATIVE

Over the last year, Wake Up Schools has collaborated with Buddhists Across Traditions and Jhamste Gatsal Children’s Community to establish SHEE—Sprouting Humane Education for the Ecological Crisis.

SHEE is a global open-source community to exchange ideas, inspire each other, and support our aim to evolve education to meet our needs and those of our planet.

On March 4, 2023, we held the webinar Education for the Ecological Crisis Using Buddhist Ethics with speakers Brother Pháp Dung (joining from Deer Park Monastery, United States), Bhante

Bhikku Buddharakkita (joining from Uganda), and (Genla) Lobsang Phuntsok (joining from India).

These three teachers brought over six decades of work in engaged action and cultivating the gardens of our hearts to awaken to our interconnectedness. This was an inspiring, joyous, international space.

With deep gratitude to our three luminaries for shining a bright light on a path forward and to our global participants and friends who joined us in this vital, important conversation. We share an excerpt of this rich discussion:



Webinar screenshot of Brother Pháp Dung

The wonder that we feel—the connection and love—
is actually the medicine for our violence, for our loneliness.

ISOLATION AND RECONNECTING

Brother Pháp Dung

I went to COP21 in Paris. There was a lot of care and critical thinking on how to solve things, but I felt that there was some heart missing.

Education is not about producing more workers, employees, or good citizens. We are disconnected from Mother Earth, and so I always teach young people to love nature. The wonder that we feel—the connection and love—is actually the medicine for our violence, for our loneliness. When we have fallen in love with Mother Earth, we act from that warmth, that sense of interbeing.

Lobsang Phuntsok

We need to first understand that there is an ecological crisis happening in every being. In our children's community, we talk about the three essentials: educating the heart, mind, and body. What we see in modern education is that the system is so focused on human thinking, it has completely ignored human feelings and human emotions.

Bhante Buddharakkita

At the COP in Marrakesh, they were talking about reducing carbon emission by 30 percent by 2030.



Webinar screenshot
of Bhante Bhikku
Buddharakkita

I told them, “No, we need to really look at reducing greed emissions by 30 percent. Reduce hatred emissions by 2030. Reduce delusion emissions!”

Greed, hatred, and delusion are all behind the ecological crisis. Most people are disconnected, and that’s why they’re unable to take care of the environment. I tell them, “You see those trees? They are your external lungs. You have internal lungs, and you have external lungs. When you breathe out, give the air to your external lungs. Then your external lungs will give you air.”

BUDDHIST ETHICS AND TEACHING

Bhante Buddharakkita

In Africa, we practice ethics in connection between ourselves and others. It is always relational.

We look at two principles. (1) What is the motivation for what you are doing? If the motivations are greed, hatred, delusion, and fear, we try to transform them to what is skillful. (2) What are the consequences? Does what you are doing bring suffering, pain, and stress, or happiness and joy?

I teach the children to consider their actions in terms of these two ethical criteria. They develop a

psychological framework to put actions into perspective: they do not do something just because God said or because their parents said. They do it because they sense the connection.

Children learn biology, but they can’t see interconnection until they meditate on it. In Uganda, we have projects to plant trees, because we have a lot of deforestation. Children now take care of the physical environment. And they take care of the physical environment through meditation. People are destroying this environment because they don’t take care of their minds.

Brother Pháp Dung

What guides me in terms of what is right and wrong is the basic teaching of The Four Noble Truths. The guiding light for me is the question: Where is the suffering?

I can share a beautiful story. At Teen Camp, we have many teenagers who come. One child felt left out and smashed one of the glass windows of our meditation hall. All the boys wanted to punish him. We gathered to discuss it. They all looked to me to decide what was right and wrong, but I threw it back to them and then we dug deeper into it.



People are destroying this environment because they
don't take care of their minds.

They said, “We were not letting him join us.” They had shunned him, so he felt angry. Every teenager shared their perspective, without getting caught in right and wrong. It's the same with the environmental crisis—everyone's trying to negotiate who to blame. When we look into it, we find that right and wrong are very connected.

Back to the broken window: we needed to decide what action to take. The boys agreed together that they would all be banned from the monastery—all of them and their families—for two months. When they told their parents, some reacted, “That's not fair. My child had nothing to do with it.” But their children had seen the interbeing, that they were all co-responsible for what had happened: the broken glass, the bleeding hand. There is so much wisdom when you remove the authority and let people look at the suffering.

For me, it's crucial in our evolution as humans to teach young people and teachers to learn how to take care of their suffering. We can help schools and teachers to say, “It's okay to suffer. It's okay to be sad. Let's look into it. Let's be with it.”

SUSTAINING OUR ENERGY AND VOLITION

Lobsang Phuntsok

As a teacher in this community, I live here with the children twenty-four seven and I struggle a lot with the question of how to care for myself.

For me, the most important thing is to build a relationship with the children. And I'm talking

about building an imperfect relationship. Teachers are burning out because there is an unrealistic expectation in our society. Teachers cannot be wrong. Teachers have to be perfect. Teachers have to have every right answer. Nobody can live up to that and remain a teacher for very long.

The most important thing is building an imperfect relationship. Accepting that I am imperfect. You are imperfect. These imperfect teachers have the biggest intention in the greatest service of humanity. They are committed to their students: “I will never let you go. I will never give up on you.”

I know the term compassion fatigue, and I dislike this term because it is not the fatigue we generate when we practice love and compassion. This is the fatigue of unrealistic expectations. Compassion will never exhaust you; compassion will rejuvenate your energy. We all know this. When we think of compassion, even for a moment, it lights us up. It will never drain you.

But people are scared of asking, “Have you ever heard of greed fatigue?” There is violence fatigue. Nobody wants to talk about it, because it's dangerous for business. People don't want to discourage practicing greed and fear. There is fear fatigue in the younger generation: “I'm behind. I need to catch up. I need to do better. I need to have a bigger car. I need to have more money in my bank account.”

These are the diseases in our society. These are what is actually draining everybody's energy. There's no compassion fatigue. There's no love

When we look into it, we find that right and wrong are
very connected.

fatigue. There is hate fatigue. There is competition fatigue. There is unrealistic expectations fatigue. Our society is actually pushing these on a younger generation, on us, on everybody.

The school has to be a space to de-stress. The school needs to find a bigger purpose than just teaching, solving math, science, and language problems. The school needs to add one more challenge: to solve the real problems of their students—and of their educators. To be a place where they can de-stress, where they can come and be themselves, where they can cry, and where they can actually share their challenges.

If we cannot do this, education is becoming a big problem. We can already see the cost of suffering. As Bhante Buddharakkita and Brother Pháp Dung said, it is vital that we understand where these sufferings are coming from.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Lobsang Phuntsok is the founder of Jhamtse Gatsal Children's Community in Lumla, India. Today, Jhamtse Gatsal (the garden of love and compassion) has more than a hundred children in its care. Lobsang's story is beautifully told in the Emmy Award winning documentary *Tashi and The Monk*.

Venerable Bhante Buddharakkita is the founder and abbot of the Uganda Buddhist Center in Uganda. He is a visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and holds an honorary doctorate in Buddhist studies from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU), Thailand.

Brother Pháp Dung is a senior Dharma teacher in the Plum Village tradition. Born in Vietnam and having first trained as an architect, Brother Pháp Dung helped to establish Deer Park Monastery and other US centers and has led mindfulness retreats in many countries, including Uganda and India.

An extended version of this article is available at mindfulnessbell.org. You can watch the full webinar at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPf7O3tJS-g>



Orlaith (Orla) O'Sullivan, True Garden of the Nectar of Immortality (pronouns she/her), is the international coordinator of Wake Up Schools. She is passionate about building happy communities. She helps families, schools, community groups, and businesses to explore ethical and joyful paths of well-being.

A Poem

A silent morning mist rolls in,
Blankets the ground in softness.
All about the early dawn shines,
Burning away the fog.

Grey geese arrive on winter wings,
Honking and waddling, nipping at the grass.
Soon they will fly away...

Tladatsi, Karma Yeshe Sumdrup (pronouns he/they), a mixed ethnicity Indigenous and Euro American, took formal refuge in the Drukpa Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhist tradition and is a veteran prisoner of forty-two years. He is in training to become a certified recovery mentor for alcohol and drug addiction focused on trauma recovery.



Embarking on the Joyful Journey of a Plant-Based Diet

Luise and Valentin offer stories of witnessing animal suffering that spurred them to practice with more self-compassion, joy, clarity, and non-judgment.

Many of us have heard Thầy's teachings about what we consume and how we can look deeply to see whether the planet or other beings have suffered in the production of a certain product. We might already feel a call for us to change the way we eat so that we can contribute to a more peaceful society and world. But day to day, we may find it hard to put these intentions into practice or stick to them consistently; we find ourselves stuck in our old habits. In this article, we share some challenges we encountered while adapting a plant-based diet. We believe we all share similar experiences on our journey to a more loving and sustainable life, regardless of the specific actions we choose.

CONFRONTING THE SUFFERING

Right at the beginning, we want to share our stories about how we first decided to change our habits:

Valentin

When I was fifteen, I was travelling back from a summer holiday with dear friends. On the highway in front of us, I saw a truck that seemed to be losing some of the goods it carried, although I couldn't quite identify what was flying around behind it. It was only at a gas station, where the truck and our car both stopped, that I could see behind the truck's bars: it transported chickens. In distress, the poor animals had pecked feathers from one another. They looked tattered and continued to attack each other. Confronted with their pain, compassion brought me to tears. It was in that moment that I committed to removing animal products from my diet.

Luise

One day, during a semester abroad in Korea, I walked through a fish market. I had never seen anything like this place before. Living fish in plastic buckets of water were poked with a stick every now and then to demonstrate their aliveness and freshness to potential customers. Crabs with bodies larger than my two fists, and legs as long as my forearms, were crammed into aquariums. In front of me, one crab was taken out of the aquarium by the man selling them. The man started hitting the crab in his hand with a metal tool, again and again and again. The crab twitched and finally went limp. It was dead, “ready to eat.” I started crying. Embarrassed, I tried to hide my tears from the people around me. Never before had I seen an animal brutally killed like this. Never before was I directly confronted with the suffering of the animals we eat. At that moment, seeing this suffering for the first time, I decided I could not eat animal products any more.

Those moments and other similar ones we witnessed over the years, although painful, have been a source of willpower, clarity, and decisiveness to continue with compassion. Our compassion transforms pain into dedicated action.

HARVESTING THE JOY OF COMPASSIONATE LIVING

When we think of a plant-based diet, we may believe that we are sacrificing or restricting ourselves. But are we sure? These perceptions can turn into real obstacles on our journey



Photo by Michael Dore

of living more compassionately. If we don't look deeply into these perceptions, we might even give up trying to change our eating habits because it feels overwhelming and paralyzing. Not doing something does not have to feel like a painful restriction; instead, it can be a daily celebration of love. For most of us, not hitting strangers in the face does not feel like a restriction of our freedom. It is a natural act of kindness to greet each other with a smile instead, and it feels good. Adopting a plant-based diet can feel the same.

We have experienced that a change of perspective is crucial in order to focus on what we are truly doing. Our invitation is to mindfully and consciously enjoy a sense of embodied compassion; we honor our integrity and commitment each time we choose to act more compassionately by eating a plant-based diet. By bringing our attention to these positive and nourishing aspects of our choices, our practice becomes a vehicle of our growth. There is deep fulfilment from living in line with our sense of justice.



Photo by Valentin

This is a concrete practice that can gradually change the way we perceive our actions. Over time, it becomes a habit to enjoy our conscious and compassionate choices. All the while, we are able to explore and savor a colorful variety of tasty, fresh, and nourishing foods every day of our life.

TAKING CARE OF OUR OUTRAGE OVER THE UNLOVING BEHAVIOR OF OTHERS

When we started our plant-based journey, a lot of sadness and anger arose. Sadness about all the suffering of sentient beings caused by the eating habits of humans. Anger at all the humans supporting that suffering for brief moments of pleasure. We started to ask direct questions like, “Do you not care that an animal died for this?” We pressured the people around us. But of course this didn’t work. People rarely perceive such harsh words as invitations for reflection.

So over the years, we practiced looking more deeply into our anger. We found that part of it was a result of wrong perceptions about human beings and their reasons for acting in ways that produce pain. Rather than judging others, we saw that behaviors that make other beings suffer result from deep misconceptions, such as a belief in separateness and an inability to experience interbeing. A lot of compassion arose from that insight. Judging others would mean playing the same game of “you’re wrong and bad, I’m right and good” that is at the core of discriminative, dualistic thinking, which itself causes a lot of pain. Through exploration, we realized how deeply discriminative thinking patterns are ingrained in our cultures and minds. We are very happy to share that today, we experience a lot more gentleness and compassion towards ourselves and others.

Our exploration also led us to a point where we learned to compassionately hold and take care of the outrage and sadness that naturally arise when we see beings hurting each other. Our practice enables us to attend to those feelings with gentleness and tender compassion. For us, that creates inner calm and stability.

For us, over the years, eating a plant-based diet has transformed from a desperate protest to a loving practice for ourselves and the world.

May our collective awakening bloom!

Luise, Source of Unconditional Love (pronouns she/her), and Valentin, Source of True Compassion (pronouns he/him), are currently enjoying the wonderful autumn—sometimes together with their Wake Up Sangha in Aachen, Germany. When they are not on the journey of finishing their energy engineering studies, they both like to learn about loving communication, community building, Buddhist psychology, and the transformation of suffering.



The Earth is inside of us, in each morsel of food, in the air we breathe, in the water that we drink and that flows through us. Enjoy being part of the Earth and eat in such a way that allows you to be aware that each bite is deepening your connection to the planet.

—THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH, *HOW TO EAT*

These words from our teacher, Thầy, are like the sound of the bell reminding me to pause for a moment to recognize what is present within and around me. However, even though I live in a peaceful and supportive monastic environment, I still find myself getting carried away by thoughts, emotions, my own stories, and other distractions.

Before becoming a monk, I grew up eating meals lovingly prepared by my mother and sister. I enjoyed food from restaurants and vendors on the streets of Việt Nam, my home country. This eating and drinking, though, was done to satisfy my hunger, quench my thirst, and entertain my taste buds. When I became a monastic in my thirties, I realized how unmindful I was when it came to food. I lacked understanding of the suffering that so many creatures go through to sustain our human lives. Meditation has given me the opportunity to deepen my awareness of and my relationship with food, and it has helped me to transform my habit of eating rapidly while daydreaming.

I gradually learned to eat with more awareness and appreciation. I was able to see the sun, the rain, and the farmer in a carrot. Each morsel of rice and each cup of tea became more real with my growing awareness of their deep connection to nature. As my awareness grows, I find that our vegetarian diet helps me to stay healthy and cultivate more compassion for living beings.

The fourth of the Five Contemplations, recited before each meal, reminds us to eat “in such a way that reduces the suffering of living beings, stops contributing to climate change, and heals and preserves our precious planet.” What if this small act of reducing suffering with each meal were multiplied by countless people practicing in this way? Together, we could offer an immeasurable contribution to the health of our planet.

It’s this potential that inspires me to cook vegetarian dishes to offer to our community at the monastery.

I remember how Thầy would skillfully and compassionately invite those used to eating meat to offer a loving and healing gift to Mother Earth by reducing their meat consumption by 50 percent. Perhaps by offering the following recipe for a classic dish we enjoy in the monastery, I can help inspire compassionate eating. You may be inspired to try eating vegetarian meals several days a week and see how you feel. How is your body? Do you notice any changes in your relationship to Mother Earth?

An extended version of this article is available at mindfulnessbell.org.

Lemongrass Curry for Mother Earth

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 sticks lemongrass, tough outer layer removed, bruised with the back of a knife

½ onion, diced

½ teaspoon black pepper

1 cup carrots, sliced

2 cups potatoes, cubed

2 ½ tablespoons curry powder

1 ½ teaspoons salt

1 quart water

5 lemon leaves, sliced thin

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon mushroom powder

⅔ cup cooked chickpeas or fresh tofu, cubed

1 can coconut milk (13.5 oz, about 1 ⅔ cup)

1 cup white mushrooms, sliced

1 bunch spring onions, sliced thin

1 lime

Heat the vegetable oil in a wide pot over medium heat. Add the lemongrass (you may need to cut it to fit in the pot), onions, and black pepper. Stir for one minute, then add the carrots and potatoes. Stir for three minutes.

Add one teaspoon of curry powder and a pinch of salt. Continue to stir the mixture for another minute.

Pour in water. When the water starts to boil, add the lemon leaves, 1 teaspoon salt, sugar, mushroom powder, and chickpeas or cubed tofu. Let everything boil un-

til the carrots and potatoes are almost soft.

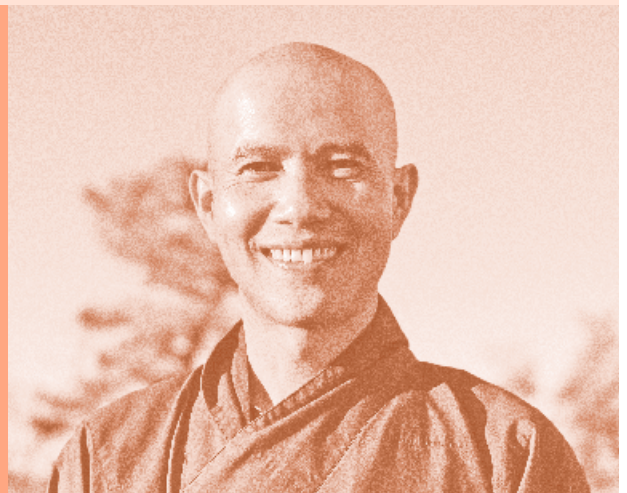
Add two tablespoons of curry powder, the can of coconut milk, and the fresh mushrooms. Let the mixture boil for a couple more minutes.

Please taste and add more curry powder, coconut milk, salt, sugar, and/or water if needed, depending on your preferences.

Garnish the curry with the chopped spring onion and lime wedges. Serve with bread, rice, or rice noodles.

Serves 2–4.

Chân Trời Đại Lực, or Brother Strength (pronouns he/him), was ordained in 2019 at Blue Cliff Monastery in New York, US. He came to the United States in 1990 and grew up in Virginia. He worked in Washington D.C. before encountering the teachings and becoming a monk. Brother Strength currently resides at Blue Cliff Monastery. He loves soccer, hiking, nature, history, and, of course, meditation. He also enjoys music and cooking vegetarian food.



A Peace Treaty with the Earth



Touching the earth practice, Vesak in Plum Village 2023; photo by Đức trú courtesy of monastic Sangha

**Brother Pháp Lưu
offers a new series of
earth-touching
meditations.**

A few inspired monastics, including Brother Pháp Dung, Sister Lăng Nghiêm, and I, approached Thầy in 2007 as he embarked on a US tour from the newly opened Blue Cliff Monastery. We hoped Thầy would institute a worldwide ecological initiative across all of our centers. The initiative we had in mind was based on what we were developing at Deer Park Monastery; it included solar panels for our electrical needs, the practice of a no-car day once a week, and cars altered to run on used vegetable oil. Thầy, as Zen master and teacher, took our intentions even further and declared: “What we need is a peace treaty with the Earth.” That night, I drafted the first version of the Earth Peace Treaty Commitment Sheet based on our collective aspirations. The current version of this treaty, recently updated, is reprinted in this *Mindfulness Bell* issue. In the years following its inception, thousands of people committed to the actions suggested by the Earth Peace Treaty; many sent a copy of their pledge to us at Deer Park Monastery.

When I returned to Deer Park during the pandemic in August of 2020, one such recently completed pledge was in my mailbox. I took it as a reminder from Thầy to continue my own commitment of shepherding the Earth Peace Treaty movement. In the following summer of 2021, the community offered me two weeks to write and sleep in a hammock amongst the Engelmann Oaks in the wild of Deer Park’s hidden mountain. There,

I composed the first draft of the contemplation below—a more integrated path that flows from the Earth Peace Treaty commitment sheet and is based on the Eightfold Path. This draft expresses my own insights and practice of reconciliation with Mother Earth.

In the lead-up to COP26 in the fall of 2021, Sister Lực Nghiêm asked Thầy Pháp Dung and I to draft a statement to our international community. Our statement included a revision of the contemplation I created while on writing retreat in Deer Park. Further helpful insights and edits were contributed by Sister Thệ Nghiêm, Sister Hiển Nghiêm, Sister Đăng Nghiêm, Hisae Matsuda, Heather Weightman, John Bell, Felipe Viveros, Aaron Solomon, and many others. Ánh Hương and Thư Nguyễn contributed a decisive shift in the tone, and together we created a contemplation that now stands as a practice of touching the earth: an intimate conversation with Mother Earth. After the initial group of fifty people read the text and gave input, I let it sit for a while in the crucible of my own practice. With this issue of *The Mindfulness Bell*, we offer it to a wider public. Any shortcomings or hidden dualisms are due to my own still-growing understanding of the Dharma and Thầy’s teachings.

I hope it contributes to your own path of making peace with the Earth.

Touching the Earth to Guide Our Engagement with Climate and Social Justice

Note: “We/us” can be used in place of “I/me” where appropriate.

The contemplations can be practiced as a whole, or individually in a series of shorter sessions.

You may also like to read the contemplations as inspiration for reflection and intention-setting.

THE FIRST CONTEMPLATION

Mother Earth, I open myself to your joy and your pain. Recognizing that we inter-are, I see that my views and actions affect your well-being and suffering, and the well-being of myself and all other beings.¹

[Bell: You may like to bow deeply, or practice a prostration while the contemplation is read]

Breathing with mindfulness, I am in touch with the insight that I am not separate from you, Mother Earth, or from all beings; your well-being and mine are connected. When I cling to and act on views based in ignorance, craving, fear, and aversion, I contribute to corporate and governmental policies and systems that have harmed others, degraded the environment, and brought our climate into crisis. With compassion, I bear witness to the sacrifice zones², melting permafrost, rising sea levels, extreme temperatures, and wildfires, as well as to the steep decline and extinction of species. I recognize that these events arise from generations of neglect and violence that stem from wrong views about our collective relationship with you, Mother Earth.

Knowing that suffering and happiness inter-are, I draw strength from your great equanimity. As I see and meet these challenges, I aspire to train myself not to fall into despair, escapism, or paralysis, but instead to cultivate loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity toward my body, feelings, and others. Through the concrete practice of nonviolence, I am determined to find ways to change the situation, both in my own life and in society.

Touching the earth, I am aware that I am part of a larger planetary body, and I share limited resources with countless others. I see clearly that when I live more simply and share with others, I

already have enough conditions for happiness and can better support equitable living conditions for everyone.

[Bell & Stand Up]

THE SECOND CONTEMPLATION

Mother Earth, I see that my thoughts influence my actions and have real effects on the world. I aspire to give rise to loving thoughts toward myself and all beings.

[Bell & Touch the Earth]

Mother Earth, I witness your great capacity to hold and embrace all beings as your children. When I can connect with this same quality of inclusiveness in me, I am able to embrace the current climate emergency without falling into judgment, anger, grief, or despair. As I reflect on those doing harm and worsening the situation, I practice sending them loving thoughts and recognize they are not my enemy. The roots of harmful actions are wrong perceptions and misunderstanding. Letting go of my tendency to think of others as separate from me, I feel compassion arise toward all of us for our collective situation.

Looking deeply, I am aware that my lifestyle and my community’s lifestyle also contribute to ecological suffering. I am determined to develop and maintain *bodhicitta*, the mind of love, to give me strength to embrace and transform my habitual ways of thinking and acting and to support others on the path of awakening and healing. I know that cultivating inclusiveness and *bodhicitta* will help me transform challenging situations and act to bring about a positive, regenerative future for all of us.

[Bell & Stand Up]

THE THIRD CONTEMPLATION

Mother Earth, I am inspired by your capacity to receive my unskillful words and strong emotions with compassion and solidity.

[Bell & Touch the Earth]

I realize my words can create division and despair in others if I am not mindful. When I practice loving speech, I can water positive seeds instead, like hope and compassion. When I practice deep listening, I gain more clarity and understanding about myself and others. I know deep listening and loving speech help me skillfully engage in constructive dialogue about the climate crisis in ways that move the heart. In the past, I have spoken out of anger or fear and caused others to turn away or react defensively and angrily. Now, when I am called to speak in support of climate action or to address perspectives conflicting with my own, I will practice speaking in a way that inspires others to engage positively. I realize true dialogue can only occur when both parties are willing to be fully present with each other.

When the energies of anger, impatience, and despair come up in me, I will practice mindful breathing and walking to calm myself. When I re-establish my capacity to listen deeply to myself and the other person, I will transform those energies into understanding and compassion. Only when I communicate in this spirit might the other person receive my words with openness. I will learn to communicate in ways that inspire individuals, corporations, and institutions to recognize the harmful effects of their actions, to give up the culture of consumption, to transform our dependence on fossil fuels, and to support regenerative economies that honor and protect you and all your children.

[Bell & Stand Up]

THE FOURTH CONTEMPLATION

Mother Earth, so much has been done to hurt you. I bear witness to this pain, and wish to begin anew now that I see clearly how my actions and those of so many of us have harmed you, bringing about a dangerous and uncertain imbalance for all life.

[Bell & Touch the Earth]

I see that the pollution and disruption of communities and ecosystems and the destruction of biodiversity stems from destructive and exploitative patterns of consumption—including the burning of fossil fuels—that have brought much harm and suffering to you, Mother Earth, and to all of us. Deep in my heart, I earnestly wish to reduce harm and engender healing. I know nonviolent direct action can bring real social change. I realize that to practice true nonviolent action, I first must learn how to deal peacefully with my own suffering. That is why I touch the earth now, letting go of my fears, anxieties, and anger, so I may cultivate the clarity, compassion, and courage to act wisely.

Like the Earth Holder Bodhisattva, Dharanimdhara, who supports, preserves, and protects the air, water, soil, and all beings without exception, I am committed to practice the way of Earth holding for the safety and well-being of all beings and environments—especially those most impacted by ecological degradation. Upholding reverence for life, I am determined not to engage in the destruction of life and life systems and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. I see the profound interrelationship between social, racial, and environmental justice. I am moved to act to bring an end to the inequitable distribution of natural resources and discriminatory policies that continue to harm your children and destabilize communities around the world.

I can no longer close my eyes to the industrial food system, which contributes directly to greenhouse gas emissions, the suffering of living beings, soil depletion, the massive draining of aquifers, and the destruction of biodiversity. Aware of these harms, I see that it is not difficult to reduce my consumption of harmful industrial products or to



Monastic tour, Freiberg, Germany,
May 2023; photo by Thien Khai
courtesy of monastic Sangha

abstain from them completely. I am inspired by the many Indigenous cultures all over the Earth and seek to honor their wisdom and knowledge for living more simply and harmoniously with you, Mother Earth.

I see that we are your stewards, Mother Earth, and with this insight comes great responsibility to act for your well-being and for future generations. I know the best way to care for the future is to practice dwelling happily and mindfully in the present moment, unattached to the fruits of my actions. In this way, I am able to work with ease and joy, fully present and fully appreciating the conditions around me. When a community of Earth holders embodies this spirit, that community can impact society and produce social change. In the present moment, I am committed to protecting those most harshly impacted by the climate crisis by sup-

porting direct, local actions. I am motivated to help communities, corporations, and governments look deeply into their past, present, and future impacts so they may change their ways, adopting new low-carbon policies, renewable energies, and sustainable resource use. Reverence for the lives of all future generations moves me to live lightly on the Earth using present-moment sources of energy, including sunlight.

[Bell & Stand Up]

THE FIFTH CONTEMPLATION

Mother Earth, I know you are truly there for me and that I can trust you. So that I may regain your trust and be truly there for you, I am learning how to live and consume in a way that preserves my health, that of other beings, and future generations.

[Bell & Touch the Earth]

Just as inflammation indicates imbalance or illness in my own body, climate and ecological disruption indicates imbalance in your body, Mother Earth. I deeply wish to reduce this inflammation. Now I see that doing so requires me to make meaningful changes in how I make a living. I know that the desire for wealth, power, fame, and sensual pleasures can blind me to how my livelihood may contribute to releasing toxins into my own body and into our atmosphere, soil, and rivers. This inspires me to choose a vocation that does not exploit other people or you, Mother Earth.

I know that many human cultures have fallen into the habit of stealing from and oppressing others, exploiting the land and each other for labor, and using violent means to extract natural resources so we may consume them in excess. With compassion in my heart, I am determined to live and consume in a way that transforms the habit of exploitation and preserves my own health, as well as the health of other living beings, future generations, and you, Mother Earth, by adopting a way of life that is fulfilling, creative, and in harmony with nature. In that way, I may be present for loved ones and support our most vulnerable communities.

[Bell & Stand Up]

THE SIXTH CONTEMPLATION

Mother Earth, I admire your enduring capacity for regeneration as you diligently transform decaying matter into new life. I see that I too have this capacity, and that I can find more skillful ways to handle my difficult emotions. I will not neglect them or let them spread like a wildfire in my consciousness, but will learn how to embrace, honor, and transform them into insight and wise action.

[Bell & Touch the Earth]

When I look deeply into the climate crisis, I see that emotions like anger, fear, greed, and despair have led to violence and harm toward one another and to the desecration of our environment. This strongly motivates me to take care of my emotions, to recognize, accept, embrace, and look deeply into them as soon as they arise. Shining the light of mindfulness on my emotions, I help them transform so I may have more calm, clarity, and insight. I will learn to cultivate appropriate attention and be more vigilant about what I am consuming through my senses, including news, social media, and conversations. In this way I can understand clearly what is fueling my emotions and whether it is beneficial or harmful.

Your capacity for regeneration reminds me that conditions for happiness are already available in the present moment. I will train myself with mindful breathing and walking to keep this awareness alive. I will use my mindful steps to invite positive emotions like compassion, understanding, and love to come up and thrive in my consciousness for longer periods of time. I know there are pathways of healing in community that will allow me to transform the roots of painful emotions that belong primarily to my past and my ancestors' past. Immersion in nature, enough rest, and community living all help to contribute to my own mental solidity, peace, and joy, keeping my engagement with Earth-holding sustainable.

[Bell & Stand Up]

THE SEVENTH CONTEMPLATION

Mother Earth, your deep love penetrates all of us, your children. Thanks to this love I have learned how to shine the light of mindfulness on the pain in our collective consciousness to bring about healing and transformation in myself and in the world.

[Bell & Touch the Earth]

I know now that the climate and ecological crisis, including the mass extinction of species, results from our individual and collective ignorance about the full effects of our actions. Mindfulness allows us to be fully present, alert, fearless, and free to see how our choices have real effects on you, Mother Earth—on the climate and on people, animals, plants, and minerals. In this way, I see clearly what to do and what not to do. I commit to culti-

vating the energy of mindfulness in my daily life by remembering to stop, come back to my breathing, and become aware of what is going on within me and around me in the present moment. I see it is a joy to be alive. I will practice to nourish myself with the wonders of the present moment so I have more energy to act for change and to help myself and my community heal the collective wounds at the root of the climate and ecological crisis. Mindful that all states, governments, and institutions are of the nature to form and to collapse, I will continually do my best to address real social and ecological injustice by building resilient and regenerative communities. Doing this, I plant seeds that will sprout into new cultures and societies.

[Bell & Stand Up]



Monastic tour, Darmstadt, Germany, May 2023; photo by Thien Khai, courtesy of monastic Sangha

THE EIGHTH CONTEMPLATION

Mother Earth, your capacity to endure fills me with genuine awe and respect. With the energy of concentration, I open myself to the experience of oneness with you and touch the unconditioned.

[Bell & Touch the Earth]

I know my mind is often dispersed and unable to come back to and focus on what is really going on in the present moment. I easily get attached to concepts, images, sounds, words, points of view, emotions, and other sense impressions. Unifying my body and mind right now through mindfulness of breathing, I let go of these perceptions and conditioned phenomena and see that my mind has the capacity to become stable, calm, and free. There is nowhere to go, and nothing to do: just the experience of the breath and the body in this present moment. From here, noble action is possible.

The Buddha taught the Three Doors of Liberation as themes of meditation to help us become free from our concepts and notions and to maintain that freedom. I see that the Three Doors help me act in the world with joy and happiness without getting trapped by devastating emotions like despair.

Practicing the concentration on emptiness, I let go of the view that this body is me, mine, or myself; that this culture, society, or civilization is me, mine, or myself; or that the human species is me, mine, or myself. In this body is the entire cosmos—stardust, water, wind, atoms, and quarks—yet it is empty of one thing: a separate self. All is action and process, cause and effect. This is the wondrous nature of interbeing; everything is intimately connected. With this realization, I am filled with joy and clarity. For so long I have clung to the perception that I am a separate self. This perception cuts me off from others, leaving me alone and isolated from you, Mother Earth, and I get caught in the belief that when this body dies, everything ends. Now I see that these are mere notions; even as I grasp them they slip through my fingers, change, and disappear. Touching emptiness, I touch the fullness of all things, everywhere. I can remain stable in the face of losing everything I hold dear: those I love

and care for; the institutions, businesses, states, and governments that support and sustain me; even the extinction of humankind and countless species. I learn to touch the ultimate dimension—nirvana—in this present moment and receive the gift of nonfear: bright, beautiful, and open. I see that you and I, Mother Earth, have not ever been separate in this dance of birth and death spanning billions of years. Sorrow, despair, and fear can no longer overwhelm and paralyze me. I can act with love and compassion unburdened by fear.

Practicing the concentration on signlessness, I am no longer caught by appearances. This body, these feelings, these perceptions, these mental formations and consciousness are flowing streams³; I stop grasping at sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, or thoughts—experiencing events in the world but not getting caught by the sign or appearance of those events. Seeing this frees me to touch the love that pervades the millions of people who have contributed and are continuing to contribute to transforming the situation of the climate crisis in unacknowledged ways. Touching this fills me with determination to help, to serve, and to act wherever I am, with the scope and capacity available to me.

Practicing the concentration on aimlessness, I do not let myself be carried away by the emotions and desires of the majority, or by expectations of what must happen in the future. I no longer look for happiness outside of myself, or at some point in the future, but dwell happily in the present moment, knowing the future is forged right here in this moment. This way I naturally manifest a deep aspiration to help without expectation of result. I am able to access the deep stores of energy transmitted to me by my blood, spiritual, and land ancestors who worked tirelessly in the spirit of service and love for the sake of your well-being, Mother Earth, and to transform situations of social injustice. With this energy, there is no limit to what is possible, and I can continue to work for the liberation of all beings, in whatever form they may take in the future.

[Bell & Stand Up]

Together we know that a future of human flourishing on this beautiful blue planet—a jewel of the cosmos—is possible, but it is neither simple nor easy, and it is not a given. Changing our way of living for a future to be possible is the great challenge of our time. During the darkest moments of the war in Vietnam, Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh reminded his student activists in the School of Youth for Social Service that everything is impermanent; our individual and global cultural habits are also impermanent. Thanks to impermanence, everything is possible. Thích Nhất Hạnh inspired his students to never give up hope, to never give up their dreams and efforts to build a more positive future. Buddhist practice empowers us to walk this path of compassion, freedom, and responsibility.

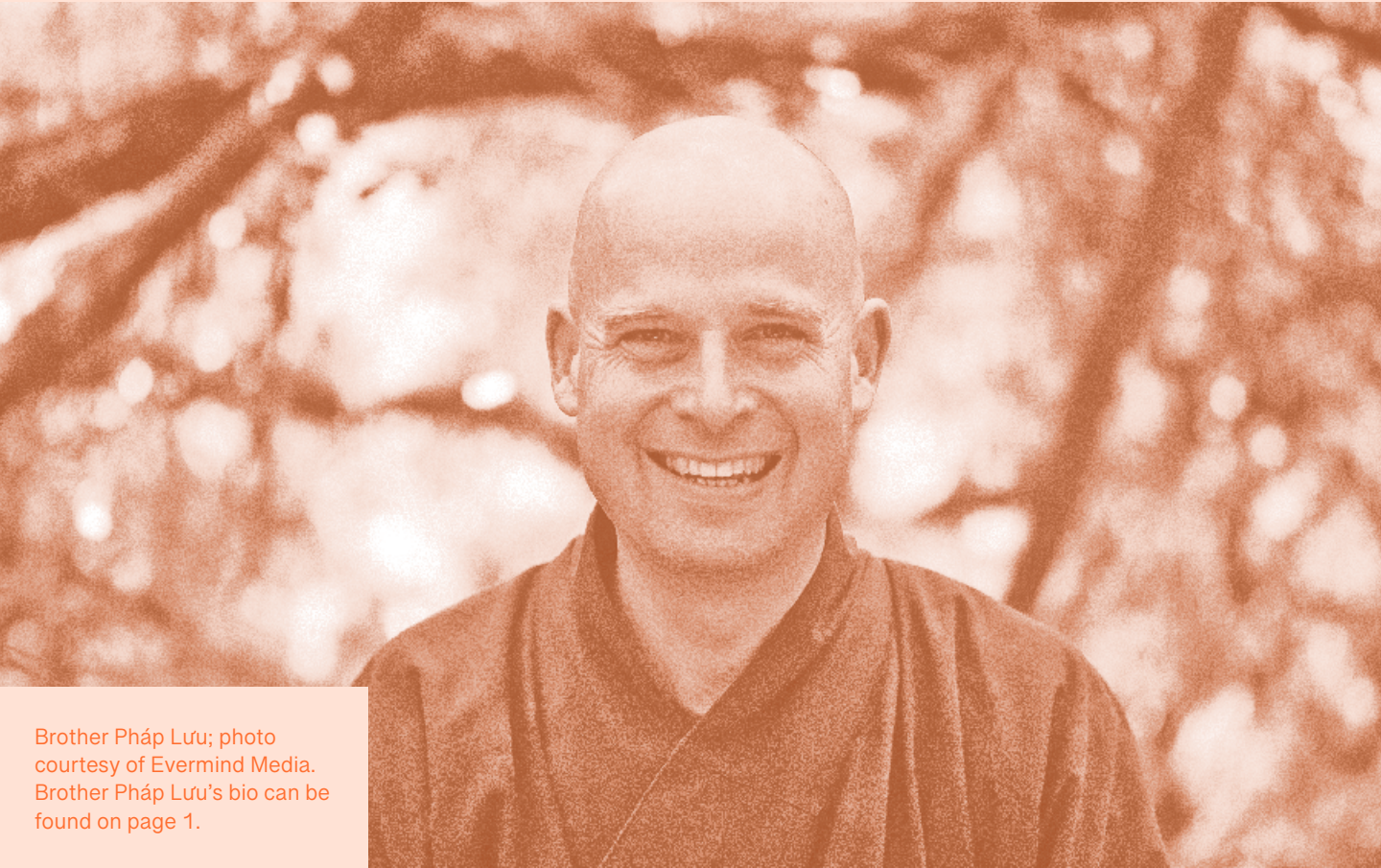
Recordings of the contemplation are available on the Plum Village app and at deerparkmonastery.org/ept to support your own practice of touching the earth.

*For a more in-depth and expansive contemplation on Mother Earth, and for the inspiration and source for many of the practices presented here, please consult the book *Love Letter to the Earth*, by Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh. For an ethical way of living that informs and is integrated into all of these contemplations, please consider reading and putting into practice *The Five Mindfulness Trainings*. For further teachings by Thích Nhất Hạnh on the climate crisis, read *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet*.*

¹ “Because the practice of nonattachment as it is taught in the sutra can liberate us completely from wrong views, the happiness that results from this practice is far greater than any kind of happiness. Virtuous acts still based on the ground of self, person, living being, and life span may bring some happiness, but compared to the happiness of true liberation, it is still quite small. When a person is absolutely free from wrong views, his or her actions will greatly benefit the world.” Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Diamond that Cuts Through Illusion*.

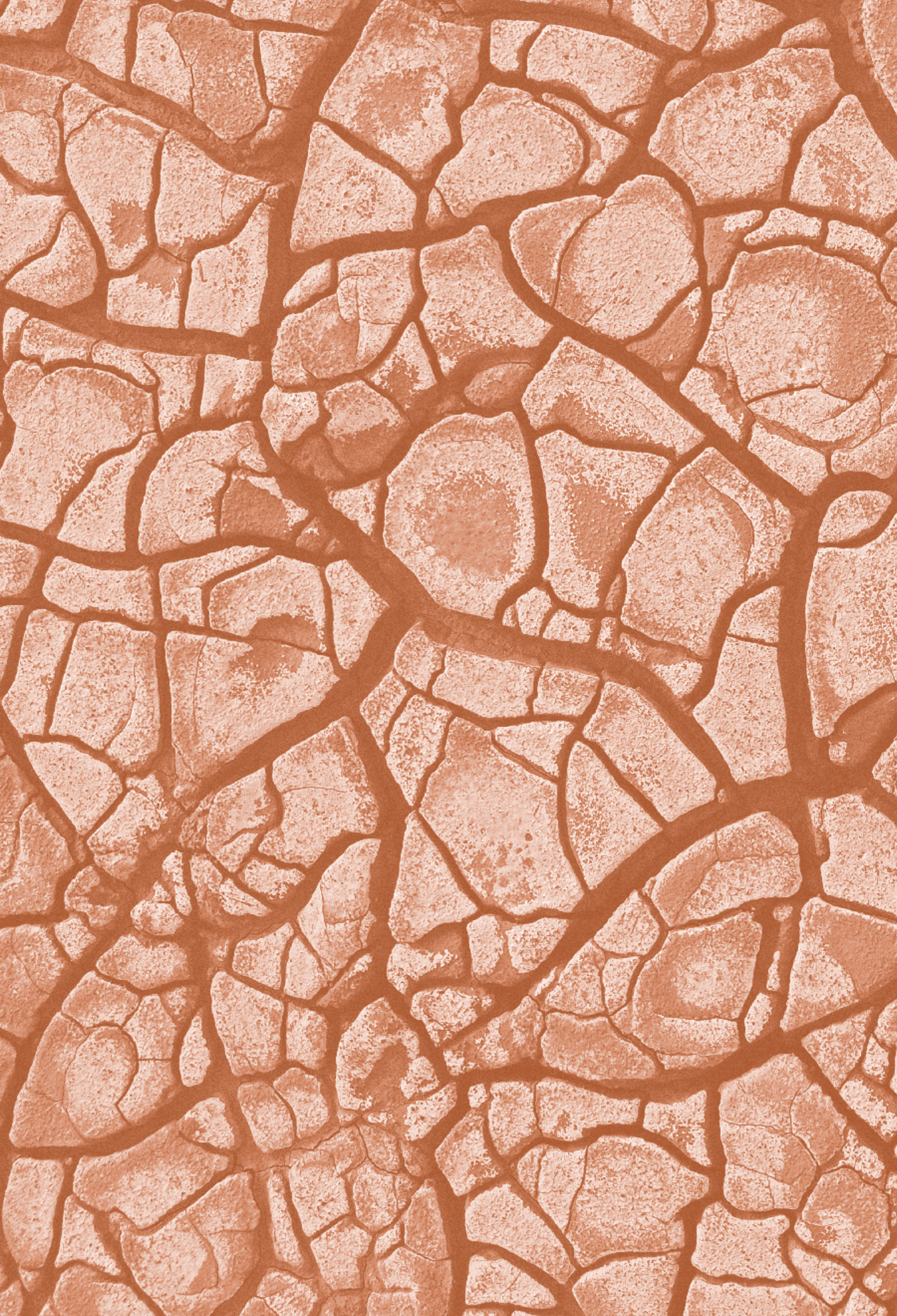
² “A sacrifice zone or sacrifice area (often termed a national sacrifice zone or national sacrifice area) is a geographic area that has been permanently impaired by heavy environmental alterations or economic disinvestment, often through locally unwanted land use.” Wikipedia. Accessed July 11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacrifice_zone.

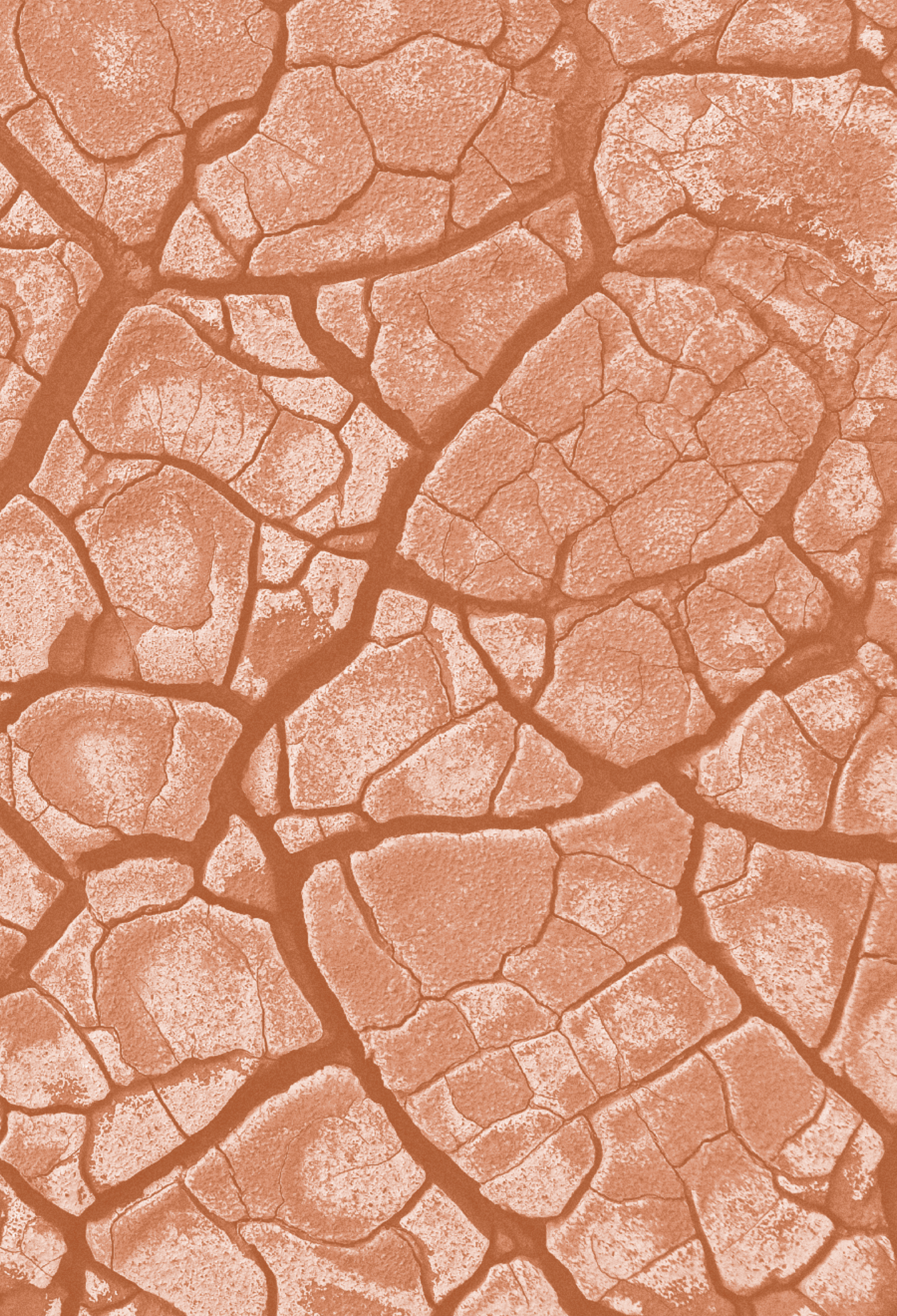
³ “23rd Tenet: We can talk of a person as a continuous and ever-changing stream of five aggregates. This stream is always flowing. It is in connection with and interchanges with other streams of phenomena. We cannot speak of a person as an unchanging and permanent separate self.” Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Plum Village Looks at Vulture Peak*.



Brother Pháp Lưu; photo courtesy of Evermind Media. Brother Pháp Lưu's bio can be found on page 1.

Following photo by Adrián Rivera





This sheet invites us to consider steps we might take to deepen our connection to the Earth and can serve to encourage our practice and remind us of our aspirations.

Please carry your chosen commitments with you as a reminder.

I, _____ commit to:

TRANSPORTATION

- ☐ Walk or bike to work _____ days per week.
- ☐ Walk or bike to places within _____ miles.
- ☐ Carpool to work or use mass transit.
- ☐ Have a car-free day once every _____ week(s).
- ☐ Replace car trips with electric bike trips.
- ☐ Work at home _____ day(s) a week.
- ☐ Reduce car trips by _____ percent.
- ☐ Drive a fuel-efficient/electric vehicle.
- ☐ Reduce flight travel to less than _____ flight hours per year.

CONSUMPTION

- ☐ Reuse and recycle all items possible.
- ☐ Encourage recycling at my work or school.
- ☐ Avoid buying single-use items or items with excess packaging.
- ☐ Replace paper napkins, towels, and plates with reusables.
- ☐ Use cloth or other reusable bags for shopping, etc.
- ☐ Buy clothing in used clothing stores and thrift shops.
- ☐ Use the public library instead of buying books.
- ☐ Share books with friends.
- ☐ Share magazines and catalogs by donating them to clinics, etc.
- ☐ Use biodegradable cleaning products.
- ☐ Compost kitchen waste.
- ☐ Pick up trash along my walking/jogging routes.

NUTRITION

- ☐ Purchase _____ percent organic food.
- ☐ Eat a compassionate, plant-based diet.
- ☐ Support farmers and reduce food-miles by buying local produce when I am able.
- ☐ Join a community-supported agriculture (CSA) group near my home.

- ☐ Plant _____ trees in my neighborhood or region.
- ☐ Grow produce at home or in a community garden.
- ☐ Not use pesticides or herbicides.

WATER

- ☐ Turn off the faucet while brushing teeth or shaving.
- ☐ Take short, warm showers.
- ☐ Reuse gray water.
- ☐ Plant native and drought-tolerant plants where applicable.
- ☐ Flush only when necessary.
- ☐ Reduce overall water use by _____ percent.
- ☐ Install a system to capture and store rainwater.

ELECTRICITY

- ☐ Turn off computers while not in use.
- ☐ Set computer and display to turn off after a period of inactivity.
- ☐ Use a power strip for appliances to avoid drawing ghost electricity.
- ☐ Replace light bulbs with energy-efficient bulbs.
- ☐ Use stairs instead of elevators.
- ☐ Reduce the use of electric appliances.
- ☐ Reduce use of hot water.
- ☐ Air-dry clothes (without a dryer).
- ☐ Eliminate or reduce the use of air-conditioning/heating.
- ☐ Raise the air-conditioning temperature by _____ degrees.
- ☐ Lower the heating temperature by _____ degrees.
- ☐ Get an energy audit of my home and improve its efficiency.
- ☐ Install a programmable thermostat.
- ☐ Install energy-efficient insulation and windows.
- ☐ Install a solar water heating unit.



- ☐ Purchase and install solar panels.
- ☐ Purchase renewable-source electricity (wind, solar, geothermal).
- ☐ Have an electricity-free day ____ times a month.

I ADD MY OWN COMMITMENT
PROPOSALS HERE:

SPREAD THE VIBE

- ☐ Meditate ____ times a month on my relationship to the ecosystem in which I live.
- ☐ Meditate ____ times a month on how I can reduce my consumption, and act on this.
- ☐ Encourage a friend to commit to items on this list.
- ☐ Educate myself on ecological issues.
- ☐ Support local environmental organizations.
- ☐ Write articles/stories to help others get in touch with their ecosystem.
- ☐ Write to local and national politicians calling for more effective environmental legislation.

I make the commitment to practice the items that I have checked above so that I may reduce the suffering produced by my way of living.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please share a copy of your completed sheet with a friend and ask them to remind you of the commitments you have made. We support each other in this ever deepening and radical way of being. As our teacher, Thích Nhất Hạnh, has said:

Every one of us can do something to protect and care for
our planet. We have to live in such a way that a future will
be possible for our children and our grandchildren.
Our own life has to be our message.

The Earth Peace Treaty Commitment Sheet can be found on the Deer Park Monastery website:

<https://deerparkmonastery.org/ept>

and on *The Mindfulness Bell* website:

<https://www.parallax.org/mindfulnessbell/article/ept>

For more inspiration visit the Earth Holder website: <https://earthholder.training/>



Fueled by Generosity

Your dāna is a key power source for a new global online course and also helps ensure that monastics' critical needs are met.

The online course Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet (ZASP) is a new global learning journey from the Plum Village International Community. The course has had two cohorts and will continue to run multiple times each year, offering participants of all ages and backgrounds a mindful and supportive path for living and acting skillfully during our turbulent, uncertain times.

The course is good, urgent medicine for a people and a planet that are suffering deeply. It is the latest manifestation of Thích Nhất Hạnh's vision for a global online monastery.

ZASP's learning management platform was built from the ground up and supplied with rich content by a dedicated team of monastic and lay Dharma teachers, volunteers, and staff. It offers recorded and real-time video teachings by monastics and longtime Plum Village practitioners, mindfulness practices, and space for reflection and deep conversation. One hope is that participants will walk away knowing how to use their unique gifts and deepest aspirations to cocreate a more mindful and compassionate world.

Two sources continue to help power the course and its innovative "Dharma delivery" system: *dāna* in the form of donor financial support, and the Buddha's teachings as embodied and transmitted by Thầy and his Dharma teachers. These power sources are deeply intertwined.

Dāna, a Sanskrit word for generosity, is the first of the Six *Pāramitās* offered by the Buddha as a path for crossing over to the Other Shore of well-being, non-anger, joy, equanimity, and love.

A practice within the lay and monastic Buddhist community for more than 2,600 years, dāna includes the sharing of not just material resources but also the gifts of the Dharma. Offering the Dharma supports freedom from fear; the courage that comes from true wisdom illuminates the path of

meeting life's difficulties with a calm and peaceful heart.

In the opening pages of Thầy's book, *Old Path White Clouds*, which recounts the life, Sangha, and teachings of the Buddha, we learn about King Bimbisāra's generous gift of the Bamboo Forest Monastery in Magadha, India (the present-day state of Bihar) to the Buddha and his community.¹

Later in the book, we read more about King Bimbisāra's motivation for this generous offer. "Master," the king tells the Buddha, "you have shared an important lesson with young and old alike. ... Our kingdom is blessed to have you among us. I would now like to present you and your Sangha with a gift, if you agree."

Recognizing that his monastics needed a place to stay in the rainy season, the Buddha accepted the gift. The king, Thầy writes, "was overjoyed. He knew that the presence of the monastery would mean that the Buddha would spend more time in Magadha."

From the beginning of Buddhist practice, the relationship between the monastic community and the manifold Sangha has been one of loving and mutually beneficial support. That's why dāna is extolled in the Pali canon not only as a great virtue but also the beginning of the path to liberation. Brother Pháp Hải, a senior monastic, shared this teaching during a Dharma talk several years ago at his home practice center in Australia, Mountain Spring Monastery. "Generosity softens the ground and eradicates fear, which comes from the root of ill will towards ourselves or towards others," he said. "Ill will manifests as a closing down of the heart towards another or towards ourselves."

The dāna of your regular contributions to our global community is incredibly important and so greatly appreciated. It helps not only to support courses such as ZASP, but also to cover the costs of food and health care for our monks and nuns, provide resources to run and broadcast retreats year-round, and keep the lights on, quite literally, at our eleven practice centers.

Our monastics have additional, critical needs that we will share about in the months to come.

Many of our monasteries were founded on properties with pre-existing buildings. Monastics used these buildings as long as possible, but they are no longer up to modern building codes. In some instances, they are even uninhabitable. Also, and more happily, the number of aspirants and monastics is outpacing available housing at some of our monasteries, which means new buildings need to be constructed.

Practice centers aren't just event venues for retreats. They are the homes and refuges of more than six hundred monastics. They are the places where monastics rest, study, care for one another, and deepen their individual and collective practice. The centers are incubators where ideas like the ZASP online course and teaching tours are born, books are written, and fresh ways to present the Dharma are conceived. Most importantly, they are training grounds for aspirants and monastics who aspire to receive Lamp Transmission and become Dharma teachers themselves, a process that takes as long as twelve years.

Even if you've never visited a practice center or attended an in-person retreat, you have likely benefited from the provision of a safe and supportive space for monastics to rest, steep themselves in the practice, and bloom as Thầy's continuation.

You may have encountered Thầy through video and audio recordings of his monastics' Dharma talks, freely available to anyone through the popular Plum Village app; by reading *The Raft* newsletter; through *The Way Out Is In* podcast, hosted by Jo Confino and Brother Pháp Hữu; through one of Thầy's books; or by attending a teaching tour or road retreat.

However you benefit from the beloved community's offerings, only your loving and generous support makes these possible.

"You can make one person extremely happy—you can make many, many people extremely happy—if you know how to practice *dāna pāramitā*," Thầy says. "You need only to go back to yourself, practice mindful breathing, and recognize that you have a treasure of happiness, a treasure of elements that can be used to make people happy."²

We know that you are there, and we are very happy.

– Your Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation Family

¹*Thích Nhất Hạnh, Old Path White Clouds (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991)*

²*"Dāna: The Practice of Giving," short teaching video from Thích Nhất Hạnh. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dss1yDX0wl8&t=3s>*

We Are All Thay's Continuation

Thay often said that when he was gone, the world would find him in the words and actions of those who embodied his teachings and example—in the way we walk, speak, listen, and smile.

While we mourn Thay's passing, we also have an invitation to follow in our teacher's gentle footsteps. We can do this by recommitting to our practice of meditation and mindfulness, and by supporting the global monastic community founded by Thay.

Please consider giving today and help ensure Thay's message and practice of peace and compassion will continue well into the future.

To make a one-time gift or to join our loving community of monthly donors, the Plum Blossom Society, visit TNHF.org/donate



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Rooted in the Present, Committed to the Future



“Imagine trees standing together in a forest. They don’t talk, but they feel each other’s presence. When you look at them, you might say they aren’t doing anything. But they are growing and providing clean air for living things to breathe.”

—Thich Nhat Hanh, *How to Sit*

Thay’s vision for a beloved community led him to establish a monastic order, found eleven retreat centers across 5 continents, lead worldwide retreats, author more than one hundred books, and offer countless teachings and practices that continue to inspire and nourish us today.

We know you share Thay’s vision and that every day, in ways small and large, you find ways to embody his teachings and follow his example of living fully in the present moment.

To continue Thay’s work and share his message of hope with a suffering world, we need to support one another more than ever. By joining our Cedar Society and offering a legacy gift, you will help ensure that the deep roots put down by Thay throughout his 95-year life will continue to bear the most beautiful fruits and fragrant flowers.

Leaving a legacy gift is easy. Learn how to become a member of the Cedar Society at tnhf.org/legacy-giving or contact us at info@tnhf.org or (760) 291-1003 x104.

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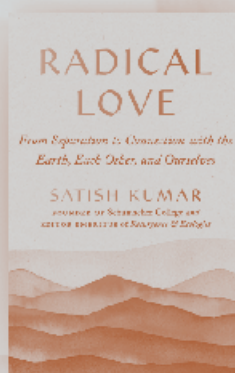
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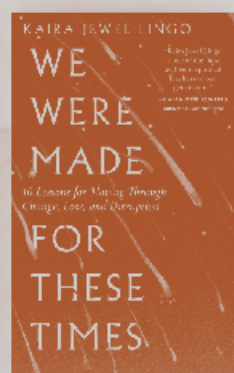
—Matt Powers, author of *The Permaculture Student 1 & 2* and *Regenerative Soil*

“Satish Kumar is the sage of the deep ecology movement.”

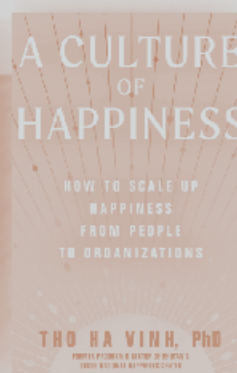
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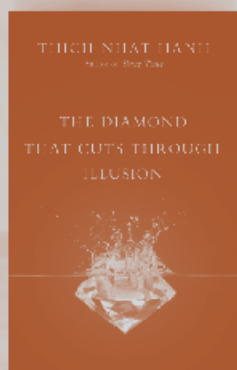
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—Jack Kornfield, author of *A Path With Heart*



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Plum Village

Practice Centers & Resources

The practice centers and monasteries listed here all practice in the Plum Village tradition of Thích Nhất Hạnh. The centers are generally open throughout the year, for short or long stays, to help us learn the art of mindful living. In addition to in-person and online retreats, the practice centers offer regular Days of Mindfulness and other events. Please visit their websites for information and resources.

Blue Cliff Monastery, New York, US
bluecliffmonastery.org

Deer Park Monastery, California, US
deerparkmonastery.org

Magnolia Grove Monastery, Mississippi, US
magnoliagrovesmonastery.org

Plum Village, France
plumvillage.org

Healing Spring Monastery, France
healingspringmonastery.org

Maison de l'Inspir, France
maisondelinspir.over-blog.com

European Institute of Applied Buddhism, Germany
eiab.eu

Stream Entering Monastery, Australia
nhaplouu.org

Mountain Spring Monastery, Australia
mountainspringmonastery.org

Asian Institute of Applied Buddhism, Hong Kong
pvfhk.org

Plum Village Thailand
thaip Plum Village

We can deepen our practice with the many resources in the Plum Village tradition available online: the Sangha directory, community initiatives, guided meditations, Dharma talks, books, articles, news, songs, and much more:

The Mindfulness Bell
mindfulnessbell.org

Parallax Press
parallax.org

The Plum Village app
plumvillage.app

The Way Out Is In Podcast
plumvillage.org/podcasts/the-way-out-is-in

The Raft
thichnhathanhfoundation.org/the-raft

Thích Nhất Hạnh Dharma Talks
tnhaudio.org

ARISE Sangha
arisesangha.org

Happy Farm
thehappyfarm.org

Earth Holder Community
earthholder.training

Wake Up
wkup.org

Wake Up Schools
wakeupschools.org

Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation
thichnhathanhfoundation.org



Can Mother Earth Count On Us?

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Brother Pháp Lưu

Heather Weightman

Leslie Davis

Katie Eberle

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MindfulnessBell.org: Our website with new and expanded digital content added weekly, archive with over thirty years of articles, worldwide Sangha directory, practice resources, and more.

Submissions: We welcome articles, essays, and stories (preferably 300-1,200 words), poetry, photos, artwork, and cartoons on the fruits of your practice. Submissions should include specific examples of how mindfulness practice in the Plum Village tradition in your daily life is helping you to transform suffering, create peace, and improve relationships and well-being. Complete guidelines are available at mindfulnessbell.org/submission-guidelines.

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