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mindfulness
bell

The Goodwill of Our Ancestors

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Welcome Letter

The concentration on nonself reveals the stream of ancestors that flows through every cell in our body: a stream transmitted to us by our parents, teachers, friends, and all beings. In this issue we invite monastics and lay practitioners from our international community, Thầy's continuation body, to reflect on the lineage that we have been transmitted: a lineage of nonviolent action that unites body and mind as one in the present moment. Their words bear witness to how this transmission evolves in the crucible of our practice.

Our lineage is also nonlinear, incorporating past and future in this present moment in a way that transcends political and proprietary boundaries of space and scheduled, measured boundaries of time. It includes peace work, scientific inquiry, poetry, applied ethics, Buddhist psychology, and a powerful, community-based resistance to the forces that lead us away from our true—and human—nature. We move, as a community, at the speed of trust.

Two years after Thầy's passing, we celebrate him in the root temple of Từ Hiếu as our ancestor—the teacher of mindful living and the founder of the Plum Village tradition—and we invite you to open your heart to the presence of our ancestral teachers in the here and now.

Brother Pháp Lưu
ADVISOR AND EDITOR



Ordained in 2003, Brother Pháp Lưu (Brother Stream) received the Transmission of the Lamp from Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh in 2011. He leads mindful backpacking retreats in nature around Deer Park Monastery and initiated The Buddha the Scientist retreat and symposium series. He is currently working with Brother Pháp Xả on a book about their experiences walking mindfully in nature.

Thầy and His Supporters in Nonviolent Activism

Sister Chân Đức teaches about Thích Nhất Hạnh's lineage as a peace activist through his letters on the influence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Father Daniel Berrigan, Mahātmā Gandhi, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

SISTER CHÂN ĐỨC

The Vietnam War and Thầy's activities for peace at that time may seem far away, but in fact, when we read about Thầy and other great peace activists of that era, we realise that we just need to continue their work in somewhat different circumstances today. Racial discrimination still needs activists to confront it. Climate activists need to make their voices heard, and so the nonviolent struggle continues. Thầy has said:

People assassinated Mahātmā Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. hoping to reduce them to nothingness and remove them forever from this planet, without any trace left behind. How wrong they were! They are still there in each one of us, like immortal statues more vital and heroic than ever, because they continue in many different forms.

Without friends on the path, you are very lonely as a peace activist. In Vietnam while calling for peace, Thầy was opposed by those who had power in the Buddhist congregation and in the government. At the same time, he was supported by tens of thousands of young people, university students, intellectuals, writers, artists, and, from 1965

onwards, the Workers League. Thầy also found supporters in the West.

In 1966 Thầy returned to the United States to campaign for an end to the war in Vietnam. While on tour campaigning for peace, Thầy had a chance to make the acquaintance of many people who had a very open and progressive humanitarian view like Hannes de Graaf and Hebe Kohlbrugge in Holland, Heinz Kloppenburg and Martin Niemöller in Germany, Bertrand Russell and Philip Noel Baker in England, Danilo Dolci and Carlo Levi in Italy, André Trocmé in Switzerland, Paul Demiéville and Laurence Schwartz in France, Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King Jr., Daniel Berrigan, Dorothy Day, Arthur Miller, Robert Lowell, A. J. Mustee, and Alfred Hasslar, etc. in the United States, and Thầy learnt a great deal from their open and progressive way of looking that was completely in accord with the spirit of Buddhism. (Thích Nhất Hạnh in a letter to his monastic students)

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

By the summer of 1965, there were 125,000 American soldiers on Vietnamese soil. Thầy and many leading Vietnamese intellectuals recognized the urgent need to muster global public opinion concerning the grievous state of affairs in Vietnam. Thầy and his colleagues were unanimous that Thầy write a letter to Martin Luther King Jr., asking for his support in speaking out to the North American people about the devastating situation in Vietnam. Thầy and his friends agreed that four additional letters should be written. Besides Thầy's letter to Martin Luther King Jr., the Vietnamese writer, journalist, and politician Hồ Hữu Tường wrote a letter to Jean-Paul Sartre, the French philosopher and political activist. The poet and translator Bùi Giáng wrote to the most important French lyric poet of the twentieth century, René Char. The writer Tâm Ích wrote to the French writer and politician André Malraux, and the poet, writer, philosopher, and scholar Phạm Công Thiện wrote to the North American writer Henry Miller.

In writing to Martin Luther King Jr., Thầy said:

Nobody here wants the war. What is the war for, then? And whose is the war? Now in the confrontation of the big powers occurring in our country, hundreds and perhaps thousands of Vietnamese peasants and children lose their lives every day, and our land is unmercifully and tragically torn by a war which is already twenty years old. I am sure that since you have been engaged in one of the hardest struggles for equality and human rights, you are among those who understand fully, and who share with all their hearts, the indescribable suffering of the Vietnamese people. The world's greatest humanists would not remain silent. You yourself cannot remain silent.¹

Martin Luther King Jr. read the letter very carefully and, in 1965, he spoke out against the war and took part in the International Committee of Conscience on Vietnam.

Without friends on the path, you are very lonely as a peace activist.

In May 1966, in Chicago, Thầy met Martin Luther King Jr. in person for the first time. They spoke for a long time about the Vietnam War. They then held a press conference in the Sheraton Hotel for about three hundred journalists. This was the first time Thầy had held such a large press conference. At the beginning of the conference, Martin Luther King Jr. and Thầy gave out a joint message:

We believe that the Buddhists who have sacrificed themselves, like the martyrs of the civil rights movement, do not aim at the injury of the oppressors, but only at changing their policies. The enemies of those struggling for freedom and democracy are not men. They are discrimination, dictatorship, greed, hatred, and violence, which lie within the hearts of man. These are the real enemies of man—not man himself.

We also believe that the struggles for equality and freedom in Birmingham, Selma, and Chicago as in Huế, Da Nang, and Saigon are aimed not at the domination of one people by another. They are aimed at self-determination, peaceful social change, and a better life for all human beings. And we believe that only in a world of peace can the work of construction, of building good societies everywhere, go forward.

On this occasion, Martin Luther King Jr. again publicly announced his opposition to the war in Vietnam. He asked everyone present to listen deeply to Thầy, who was representing people living under bombs and bullets.

When Thầy said goodbye to Martin Luther King Jr. before going on to Washington DC, he received a letter to read on the aeroplane. When Thầy opened the letter, he read:

Thầy Nhất Hạnh, I love you so much. I love your country so much. I do not know how to describe my feelings. I just wanted to hold you in my arms, but I did not dare to. I pray that you will realise all that you long for.

On April 4th, 1968, Thầy read the Heart Sutra during a Eucharist celebrated in Columbia University by Father Daniel Berrigan. After the ceremony, they went to listen to a lecture. The lecture was interrupted by the news that Dr. King had been assassinated. Thầy said years later:

I was devastated. I could not eat; I could not sleep. I made a deep vow to continue building what he called “the beloved community,” not only for myself but for him also. I have done what I promised to Martin Luther King Jr. and I think that I have always felt his support.¹

The day after the assassination Thầy wrote a note to Ray Gould, who was a mutual friend of Thầy and Dr. King. Thầy wrote:

Ray, send me the picture in which you and I and he were together. I want to see again the expression of his face when he told me in summer 1966 when we were in Chicago:

“I feel compelled to do anything to help stop this war.” He made so great an impression on me. This morning I have the feeling that I cannot bear the loss.¹

In the same letter Thầy said he was a little comforted by the fact that in Geneva, when he met Martin Luther King Jr. for the last time, Thầy had said:

Martin, do you know something? The peasants in Vietnam know all about what you have been doing to help the poor people here and to stop the war in Vietnam. They consider you as a *bodhisattva*.¹

FATHER DANIEL BERRIGAN

This is what Thầy told his students in 2014 about his friend Father Daniel Berrigan:

He is a Jesuit priest living in New York. He is very famous and this year is ninety-three years old, a writer, and a poet. When I met him, it was in 1968 when I was campaigning for an end to the war in Vietnam. He was a peace activist. We became friends and had long discussions about war and peace. Father Berrigan came to France and stayed with us for three months to practise mindfulness. He practised sitting and walking meditation and looking deeply. Every day we sat together to exchange our experience of the practice. He brought a tape recorder with him and recorded all the conversations we had.

When he returned to the US, he wrote a book authored by Daniel Berrigan and Thích Nhất Hạnh entitled *The Raft is Not the Shore*. The raft is the means to go to the other shore, but it is not the other shore. This book is still in print, but I do not know if it has been translated into Vietnamese.

When I first met him, he did not know about walking meditation. One day I invited him to go for a walk in Central Park, New York. I said:

“We are not supposed to talk. We just walk in order to walk.”

Father Berrigan was much taller than I. His legs were long, so for every one of his steps I took two. We both started walking together, and two or three minutes later he had left me ten metres behind. Seeing I was no longer alongside him, he stopped and waited. I was not in a hurry. I walked along slowly at my own pace. I was determined to do that, because I knew if I did not stick firmly to the practice, I should lose myself like others in this society where everyone is in

a hurry. I was determined to use my steps and my breath in order not to be swept away by the North American society.

After that Father Berrigan came to France to practise and learnt how to walk slowly in meditation correctly.

In 1968 Father Daniel Berrigan, along with his brother Father Philip Berrigan and other Catholics, was imprisoned for burning draft files in protest at the war in Vietnam. When criticised for this action Father Daniel said: “It is better to burn paper than children.”

In 1980, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, along with six others, began the Ploughshares Movement to demonstrate against nuclear weapons, inspired by the words of the prophets. After hammering nuclear missiles and submarines into ploughshares and using their own blood to pour on documents and weapons, they faced many years of imprisonment.

There is a deep connection between spirituality and activism. Thầy often spoke of mindfulness as holiness or the equivalent of the Holy Spirit. When put on trial for trespassing, entering security areas, or doing damage to property, members of the Ploughshares Movement would talk of being led by the Holy Spirit.

“The enemies of those
struggling for freedom and
democracy are not men.
They are discrimination,
dictatorship, greed, hatred,
and violence, which lie
within the hearts of man.
These are the real enemies
of man—not man himself.”

— MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. AND
THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

Ploughshares activist Art Laffin said, “People who have been involved in ploughshares actions have undertaken a process of intense spiritual preparation, nonviolence training, and community formation and have given careful consideration to the risks involved.”²

In 1974 Father Daniel said of his visit to Thầy and the community in Sceaux: “I was being healed of America, of the Western Church, of the Jesuits, of the wounds of war, of the disease of making it, of my race in time against time.”³ For his peace activism, Father Berrigan received severe criticism from his own church.

In 2010 Thầy told of a dream he had had about Father Berrigan. A letter of birthday greetings was sent to Father Berrigan recounting the content of the dream. Thầy did not write the letter himself, but recounted the dream to his attendant, who wrote the letter:

In a dream Thầy saw his friend Father Daniel Berrigan. Sitting next to this courageous priest, Thầy recognized that he was worthy of all respect and reverence. Thầy suggested that the community touch the earth before him.... Suddenly Thầy saw that he was sitting alone with Father Berrigan and he opened his arms to embrace Thầy. Thầy also opened his arms to embrace his friend in the true spirit of the Plum Village practice of hugging meditation. At first there was only happiness and the peace of brotherhood, but soon an unsettled energy arose in Thầy... the energy of sadness, pain, and loneliness. Thầy felt clearly that the other person was receiving this energy and responding to it.... Waking up, Thầy knew the dream had helped his own well-being, because he'd had the opportunity to recognize and share his sadness and pain with a dear friend who had the capacity to touch and understand that sadness and pain, having gone through similar difficulties, sadness, and loneliness. Thầy thinks that in our lives, those with whom we can

share like this are few, even within our own tradition.⁴

more it gets, the more it wants and still remains unsatisfied.

MAHĀTMĀ GANDHI

Thầy often referred to Mahātmā Gandhi in his teachings, especially in his teachings about the Mindfulness Trainings:

Mahātmā Gandhi lived like a monk in terms of food, clothing, and sex. If he didn't live as a monk, he would not have enough energy to lead such a sacred struggle (against the British Empire). Mahātmā Gandhi said to his wife, "In this struggle, I need to have enough energy, so we must forgo having sexual relations." And Mrs. Gandhi said, "I understand, please follow your path."⁵

Thầy spoke of Gandhi in relation to the First of The Five Mindfulness Trainings and the Second of The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. Gandhi said: "In my search after truth I have discarded many ideas and learned many new things." Thầy said the Mahātmā had the spirit of non-attachment to views and, although he was not a Buddhist, was never caught in what he already knew. Gandhi also said: "Old as, I am in age I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh."

One time the Mahātmā said to Jawaharlal Nehru, who often differed from Gandhi in his point of view: "Resist me always when my suggestion does not appeal to your head or heart. I shall not love you the less for that resistance."

With regard to the Second of The Five Mindfulness Trainings, Thầy also quoted Gandhi:

Our ancestors set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich or unhappy because he is poor. Observing all this our ancestors dissuaded us from luxury and pleasures. The mind is a restless bird; the

When referring to The Simile of the Saw Sutta (MN 21), Thầy said:

In this sutta the Buddha says that if we can master our body, our mind and our anger, even if someone saws our limbs into pieces we can still remain sovereign of ourselves. We see that that person is just the victim of their ignorance and hatred. This is an example of extreme nonviolence, like when Mahātmā Gandhi launched the nonviolent movement to resist the violence of the British government and to struggle for the independence of India. People in that movement were beaten and killed, but they remained peaceful and did not return violence for violence.

Thầy often referred to the words of the Mahātmā: "My life is my message," and said that the Mahātmā did the things that he taught. If we do not do what we teach, our teachings have no meaning.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

In November 1962, while staying in New York, there was a night Thầy could not sleep. In the middle of the night, he rose and read what Bonhoeffer had written during his final days in the prison of a concentration camp. Bonhoeffer's peace, compassion, and courage deeply moved Thầy:

[The account] of the final days of Bonhoeffer's life helped me suddenly to wake up to a sky full of bright stars that is there in everyone. I felt strangely happy, and knew that I had the ability to withstand. Bonhoeffer was the drop that made my cup full to the brim, the last condition, the light breeze that made the ripe fruit fall. After experiencing such a night, I will never complain about life

again.... Life is miraculous, even in its suffering. Without suffering, life would not be possible.

Bonhoeffer said that when he was put on trial by the Nazis and in prison he learned that there is a great difference between a theologian and a Christian.

Thanks to Bonhoeffer's extraordinary virtue and courage, Thầy recognized the presence of bodhisattvas on the Earth and not just in the sutras. For the whole of the following month, Thầy meditated on the bodhisattvas in the Lotus and Perfected Wisdom Sutras. Thầy saw that bodhisattvas were people whom we could encounter in this life and they included the young people in Vietnam whom Thầy was guiding.

Thầy has said that people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi are *Mahasattvas*, great bodhisattvas, while we are *Hinasattvas*, little bodhisattvas. Great bodhisattvas and little bodhisattvas inter-are. The great bodhisattvas encourage and inspire the little bodhisattvas on the path of non-violent resistance. As little bodhisattvas, we know that hatred can never put an end to hatred, and so we vow in our daily lives to remember the lives of these great bodhisattvas. In this way, we shall have the courage to go ahead in the great global nonviolent struggle.

¹ *Tăng thân Làng Mai*, Đi gặp mùa xuân: Hành trạng Thiền sư Thích Nhất Hạnh, (Hà Nội: Thái Hà, 2022)

² Art Laffin, 2019, "A History of the Plowshares Movement – a talk by Art Laffin, October 22, 2019," *The Nuclear Resister*. <https://www.nukeresister.org/2019/11/02/a-history-of-the-plowshares-movement-a-talk-by-art-laffin-october-22-2019/>

³ Jim Forest, *Eyes of Compassion*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2021)

⁴ Marc Andrus, *Brothers in the Beloved Community*, (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2021)

⁵ Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2010, "Attadanda Sutta (Part IV)," *Thích Nhất Hạnh Dharma Talks*. <https://tnhaudio.org/2010/05/09/attadanda-sutta-part-iv/>



Sister Chân Đức (Sister Annabel), True Virtue (pronouns she/her), has been a disciple of Thầy since 1986. She became the first Western European woman to be ordained as a nun by Thầy in 1988 in India. She received the Lamp Transmission to become a Dharma teacher in 1990 and served as Director of Practice at Plum Village. She is the former abbess of the Green Mountain Dharma Center in the US. Sister Chân Đức has been on the board of directors for the Plum Village Community of Engaged Buddhism since 1998. She was the senior editor of *The Mindfulness Bell* from 2001 to 2020. She was appointed Dean of Practice in the European Institute of applied Buddhism from 2008-2019. She is a much-loved senior Dharma teacher and has travelled widely to lead meditation retreats, including in her ancestral land of England. She inspires many with her unique teaching style. Sister Chân Đức is now living in Plum Village, France.



Mitchell at the iconic three-entrance gate of Từ Hiếu Temple, Thích Nhất Hạnh's root temple. Photo courtesy of Evermind Media. All other photos by Mitchell Ratner.

Walking in Thầy's Footsteps

Dharma teacher Mitchell Ratner reflects on his pilgrimage tracing Thích Nhất Hạnh's life and lineage in Vietnam, granting him deeper understanding of Thầy and himself.

In 2019, Sister Định Nghiêm told me about an idea that had been growing in her heart. She felt that many of the non-Vietnamese monastic and lay students of Thầy would better understand his teachings and practices if they were more familiar with the rich Buddhist history of Vietnam and with the events and places that had shaped Thầy's life. Sister Định Nghiêm and I then began initial planning for a pilgrimage tour. Because of the COVID pandemic and Thầy's declining health, however, the first In the Footsteps of Thầy pilgrimage was delayed.

After Thầy's passing in 2022 and the easing of COVID concerns, Sister Định Nghiêm, working with Sister Tuệ Nghiêm, planned a pilgrimage for January 2023. The group of pilgrims met on January 6th in the spacious Hà Nội home of Vietnamese friends of Plum Village to begin an eighteen-day pilgrimage tour; some of us were able to participate in all of it, and others only in part of it. There were thirty of us—just the right number to comfortably fit in a Vietnamese tour bus. In the initial gathering there were eight Plum Village monastics (from Vietnam, France, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia), two Korean abbots, and about twenty lay practitioners (from the United States, Spain, France, Germany, Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore). Sisters Định Nghiêm and Tuệ Nghiêm, senior monastics from the New Hamlet of Plum Village, France, were at times our hosts,

guides, historians of Thầy's life, translators, and mother hens.

During the pilgrimage we spent nights in Hà Nội, Thanh Hóa, Đà Lạt, Huế, and Yên Tử Mountain, as well as one night on an overnight train. During our days we often traveled by bus to visit places important to Thầy's development as a person and as a teacher. The pilgrimage was at various times a practice retreat with sitting and walking meditation; a study group with our organizing sisters and local guides offering presentations about the importance of places we would be visiting; and a container for multi-day, heart-to-heart conversations about our lives and our practice of Engaged Buddhism. It was, in a word, intense!

Five encounters touched me especially deeply and helped me understand Thầy in new ways: Thanh Hóa and Na Mountain, Chùa Dâu (the first Buddhist monastery in Vietnam), the enlightened kings of the Trần Nhân Dynasty, Yên Tử Mountain, and Từ Hiếu Temple.

THANH HÓA AND NA MOUNTAIN

One of our first destinations was the city of Thanh Hóa, where Thầy's family moved when he was five years old. We arrived late in the morning and had a simple lunch at a small vegetarian restaurant in the old part of town, which happened to have a quote from and photo of Albert Einstein next to the cash

register. In the afternoon a visit to an archeological museum stimulated my interest in the history of Vietnam and in how it had shaped Thầy's life and teaching—a way of looking at the world influenced by my training and work as a social anthropologist. Prior to the pilgrimage, almost everything I knew about Vietnamese history took place in the twentieth century.

The primary focus of the archaeological museum in Thanh Hóa was the Dong Son culture, which arose around three thousand years ago in the Red River Valley and Delta, roughly coterminous with contemporary North Vietnam. The Dong Son were proficient in cultivating rice and skilled in casting bronze tools. In time a geographically extensive, hierarchical, state-like structure arose, led by hereditary rulers who created and maintained hydraulic systems for agricultural cultivation and flood protection, managed trade, and prevented attacks and invasions. Between the years 43 and 299 CE, the agriculturally productive Red River Valley area was part of an administrative district called the Jiaozhi Commandery (Quận Giao Chỉ). Although the population was primarily Vietnamese-speaking, they were ruled by Chinese dynasties.

Our hotel in the modern center of Thanh Hóa was ten-stories high and bland, with few other guests. However, the emptiness of the lobby was helpful that night because an attached dining area offered the hotel's strongest Wi-Fi signal. At 9 p.m. Vietnam time, which was 9 a.m. in the Eastern United States, I participated in an in-person and online ceremony transmitting The Five Mindfulness Trainings to practitioners in the Washington DC area. Logging into the internet at the hotel and remembering the Einstein quote at our lunch, I was struck by how much more worldly Thanh Hóa was today from the provincial town Thầy knew in the 1930s.

The next morning we traveled by bus to Na Mountain, one of the three most sacred locations in Vietnam. Thầy visited the mountain on a school trip as an eleven-year-old. He had hoped to meet a hermit who his teacher had told him lived on the mountain. Going off on his own, Thầy found the

hermit's simple hut, but not the hermit. Then he found something else that changed the course of his life. Thầy called it his first spiritual experience. In *At Home in the World* he writes:

As I walked deeper into the forest, I heard the sound of dripping water. It was a beautiful sound. I started to climb in the direction of that sound, and soon I found a natural well, a small pool surrounded by big rocks of many colors. The water was so clear that I could see all the way to the bottom.... The water tasted so good. I had never tasted anything as good as that water. I felt completely satisfied; I did not need or want anything at all—even the desire to meet the hermit was gone. I had the feeling that I had met the hermit.¹

Our group sat in meditation by a feng shui shrine at the top of the mountain. The hermit's hut was long gone. However, we were able to walk down the mountain to gather around the well and taste its water.

Thầy's visit to Na Mountain contributed to his aspiration to become a monk. When he was sixteen he traveled by overnight train from Thanh Hóa to Huế to become a novice at Từ Hiếu Temple, accompanied by his older brother, who was already a monk there. Our pilgrimage group replicated Thầy's journey by taking an overnight train to Huế. I shared a sleeping compartment with the Korean abbots, both of whom exuded a joyful settledness that drew me and others to them. Although neither of them spoke English well, and their female translator was in a different compartment, we managed that night and the next morning to have some delightful exchanges using gestures and Google Translate.

CHÙA DÂU AND MASTER TĂNG HỘI

Later in the pilgrimage we drove thirty miles from Hà Nội to visit Chùa Dầu, the first Buddhist temple in Vietnam. It was built between 187-226 CE in what was then Luy Lâu, the capital of the Jiaozhi

Pilgrimage group photo in the front courtyard of Chùa Dâu Pagoda, originally named Pháp Vân Temple, the oldest Buddhist monastery in Vietnam. The first Zen Patriarch, Tăng Hội, lived and taught meditation there in the third century.



Commandery. Because of its prominent role in the sea trade between India and China, Luy Lâu was often visited by Indian monks and traders, and the area became a regional hub for the study and teaching of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

For Thầy, Chùa Dâu was especially important because Master Tăng Hội, who died in 280 CE, studied and taught there. In 2007, after his second trip home after his exile from Vietnam, Thầy explained:

The meditation that I share in the West has its roots in Vietnam of the third century. We had a very famous Zen master, Master Tăng Hội, whose father was a soldier from India and his mother

a young Vietnamese woman. When his parents passed away, the child Tăng Hội went to a temple in northern Vietnam to become a monastic. He translated commentaries on the sutras in that temple in Vietnam, then went to China where he became the first Zen master teaching meditation in China—three hundred years before Bodhidharma. I wrote a book about Zen Master Tăng Hội, and I said that Vietnamese Buddhists should worship this Zen master as our first Zen master of Vietnam.²

In light of the significance of Chùa Dâu to Thầy, our visit to the temple unfolded in a surprising way. The temple seemed unfrequented and somewhat neglected. Although there were statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, there were many more statues honoring local deities, Chinese mandarins, and guardian spirits. Our local guides enthusiastically told us fanciful stories, including one about a young woman who had been transformed into a tree by a dishonorable monk, then centuries later was released by a wise local lord who had the fallen tree made into a yellow-robed statue that now towered over the Buddha in the central altar. Throughout our tour of the temple, the guides never mentioned Master Tăng Hội.

Later, away from the guides, Sister Định Nghiêm explained that Vietnamese Buddhism continues to coexist with many folk beliefs and practices involving local deities, mother goddesses, ancestral gods, shamans, and animal spirits. In some temples, such as this one, these other perspectives play a much more prominent role.

Our visit to Chùa Dâu helped me appreciate Thầy's spiritual connection with Vietnam's two-thousand-year-old Buddhist heritage. Because of his fluency in Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese, if there was something a Vietnamese-Buddhist teacher had written, he could read it. Thầy, however, was not only a historian and aficionado of Vietnamese Buddhism; he was also a spiritual revolutionary. Beginning in his teens, Thầy had a deep desire to renew and revitalize Buddhism in Vietnam. He wanted to move the Buddhist community away from the superstitions and folk beliefs we brushed up against at Chùa Dâu and to offer more nourishing spiritual practices, like those Tăng Hội had contributed to the Buddhist tradition.

THE ENLIGHTENED KINGS

Thầy began monastic training at Từ Hiếu in 1942, in the midst of the Second World War. Japanese control and subsequent occupation caused many hardships for Từ Hiếu and for all of Vietnam, especially the Great Famine of 1945 when an estimated 600,000 to 2,000,000 Vietnamese people died.

Thầy's biography notes:

Stepping out of the temple [Thầy] saw bodies out in the streets of those who had died of hunger and witnessed trucks carrying away dozens of corpses. When the French returned to reclaim Vietnam in 1945, the violence only increased. Although many young monks were tempted by the Marxist pamphlets' call to arms, Thầy was convinced that Buddhism, if updated and restored to its core teachings and practices, could truly help relieve suffering in society and offer a nonviolent path to peace, prosperity, and independence from colonizing powers, just as it had during the renowned Lý and Trần dynasties in medieval Vietnam.³

To learn more about the medieval emperors that so inspired Thầy, our pilgrimage group traveled to Yên Tử Mountain, seventy miles east of Hà Nội. The first three Trần Dynasty emperors, who ruled from 1226 to 1314, especially impressed me because they were effective military leaders, compassionate rulers, supportive mentors to their sons, and fully committed Buddhist practitioners. After the decisive defeat of the Mongols armies, Trần Nhân Tông, the third Emperor of the Trần Dynasty, focused on rebuilding his country and reducing the burden on the poor. When he was thirty-two, he abdicated in favor of his son. Trần Nhân Tông had wanted for years to devote himself to spiritual awakening. After officially becoming the "Retired Emperor," he left the palace to practice Buddhism on Yên Tử Mountain, ordaining as a monk in 1295.

In the preface to his historical novel *Hermitage Among the Clouds*, Thầy writes about Trần Nhân Tông:

[He] abdicated his throne to become a monk and live in the little hermitage "Sleeping Clouds" on Mount Yên Tử. He was known as the "Noble Teacher of Bamboo Forest" and was the founder of

the “Bamboo Forest School of Zen Meditation.”

Before becoming a monk ... he ruled as king over the land of Viet. He repelled the invading Mongol army at the end of the thirteenth century. From the day he was ordained a monk, he lived an ascetic life—wearing coarse cloth, sleeping under a roof of leaves, and going everywhere barefoot. Even as a monk, he continued his work to establish justice and morality in the culture of his people. He traveled to the land of Cham in hopes of establishing a foundation of lasting friendship and peace between the two countries.⁴

Several days before his death, Trần Nhân Tông inscribed a poem on a temple wall:

*Life's length is one breath,
Moonlight on ocean waves.
Why worry about Mara's realm?
My Buddha land is the springtime sky.⁵*

YÊN TỬ MOUNTAIN

Our group's time on Yên Tử Mountain was divided between two very different environments. We stayed overnight and ate most of our meals in a recently-built resort complex created to resemble a twelfth-century Vietnamese monastery or town. The complex included a five-star hotel for “royalty” as well as modest rooms containing four bunk beds for “villagers” (including our group). The whole town, and especially the five-star hotel, were meticulously crafted and luxurious. Although there were many gorgeous landscaped views and lovely architectural details, the overall effect felt to me discordant with the natural simplicity of Yên Tử Mountain and the Bamboo Forest School founded by Trần Nhân Tông.

The other environment we experienced was Yên Tử mountain: rugged, wild, and full of Buddhist and Taoist temples and sacred spots. We climbed Yên Tử in a biting wind with the temperature

around fifty degrees Fahrenheit. A few monastics and lay practitioners climbed for three hours on stone stairs and heavily rooted paths. The rest of us accepted the assistance of gondolas on two segments. Even then, the way up was arduous. Along the way, we did prostrations and walking meditation at a fourteenth-century stupa containing the relics of Trần Nhân Tông. The view from the peak was a spectacular panorama of multiple ranges of cloud-covered mountains. We stayed for an hour, resting, sharing snacks and reflections, and singing Plum Village songs.

Later, when I talked with friends about the early Trần emperors, one asked me how their teachings and practices might be applicable today. What sort of reforms or strategies might such enlightened rulers advocate? My sense is that it is not about specific reforms or strategies, but about leaders nourishing in themselves and others an aspiration to be loving, compassionate, and fully awake. If that perspective is present in many, positive changes will occur. Thầy said something very similar in a Dharma talk:

In Buddhism we speak of the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. But when we look at the Sangha, the third Jewel, we see that it contains the two other Jewels. A good Sangha, a good community, is made of people who practice mindfulness, concentration, and insight. ...

So in a Sangha, in the body of the Sangha, because we have a good *Sanghakaya* (Sanghabody), there are many cells. Each of us is a cell of the Sangha. And each of us can generate the energy of mindfulness, concentration, and insight. And if every one of us practices properly, then the collective energy produced by the Sangha will be very powerful.

I think that we can save this planet, reduce violence, and end war with that kind of energy. No matter how talented our political leaders are, if they do not have that kind of energy, they cannot help.... Martin Luther King Jr. saw that

very well. He was devoted to Sangha building. He talked about the Sangha as a beloved community. Unfortunately he was assassinated and could not continue the work of Sangha building. We should continue his work, because Sangha building is very crucial. It is by the work of Sangha building that we can create the kind of power, the kind of energy, that helps us to deal with the enormous difficulties we are now facing.⁶

TỪ HIẾU TEMPLE

Thầy lived at the Từ Hiếu Temple in Huế for five years as an aspirant and novice and returned there for the final four years of his life. Our pilgrimage made two multi-day visits to Từ Hiếu to participate in the ceremonies honoring the first anniversary of Thầy's passing and, later, to celebrate Tết with the monastic community. I had practiced at Từ Hiếu in prior years and have warm feelings for it because of its connection to Thầy, because of the kindness-

es I have received from the monastics who practice there, and because of its engaging history.

The story of Từ Hiếu begins in the mid-nineteenth century. National Teacher Master Thích Nhất Định was the esteemed abbot of a temple in Huế and also an advisor to the Nguyễn Dynasty court. When he was fifty-nine years old, he retired and moved to a straw hut in the pine woods outside Huế. Some time later his elderly mother, whom he cared for at his hermitage, became ill and doctors recommended a diet of fish soup. Although as a Buddhist monk he was a committed vegetarian, Thích Nhất Định dutifully walked to the market every morning to buy fish. When people began to spread rumors about his dietary laxness, Nhất Định did not respond.

In time the story reached the court of Emperor Tự Đức, a learned and kind leader who was a strong follower of Confucian ethics. He investigated and realized Nhất Định's actions were prompted by his love for his mother. In 1848, the year after Nhất Định's death, the emperor honored the faithful monk by building a major temple at the site of



Sister Định Nghiêm outside the wall of the Huế Quang Golden Stupa in Hoa Yên Temple in the Yên Tử Mountain, which contains relics of king Trần Nhân Tông who became a monk, lived on Yên Tử Mountain, and founded the Bamboo Forest School of Vietnamese Buddhism.



Sister Tuệ Nghiêm leading a song on the top of Yên Tử Mountain.



Elders celebrating Tết at the Nguyễn family shrine in the village of Thành Trung, near Huế, where Thầy's father, Nguyễn Đình Phúc, was born.

the straw hut. He named the temple Từ Hiếu, “Merciful Filial Piety.”

I envision the monastery as exquisite and well maintained in its early years, but its appearance and finances were probably much reduced by 1942 when Thầy came to Từ Hiếu as an aspirant monk. Even though the physical conditions were difficult, Thầy remembers Từ Hiếu fondly in his memoir, *My Master's Robe*:

Of course you did not practice sitting meditation all day when you entered the temple. For months and sometimes years you had to take care of the cows, collect dry twigs and leaves, carry water, pound rice, and collect wood for the fire. Every time my mother came to visit from our village, which was far away, she would regard these things as being the challenges of the first stage of practice. At first my mother was concerned for my health, but

as I grew healthier, she stopped worrying about me. As for me, I knew that these were not challenges—they were themselves the practice. If you enter this life, you will see for yourself. If there was no taking care of the cows, no collecting of twigs and leaves, no carrying water, no growing potatoes, then there would be no means for the practice of meditation.⁷

During the Tết celebration our group met one morning for meditation at “Thầy's Hut,” where Thầy lived his final years. Thầy's presence was palpable. Then we went to the Buddha Hall to pay our respects to the Buddha and to the Từ Hiếu Temple lineage. I remember standing, spellbound, in front of two portraits framed together in the ancestors' room. One portrait was of Thầy's teacher, Abbot Thích Chân Thật (1884-1968), and to the right was Thầy's teacher's teacher, Abbot Thích Tuệ Minh (1861-1939). The portraits led me to reflect



Portraits in the Ancestors Hall at Từ Hiếu Temple of Thầy's teacher, the fourth Abbot Thích Chân Thật (1884-1968), and Thầy's teacher's teacher, the third Abbot Thích Tuệ Minh (1861-1939).

on the transmission of the mindfulness teachings from generation to generation, beginning with the Buddha and continuing to Thầy and the many lives he touched and transformed.

The portraits also reminded me that the essence of a spiritual practice is transmitted through close and loving relationships. In *My Master's Robe* Thầy writes about discovering his teacher up very late one night stitching a brown robe. Soon Thầy realizes that his teacher is mending the robe so he can offer it to Thầy in the morning, when he will receive the novice precepts and will no longer wear the gray robes of an aspirant.

At last the robe was mended. My teacher signaled for me to come closer. He asked me to try it on. The robe was a little too large for me, but that did not prevent me from feeling so happy that I was moved to tears. I had received the most sacred kind of love—a pure love that was gentle and spacious, which nourished and infused my aspiration through my many years of training and practice.⁸

The last time Thầy visited his teacher at Từ Hiếu was in May 1966, just before Thầy traveled to the US to speak about the horrific suffering caused by the war and to call for peace. Thầy received Lamp Transmission during the visit, becoming one of many Dharma heirs of Master Thích Chân Thật. Two years later, when the abbot died, he left instructions for Thầy to be appointed as the abbot of Từ Hiếu. Thầy, however, because of his peace advocacy in the US, was denied the right to return to Vietnam and was not able to visit Từ Hiếu again until 2005.

HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION

I signed up for the pilgrimage expecting it to deepen my understanding of Thầy and his teachings, and it did. I didn't expect how much it would teach me about myself.

As I've noted, the pilgrimage made me more aware of how deeply Thầy experienced and was nourished by his relationships with his ancestors. Once I saw that, I began noticing it all around me

in Vietnam: in the space and care devoted to family altars and in the way visits to family and temples are an integral part of the celebration of the Vietnamese New Year.

The more clearly I saw these Vietnamese connections, the more I became aware of the paucity of my own connections to my blood, land, and spiritual ancestors. My grandparents were Eastern European Jews, shopkeepers and tailors, who came to the United States as teenagers around 1900. They left behind the communities they had grown up in, the languages they were accustomed to speaking, parents and extended families, and the spiritual traditions that had nourished earlier generations. Shortly after I was born, my parents relocated from the Midwest to California, separating themselves from their own extended families. I grew up rootless, unhappy, and without a sense of belonging anywhere. Looking for

something better, and wanting to distance myself from family tensions, I moved from California to the Washington DC area in my twenties.

I struggled with my rootlessness for another two decades, and then I met Thầy in 1990. I realized I had a spiritual illness that I didn't even know how to talk about. But Thầy understood it, and he (and the Buddha) had a remedy. Thầy offered me a vision of a life fully and authentically lived, concrete practices to develop my mindfulness and compassion, and a community of spiritual companions. In other words, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Often during the pilgrimage I thought about the almost forty years during which Thầy could not visit Vietnam. He so loved the country and its history; he cared deeply for his many friends and teachers at Từ Hiếu and throughout Vietnam who had supported and nourished him. How painful it



Pilgrimage members in the outdoor ethnographic park at Trảng An, part of the an UNESCO Cultural and Natural Area World Heritage Site in Vietnam's Red River Delta. In addition to a renown landscape, the site contains historic buildings and temples from Hoa Lư, the first capital of Đại Việt (Great Việt), founded in 986.

was for him to be separated from them. In an odd sort of way, both Thầy and I had lived much of our lives in exile. His was geographic. Mine was a form of psychological and spiritual alienation, a decaying of my capacity to relate well to myself, those around me, and the natural world.

Fortunately, the practices that were helpful to Thầy in his exile, were also helpful to me and to millions of others. In *At Home in the World* Thầy writes about his first two years of exile:

I had a recurring dream of being at home in my root temple in central Vietnam. I would be climbing a green hill covered with beautiful trees when, halfway to the top, I would wake up and realize that I was in exile. The dream came to me over and over again.⁹

Over time he learned to embrace his exile and the profound insights it made available to him:

My practice was the practice of mindfulness. I tried to live in the here and now and touch the wonders of life every day. It was thanks to this practice that I survived. The trees in Europe were so different from the trees in Vietnam. The fruits, the flowers, the people, they were all completely different. The practice brought me back to my true home in the here and now. Eventually I stopped suffering, and the dream did not come back anymore....

The expression, “I have arrived, I am home,” is the embodiment of my practice. It is one of the main Dharma Seals of Plum Village. It expresses my understanding of the teaching of the Buddha and is the essence of my practice. Since finding my true home, I no longer suffer....

When we are deeply in touch with the present moment, we can touch both the past and the future; and if we know how to handle the present moment properly, we can heal the past. It was precisely because I did not have a country of my own

that I had the opportunity to find my true home.¹⁰

I am deeply grateful to Thầy for offering his reparative teachings to Western practitioners. I am grateful to Sister Định Nghiêm for imagining all that an In the Footsteps of Thầy pilgrimage might offer non-Vietnamese practitioners. It certainly touched and transformed me more deeply and in more ways than I anticipated. I am filled with gratitude for Sisters Định Nghiêm and Tuệ Nghiêm, who worked tirelessly before and during the pilgrimage, and for the many wonderful practitioners on the pilgrimage bus with whom I shared joys, challenges, and emerging insights.

¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *At Home in the World* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2016), pages 23-24.

² Thích Nhất Hạnh, “The Three Spiritual Powers,” *The Mindfulness Bell* 46 (October 2007),

<https://www.parallax.org/mindfulnessbell/article/dharma-talk-the-three-spiritual-powers/>

³ “Thích Nhất Hạnh: Extended Biography,” Plum Village. Accessed August 31, 2023. <https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/biography/thich-nhat-hanh-full-biography>

⁴ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Hermitage Among the Clouds* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2001), page vii.

⁵ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Hermitage Among the Clouds* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2001), page 126.

⁶ Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2011, “Beloved Community,” *Thích Nhất Hạnh Dharma Talks*. <https://tnhaudio.org/2011/09/14/beloved-community/>

⁷ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *My Master’s Robe* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2005), page 22.

⁸ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *My Master’s Robe* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2005), page 97.

⁹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *At Home in the World* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2016), page 13.

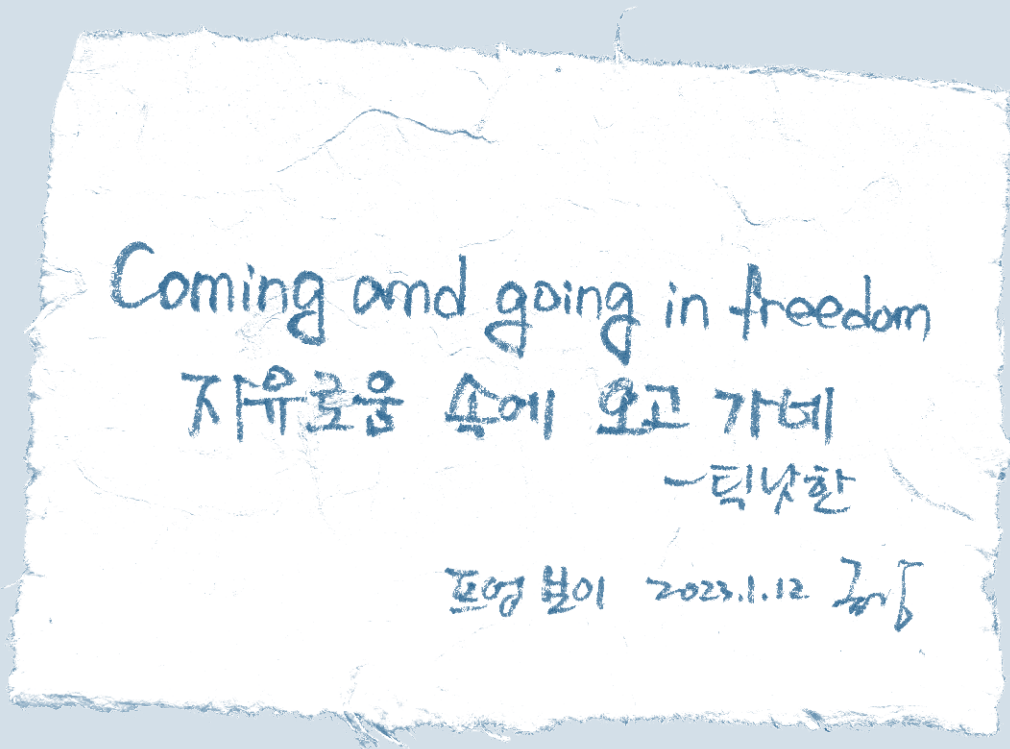
¹⁰ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *At Home in the World* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2016), pages 13-14.



View from the peak of Yên Tử Mountain, home to Buddhist monks and Taoist sages for more than a thousand years.

Mitchell Ratner, True Mirror of Wisdom, has taught classes and workshops focused on integrating mindfulness meditation with work, meaningful relationships, and the challenges of everyday life since 1994. In 2001 he was ordained as a Dharma teacher by Thích Nhất Hạnh. He practices with the Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center and lives with his wife in Takoma Park, Maryland, US.





Korean Master Jong Man Oh, one of the two abbots on the first segment of the pilgrimage tour, gifted each participant with an English/Korean calligraphy he had made on the morning of his departure.

Our Patriarch Liễu Quán

**Sister Đoàn Nghiêm teaches about the Plum Village lineage;
Thầy's disciples are the ninth generation of the Liễu Quán Dharma line.**

All who received the Mindfulness Trainings from Thầy, even The Five Mindfulness Trainings, receive an ordination certificate. Usually the brothers and sisters who transmit the precepts read the certificate and let us know what lineage we are a part of—whose disciple we are. Thầy's disciples are the forty-third generation of the Lâm Tế (Linji) Dhyāna School and the ninth generation of the Liễu Quán Dharma line. Now we are going to learn about the patriarch Liễu Quán.

“*Liễu*” has two meanings. It means joy complete; it also means understanding: to see, to know. “*Quán*” means to contemplate, to look deeply; it means we can say that because of looking deeply we can see clearly. It can also mean we have looked deeply successfully, contemplated successfully, completely.

The patriarch Liễu Quán is Vietnamese. He was born in 1670 in Bạch Mã village in the province Phú Yên. We're very lucky the province still exists today. Anyone who wants to find Liễu Quán's homeland can visit the beautiful province. Here, those who are Vietnamese can organize a tour to visit the homeland of our ancestor, of our patriarch.

Liễu Quán's family was very poor. He was not like the Buddha, the son of the king. He was like Jesus—poor and born in a poor family. Jesus was born in a stable, and Liễu Quán was born in a forest. He lived in the forest and was a logger. In 1676 his mother passed away, so after that Liễu Quán lived only with his father, who would take him to Hội Tôn Temple to play with the monks.

At the temple, young Liễu Quán met a Zen master from China named Tế Viên. Tế Viên was the abbot at a temple he built in Vietnam. Liễu Quán would often go to the temple and was very loved by Zen master Tế Viên. When he was twelve years old, Liễu Quán officially began to live at the monastery under the guidance of Tế Viên. Liễu Quán was a novice. He learned the sutras, gathas, and chants, but all in Chinese. He lived at the temple for seven years, and was still an aspirant when Zen Master Tế Viên passed away. Liễu Quán heard that many high venerables were in Huế, in Central Vietnam. So after Zen Master Tế Viên's funeral, Liễu Quán went south to Huế. He walked because there weren't any vehicles at that time. The journey was about five hundred kilometers. Liễu Quán had to cross mountains, streams, rivers, hills, and it was very, very difficult. It took him one year to reach Huế.

In 1690, Liễu Quán arrived in Thuận Hóa (now Huế). He went to Thiên Thọ Temple (now called Báo Quốc Temple) in Hàm Long Mountain—the same place where Thầy went to study when he was an aspirant. Our root temple sent Thầy to Thiên Thọ Temple because it was a Buddhist Institute, kind of like the European Institute of Applied Buddhism in Germany. They would regularly receive monks and nuns from other temples, and they didn't ask for money for ordination. Instead, monastics would pay by offering kilos of rice to the temple. Thầy shared that he sent about forty kilos a year of rice to this temple.

The koan's purpose is for us to embrace it—to hold it,
to take care of it, water it, and then one day it will bloom.
Then, we suddenly understand.

In Liễu Quán's time, Zen Master Giác Phong lived at Thiên Thọ Temple. He was from Guangdong province, China, which was very close to Vietnam. This closeness is why the Chinese Zen masters could go to Vietnam to teach and share the Dharma.

After practicing in the temple for one year, Liễu Quán heard that his father was ill, so he walked back to his hometown in Phú Yên and became a logger to afford food. When Liễu Quán was twenty-five, his father passed away, and Liễu Quán returned to Huế to continue his practice. On his way back to Huế, he heard that the venerable, Zen Master Thạch Liêm had organized a Great Ordination Ceremony at Thiền Lâm Temple. Liễu Quán stopped at the temple to receive novice ordination. Two years later in 1697, Liễu Quán received full ordination in another Great Ordination Ceremony organized at Thiền Lâm Temple. He was now an elder, a most respected Zen master. After receiving ordination, Liễu Quán wanted to study, so he stayed at the

temple two years before continuing his journey. In the past, monastics really liked to travel to learn, so going to this temple and that temple was very normal. Liễu Quán continued to travel, and three years later, in 1702, he met his teacher, Zen Master Minh Hoằng Tử Dung (commonly known as Tử Dung) on Hoàng Long Mountain. He originated from Guangdong, China. Zen Master Minh Hoằng established and lived at Ấn Tôn Temple (now Từ Đàm Temple), and there, he and our patriarch, Liễu Quán, met. They spoke to each other, and the Zen master gave Liễu Quán a koan.

I need to explain this koan so we'll be able to understand the Zen masters' conversation. A koan is like a question, a riddle, that doesn't need an answer from your intellect. Maybe this is a normal riddle, for example: The sandy road—is there sand in it? It could mean fine sugar or it can mean sandy path. Sugar that is very, very fine is called *cát*, which means fine as sand. So the word *cát*, sand, is used to speak about the nature of sugar, how fine

“How do you understand, ‘The ancestor transmits to the ancestor. The Buddha transmits to the Buddha’?
What do they actually transmit to each other?”

—ZEN MASTER TỬ DUNG

... practicing in the Zen tradition is not using your mind
to think; we should learn to use our heart.

it is. But this riddle is using thinking, speculation, analysis. The koan Zen Master Minh Hoàng gave Liễu Quán is this:

*All Dharma goes to the one.
The one goes to where?*

I think, here, nobody understands anything about the koan yet. So our Patriarch also didn't understand. He embraced this koan and went back to his hometown, and he studied. He investigated, and he tried to understand. He embraced the koan in his heart and mind.

The koan's purpose is for us to embrace it—to hold it, to take care of it, water it, and then one day it will bloom. Then, we suddenly understand. You can't explain it. Understanding a koan is very miraculous.

In 1708, Liễu Quán met Zen Master Minh Hoàng (Tử Dung) and shared his understanding of the koan. Liễu Quán wondered if the Zen master would approve or certify his insight. Was it correct or not? When the Zen master heard the patriarch

Liễu Quán share, he wanted to check one more time. The Zen master read this poem:

*Release your grip over the abyss,
Alone, you endure,
Dying and being reborn,
Who dares to criticize you?*

After the Zen master heard Liễu Quán offer his insight *gatha*, he wanted to make sure he really understood, so he read this poem to see his reaction. When Liễu Quán heard this poem he clapped his hands and laughed very joyfully. The Zen master was not happy with this reaction. He said “No, no, no, no, no. Not yet.” (That's how these two Zen masters spoke to each other. We can imagine in our head that it's very funny.) Liễu Quán then pointed to a weighing scale. The Zen master said “No, no, not yet.” He wasn't satisfied with that answer. That day they ended their conversation there. The next morning, Zen Master Tử Dung saw Zen Master Liễu Quán walking back and forth, but Liễu Quán didn't notice that Tử Dung was approaching him to

What else do we need to ask from our ancestral teachers?
What do you need to look for from our ancestors,
to ask from them?

speak further. If he had experienced anything new, Liễu Quán would always want Tử Dung to know about it, to see if he had attained enlightenment yet. So, Tử Dung called Liễu Quán over and said, “We haven’t finished our conversation from yesterday.” Zen Master Liễu Quán replied with one line: “If we already know that the lamp is fire, then the rice was cooked long ago.” Once he heard this line, Zen Master Tử Dung nodded his head and praised, “Wonderful, wonderful.” He was very satisfied.

In 1708, Liễu Quán built Thiền Tông Temple on Thiên Thai Mountain. When he had established his temple, he continued to study and began to teach.

In 1712, Liễu Quán had the opportunity to meet Tử Dung again for the third time. A ceremony had been organized in Quảng Nam Province, and the two Zen masters spoke to each other in a Zen way. Zen Master Liễu Quán was like a disciple to his teacher. He presented a gatha. History didn’t write down that gatha. We just know that it had to do with Buddha nature. Zen Master Tử Dung read the gatha to see how Zen Master Liễu Quán was studying and where he was in his practice at this time. Tử Dung asked, “How do you understand, ‘The ancestor transmits to the ancestor. The Buddha transmits to the Buddha’? What do they actually transmit to each other?”

“I teach to you; you teach to the younger ones. And then the younger ones—who did they teach to? What are we transmitting? What do they actually transmit?”

Liễu Quán was able to recognize a question, but at the same time if we answer like the sutras, we’ve failed. This is how a Zen master replies to another Zen master:

Bamboo shoot on the rock is very long, very high.

A duster of the turtle weighs three kilos.

After Zen Master Liễu Quán replied to this koan, he offered another:

Rowing a boat on a high mountain

Riding a horse deep in the sea.

Rowing a boat on a high mountain is not really possible. It doesn’t make any sense. Riding a horse in the depths of the sea—can you really do that? In the first poem, we read about the bamboo shoot

and the duster. We saw it doesn’t make sense. In that way, it’s similar to the latter verse about rowing the boat on a high mountain. That means they are on the same frequency.

A broken string plays the zither throughout the day.

The buffalo horn roars all night.

In this gatha, they’re trying to say these are responses that ancestors are transmitting to ancestors and the Buddha is transmitting to the Buddha. We can never talk about it or use words to explain it. They speak to each other through images, through poetry. When we think of it, we cannot think further. How can we think further? This helps us not to think too much. That’s why practicing in the Zen tradition is not using your mind to think; we should learn to use our heart.

After they spoke to each other, Zen Master Tử Dung was very satisfied. He continued to nod his head; he was very happy with his disciple. Liễu Quán was officially considered as his disciple.

In 1742, when he was seventy-two, Liễu Quán saw that his health was not very stable and so he made a gatha for the Sangha. On Liễu Quán’s last morning, he saw that his appointment with this life was completed. So when we come to this life it is an appointment, and when we come here the appointment is finished. Now we return back to our home.

What else do we need to ask from our ancestral teachers? What do you need to look for from our ancestors, to ask from them? Liễu Quán’s life was completed. He had nothing that he needed to search for. He saw his life was complete, and he just needed to return home. He no longer needed to go somewhere to study, to learn. After he finished this gatha the Sangha cried, because they knew that he was about to pass to Nirvana. Liễu Quán said:

Why are you crying? What is there to cry for? When the Buddhas are born, they pass into Nirvana and me, I know the path to take. There is nothing more to fear. I don’t need to wait for anything, so you don’t have to worry or be sad about anything. If we pass away and you

know where you're going, what fear is left? It's a great happiness. It's like we are going traveling and it's a one-way ticket traveling forever. And if we leave in that mindset, then what is there to cry about? If we're being kidnapped then of course we're going to be very fearful because we don't know where we're going, but he has a path, so what is there to cry? I already have my path; I already know where I'm going. What is there for you to cry?

When they heard that they said okay. Then he asked for the time. "What time is it?"

He said, "Yes, it's almost time."

He said, "I will go. Please remember," he said. "One last reminder that impermanence is very quick, it passes by very quickly. You should practice diligently, properly. Please remember."

He did sitting meditation and he passed away. It was very, very beautiful. Hopefully we'll be able to be the same. Zen Master Liễu Quán had left a gatha so whenever we receive an ordination we will know where we stand in the lineage. Novices, you will see this gatha on our novice ordination certificate. As disciples we should memorize this gatha.

*The great way of Reality,
Is our true nature's pure ocean.
The source of Mind penetrates everywhere.
From the roots of virtue springs the practice of compassion.
Precepts, concentration and insight—
The nature and function of all three are one.
The fruit of transcendent wisdom,
Can be realized by being wonderfully together.
Maintain and transmit the wonderful principle,
In order to reveal the true teaching!
For the realization of True Emptiness to be possible,
Wisdom and Action must go together.*

This is an excerpt from the first Dharma talk of the Rains Retreat on September 16, 2018, in the Full Moon Hall in New Hamlet, Plum Village, France. It has been edited for clarity. You can listen to a translation of the full talk on the Plum Village YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lYnZ8UpIFXA> and read an expanded version of this article at mindfulnessbell.org.



Sister Đoàn Nghiêm was the sixth monastic to be ordained by Thích Nhất Hạnh into the Plum Village tradition in 1990, and received Lamp Transmission in 1996. Her experiences as Thầy's attendant were filled with learning and growth, reflecting her dedication to the monastic life and her deep respect for Thầy's guidance. Sister Đoàn Nghiêm's path exemplifies a journey of transformation, dedication, and the embracing of simplicity and mindfulness in everyday life.

Traditional Ceremonies Honoring Thầy's Passing

Brother Pháp Dung and Brother Pháp Lưu interview Thích Giác Quang, a Most Venerable from Huế, Vietnam and a great supporter of Thầy and the Plum Village tradition, exploring the importance of the many ceremonies remembering and honoring Thầy's passing.



Thích Giác Quang; photo
courtesy of
Thai Plum Village monastics

BROTHER PHÁP LƯU: We are deeply moved when you speak about our Teacher, his love, his path, and his teaching. Many Westerners ask, “Why is there a ceremony on the first anniversary of Thầy’s passing [*Lễ Tiểu Tường*] in Vietnam?” What is the meaning behind the Cremation Ceremony [*Lễ Trà Tỳ*], the forty-nine-day ceremony, the hundred-day ceremony, the Smaller Memorial Ceremony on the first anniversary of Thầy’s passing [*Lễ Tiểu Tường*], and the Grand Memorial Ceremony [on the second anniversary, *Lễ Đại Tường*]?

BROTHER PHÁP DUNG: Many practitioners living abroad follow our Teacher, they love our Teacher very much. They have been following our ceremonies online over the past year, and they write very touching letters commemorating Thầy. Still, they don’t understand much about the culture and ways of Vietnamese people, especially Buddhism. Pháp Lưu and I could go to the library to research, but on this occasion we have you. Aware of your experience and your love for our Teacher, we wish to hear directly from you about the culture and your feelings during these ceremonies. We’ve heard from other monks that, thanks to your help, these ceremonies were realized in the spirit of Thầy’s teaching and the Plum Village tradition. The anniversary ceremonies will affect our worldwide Sangha. I feel that during the next five to ten years, many Westerners will begin to go on pilgrimage to places like Huế, Vietnam. We hope you will share your personal insights into the meaning of the ceremonies. The first question I would like to ask:

In Buddhist culture, Vietnamese culture, when a great master passes away why are there ceremonies? Why must there be so many stages of ceremonies?

THÍCH GIÁC QUANG: Generally speaking, the cultures of East Asian countries (China, Japan, South Korea), and Vietnamese culture in particular, greatly respect the deceased. Vietnam is influenced by China. When Chinese culture was introduced in Vietnam, [neo-Confucian] ceremonies were mainly used to bolster the national culture. We, as Buddhists, never go against that tendency, but we add Vietnamese Buddhist content to the ceremonies. Buddhism has always done like this [integrating into the local culture], as did the Buddha.

After the death of a layperson, we first hold the Purification Ceremony: cleaning the coffin, chanting prayers, sprinkling water for purification. Then comes the Coffin Closing Ceremony—putting the corpse into the coffin, done very carefully, respecting the body. They place precious materials, and sometimes clothes and personal possessions, in the coffin.

In Buddhist practice, we have the Opening Scripture Ceremony, in which we offer homage to Buddha, asking Buddha for permission to start chanting the scriptures for prayer. Next is the Soul Return Ceremony [inviting the soul back]; when a person dies, their three souls [三魂] and seven spirits [七魄] have left, so we invite them back. After that is the Paying Respects Ceremony to honor the deceased. In the following days, we prepare daily meal offerings. Then, before the funeral day, there is the Morning Ceremony. That morning, we offer a meal to the departed spirit and report that we will escort them tomorrow. The day of the Morning Ceremony, we also invite the departed spirit to pay respects to the grandparents, the ancestors. As a descendant, the deceased is coming to enter the lineage of the ancestors who have gone before.

The next afternoon there is a Requiem Ceremony and an Evening Ceremony. The special feature of the Evening Ceremony is that all descendants are present for a joint offering. It is like when parents go far away, and children come to give gifts and bid their parents farewell.

The next day is the funeral day when we offer the Departure Ceremony, to inform the departed spirit that today is a good day to escort them along their way. When escorting the deceased, laypeople may participate in a Coffin Closing Ceremony. Then, there is a Grave Purification Ceremony, when monks stand to purify the grave before lowering the coffin into the burial place. [In the case of Thầy, we cremated his body instead of burying it, which is still an unusual procedure in Vietnam.]

Coming home, we hold the Soul Return Ceremony. We bring the departed spirit home and establish it on the altar. The folk consider the incense burner as the dwelling place of the departed spirit, so we set up an incense burner on the altar.

We conclude with the Completion Ceremony: chanting scriptures and paying homage to Buddha.

After the funeral and burial or cremation, the deceased's name tablet is placed on the ancestral altar in a ceremony known as the *An Vĩ Bát Hương* of the deceased. An image of the deceased is placed on the altar and incense are offered.

Afterward, the first week is counted—from the day of death to the seventh day. This cycle is repeated weekly. According to Chinese culture, a person who has passed away must go through ten stages, known as the Ten Courts of Hell, where they are judged in a court of law. In one of these courts, the King of Hell transmits your case to the judge. In Buddhism, our ancestors still accept the concept of the ten courts from folk beliefs, but they use them to infuse meaning and content into ten ceremonies. For example, in the Sutra of Good Birth [the *Siṅgāla Sutta* in the Pali Canon¹], the Buddha asked Good Birth how many directions he bows to each day, and what is the purpose of his bowing. Good Birth did not know, he simply followed what his parents taught him, so the Buddha taught him to whom he should bow in each direction. Therefore, each bow has a meaning, and bowing becomes complete.

We still accept the concept of the ten courts, but we add content and meaning to them. Each week has a purpose: so descendants can remember their ancestors. Descendants gather to practice or cultivate the wish to pray. This is perfectly fine, there are no obstacles at all.

In the seven weeks after burial, there are seven stages where we chant sutras every day, perform good deeds, and pray for the deceased. Whether on the spiritual path or out in the world, we direct our minds toward our loved ones.

The one hundredth day after the deceased passes is called the eighth stage, the first anniversary is the ninth stage, and the second anniversary is the tenth stage. The first anniversary is exactly twelve months after death. The second anniversary is the Grand Memorial Ceremony at twenty-four months after death. After that, annual commemorations are observed.

When the ceremony proceeds in two lines, it is a ceremonial formality, influenced by ancient rituals. Walking in two lines represents solemnity. Funerals in Huế are the most elaborate. In the South, funerals include music, singing, alcohol, and food, depending on the customs of the region.

Thầy's ceremonies are influenced by the culture of the royal court, the culture of the temples, and the inscriptions at the temples. There is a ceremonial procession, walking in two lines, showing respect and solemnity.

PD: Dear Most Venerable, we hear that on the second anniversary, the Grand Memorial Ceremony [*Lễ Đại Tường*] is very important. Why is that?

GQ: Normally, after the Grand Memorial Ceremony, it is considered that Thầy is no longer. Before that, we feel Thầy is still here. For two years after Thầy passes away, if anyone is worthy to be abbot, that person would not yet become abbot. For those two years, it's like Thầy is still here. For example, in the Gratitude Great Precepts Transmission Ceremony [*Đại Giới Đàn Ân Nghĩa* in 2016], Thầy was sick, but we could still carry out the things we needed to do, because Thầy was still sitting there protecting us, nurturing us with his solidity.

For two years after Thầy passed away, the one preparing to be abbot is only seen as a Temple Supervisor, meaning they just watch over and manage the temple! The good thing about this is the brothers are not disturbed because Thầy is still sitting there. The brothers are still united. After two years, everything is in order, and then that elder monk officially becomes the abbot. The Grand Memorial Ceremony's meaning is the same! It's the time of parting between teacher and student; all disciples, children, grandchildren gather back home. After the Grand Memorial Ceremony, there are only anniversary ceremonies.

PL: Why must all senior disciples return for Thầy's Grand Memorial Ceremony?

GQ: The elders are significant, so they must be present at the service. In Vietnam, we have a saying: "If you play the role of an older sibling, you must bear the responsibility." As elder brothers or sisters, we have a duty to care for our teacher; as elder siblings, we need to be the first ones to take responsibility.

PL: After Thầy passed away, you mentioned that the connection between Plum Village and our root temple is very crucial. Could you tell us why this connection is necessary and why it's so important?

GQ: Plum Village and Từ Hiếu are inseparable, like one body. The first time I brought my disciples to Từ Hiếu, I told them coming here is like returning to their spiritual homeland. They were still very immature, and I worried that they might upset the Most Venerables. If they had any questions, I told them they should ask the Most Venerables directly for guidance. I would never have dared to instruct them on my own. Regardless of which country they come from, Từ Hiếu Temple is their spiritual homeland. This deep connection was reflected in Thầy's teachings. Toward the end of his life, Thầy returned to Từ Hiếu, inviting his disciples to join him. It is natural for us to feel connected to Từ Hiếu, and even when unexpected things happen, we always acknowledge Từ Hiếu as our root.

When a person passes away, over time their memory may fade, but with Thầy, things will gradually become clearer. For instance, Harvard University now includes mindfulness meditation in its curriculum. Bhutan, the happiest country in the world, has used Thầy's image on their stamps. There are countless other examples. A Vietnamese Buddhist monk in America suddenly saw Thầy's greatness clearly. He realized that, although he was highly educated, fluent in English, and had profound knowledge of Buddhist teachings, he could not achieve what Thầy did. He simply couldn't communicate with everyone like Thầy. These examples make the vast scope of Thầy's teachings evident.

In the future, the world will recognize Thầy as a global spiritual teacher. How could his path ever fade? Plum Village may experience ups and downs. Though people may worry, this is normal. Any organization experiences this. However, when something becomes a

truth, a reality, it will never go up and down. For example, the philosophy of Laozi may not have many followers now, but no one can erase his ideas, nor those of Confucius, let alone the teachings of Thầy. Even if Plum Village experiences ups and downs, its teachings and practice will remain stable. In the future, people will recognize Thầy as a global spiritual teacher, and hearing this makes me very happy.

Even the books teachers have written about Thầy make the readers perceive the light of Vietnamese Buddhism more vividly. Normally, we are confined within the scope of Vietnam, but now Thầy's teachings have become global, and his disciples are from all over the world. They speak Western languages, Chinese, and so on. We have monks and an international monastic organization. During a visit to Plum Village, I once shared that the greatness of a person who transmits the teachings is to help local people become Buddhist monastics. The most beautiful thing about our practice centers abroad is that the non-Vietnamese now outnumber the Vietnamese. In our center in Thailand, there are over ten Thai nuns. Sister Linh Nghiêm is currently the eldest among the Thai nuns practicing in the Plum Village tradition. There is a close bond between Vietnam and Thailand, all thanks to Thầy. [Laughs]

PD: Thank you very much, Venerable!

¹ "Advice to Sigālaka," SuttaCentral. Accessed September 19, 2023. <https://suttacentral.net/dn31/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

These excerpts were taken from an interview conducted at Thai Plum Village on February 7, 2023 by Brother Pháp Khâm, Brother Pháp Dung, Brother Pháp Lưu, and Sister Linh Nghiêm. The interview has been lightly edited for clarity and ease of reading.

The Most Venerable Thích Giác Quang is the abbot of Bảo Lâm Temple in Huế, Vietnam and one of the current Phó Pháp chủ, or Deputy Dharma Masters, of the official Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha. Growing up in a Buddhist family, he was ordained at twenty-four years old in 1967. Venerable Giác Quang was present at Diệu Trạm to warmly welcome Thầy on his return to Từ Hiếu in 2018. He has been a great supporter of Thầy and the Plum Village tradition, and has particularly helped guide the monastics in their continuing presence in Vietnam.

Photo on pages 32-33 by
Tim Mossholder.

Snapshots—Six-word stories of our pilgrimage in Vietnam

Amazing dream with Sangha honoring Thầy.
 Together with my son, Sangha arms.
 Bowing in gratitude to Venerable monks.
 Warm hospitality, delicious meals, rich culture.
 I embrace past suffering, allow healing.
 C'mon, quiet already, my judging mind.
 Tales of Thầy's early practice, teaching.
 In Thầy's footsteps, here and now.
 Gratefully touching earth before Buddhas, Bodhisattvas.
 Everywhere flowers, peach blossoms for Tết.
 One small suitcase for two weeks.
 Hidden bottle of Maggi, delicious rice.
 Slipping, falling, wet moss on stone.
 Thầy's journey, overnight train to Huế.
 Train arrives at 6 a.m., rain.
 Celebrating Thầy's anniversary at root temple.
 Crowded formal lunch in meditation hall.
 Surprise reunion with Deer Park friends.
 Hut where Thầy took last breath.
 My master's room, a place of peace.
 My teacher's smile in pink camellia.
 Anna, concierge in Huế, motorbike ride.
 Learning my own lessons—love, surrender.
 Chanting Namo'valokiteshvaraya at Thầy's headstone, umbrellas.
 Six course gourmet meal, yum yum!
 Thầy's true presence at Phương Bối.
 Stoic poet's widow points to grave.
 Remnants of meditation hall on hilltop.
 Thầy's eucalyptus towers over cistern, well.
 Foundation of hut beneath tall grass.
 Picnic lunch beneath Thầy's pine trees.
 Deep international bonds transcend language barriers.
 Witnessing Sư Cô's visits with old friends.
 Sharing snacks and treats on bus.
 Ubiquitous toilet paper roll in pocket.
 Sleeping in planes, buses, trains, hotels.
 Seven hot pots in six days.
 We return to Thầy's beloved waterfalls.
 Rock climbing with son, fun times.
 Struggles with not knowing—what's next?
 One hundred-year-old tea plants.
 Fifteen years later, here I am.
 Paddling canoe takes me back: 1978.
 Most delicious warm croissant and baguette.
 Tending sick son, frigid hotel room.
 Gratitude, once in a lifetime pilgrimage.

Karen Hilsberg, True Boundless Graciousness (pronouns she/her), is a lay Dharma teacher living and practicing in Culver City, California, US, with her adult children. She is a co-founder of Organic Garden Sangha, which will be celebrating its twentieth anniversary this year. Karen and her son Ben were honored to join the Sangha in January 2023 to honor the anniversary of Thầy's transition and to visit places that are special and historically significant to Thầy and the Sangha.



Touching the Ancestral Stream: Human and More Than Human

Thầy's radical teaching on connecting with our blood, spiritual, and land ancestors opened up a deep awareness in Mick McEvoy: his ancestors are not just human, but animal, plant, and mineral.

A deep awareness of my nonhuman and human ancestors came to my mind as I contemplated Thầy officially becoming an ancestral teacher of Từ Hiếu Temple. Thầy is quoted as saying, “The ancestors have already prepared everything.” This insight gives me a great sense of relief, belonging, and certainty as I pivot daily in many different directions. The depth in the teachings of *continuation* and *interbeing* is so vast, yet so comforting. The image of “touching the ancestral stream” is rooted in the natural world. I imagine placing my hand in the cool waters of a clear stream as it flows by, and I feel held in the reality of connection to this infinite flow of life and nourishment.

The meaningful human relationships I experience in Plum Village are a huge part of my well-being. But when I reflect on feeling connected with our deep, rich Plum Village lineage, immediately the lands of Plum Village, France, come to my mind. I feel a deep, soulful connection to the natural world in Plum Village, especially in Upper Hamlet. These lands and all who dwell on them are also my spiritual family. I do my best to speak out for and to honour these lands and the integral role they play in the healing of all the humans who have crossed our threshold over the forty-one years of Plum Village's history. This land and the beings who dwell here, nonhuman and human, are part of my ancestral stream. They are a continuation of beloved Thầy and the wealth of the Plum Village lineage.

I love how Thầy encouraged contemplating our spiritual ancestors, our blood ancestors, and our land ancestors. I am as deeply connected to my animal, plant, and mineral ancestors as my human ancestors. In Plum Village I am in touch with the ancient oak forests with which we are blessed. I am in touch with the numerous past generations of squirrels and jays who buried more oak acorns than they could eat and, in so doing, helped cultivate the next generation of oak trees. I am in touch with the rich limestone soils that have evolved over aeons and now support these oak forests and our Plum Village farms and gardens.

I have supported the Happy Farm project's rooting into the soil of Plum Village for nearly a decade now. When I introduce the farm



Happy Farm photo courtesy
of Conscious Film Co.

project, I often invoke our Happy Farm ancestors. Thầy was our original Happy Farm ancestor. Often Thầy is introduced as a “Zen master, poet, peace activist, and gardener.” I love this. Anyone familiar with Thầy’s teachings has noticed the countless farming and gardening metaphors he skilfully deploys to help us understand. He tells us, for example, that a gardener can transform the rubbish we accumulate in life into beautiful compost that can nourish the soil of our inner and outer gardens. Two other early Happy Farm ancestors in Upper Hamlet are Stuart and Daniel, long-term lay friends who began the project in 2013. Without them, Happy Farm would not exist. Every human being who has stepped onto our farms and gardened with us is also a farm ancestor. Thousands of human Happy Farm ancestors have shaped our lands and contributed their energy. Their contribution and practice has made the farm what it is today.

Thầy’s teaching on deep ecology and his early environmental activism touched me deeply. Contemplating Thầy’s continuation, I see clearly that he has created a global community of future ancestors who will continue his teachings and that of the Buddha. There is a new generation of activists who, after experiencing these teachings, are cultivating a deep spiritual realm in their own lives to support their work and activism—this in the midst of our polycrisis of climate, ecology, pollution, racial justice, and social justice. What is radical and revolutionary is that many of these people are not just falling back on spirituality to support their work, but, like me, are consciously ceasing to separate their spiritual lives from the rest of their lives. We are integrating our spiritual practice into every aspect of our life. No more binary between activism and spirituality—our activist work is our spiritual life. Our spiritual life is our activism. This is the continuation of Thầy.

Often when we practise with our spiritual ancestors in our tradition the term patriarch is invoked. I have so much respect for the many amazing men who lived beautifully simple, yet deep, lives of practice and carried the teachings and traditions forward for all of us. But, understandably, the term patriarch also awakens resistance. Often I take time to invoke the numerable matriarchs in our spiritual, blood, and land ancestry. We don’t have to look far to appreciate living *bodhisattvas*: Sister Chân Không, Sister Chân Đức, and so many other elder monastic sisters and siblings.

Another matriarch I invoke regularly is the linden tree in Upper Hamlet. The majestic linden tree has been deeply rooted in the soils of Upper Hamlet since before Plum Village existed. This matriarch offers so much. For humans, she offers oxygen, shade, and nectar-filled flowers for tea. Her mature branches hold two swings that have entertained and comforted countless children and adults, monastic and lay. She has served as the arrival and departure point for countless people at the beginning and end of retreats. She holds

whole families of humans in her shade and embrace as they practise Dharma sharing week after week. Not to mention that she also offers home and sustenance to countless more-than-human beings. This linden tree is the matriarch of Upper Hamlet.

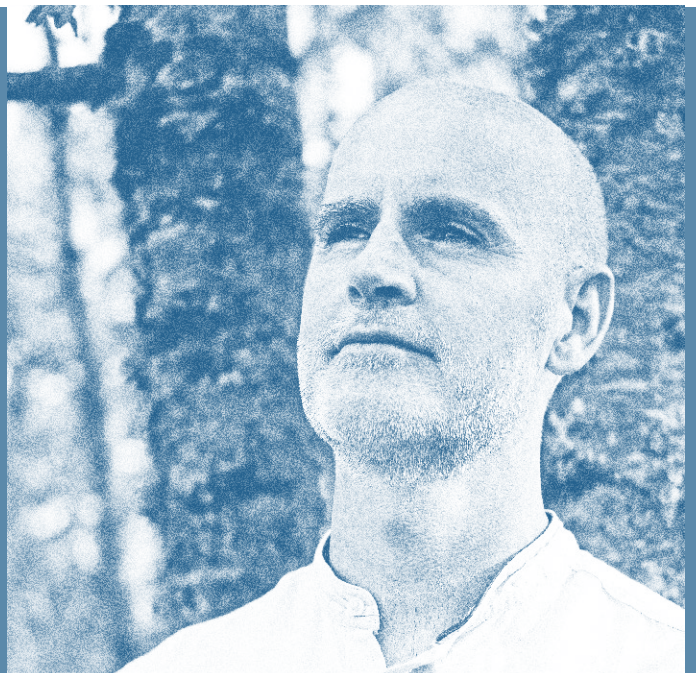
As a farmer, an ecologist, an educator, and a practitioner, I feel so deeply grateful to have Thầy as an ancestral teacher. From Thầy I have inherited so much. I do my best to transmit the deep practice of what it is to be a gardener, what it is to cultivate our inner and outer gardens toward collective healing, transformation, and awakening.

I recognise that the conditions that enable me to live, practice, study, and serve in Plum Village are a direct result of the good will of my ancestors. I am connected to their goodwill, which enables me to continue to create opportunities for practice and healing in Plum Village, France by organising and facilitating retreats and our residential Happy Farm programme. I am in touch with the good will and benevolence of all my nonhuman ancestors: animals, plants, and minerals. The plants and animals on these lands nourish me, and the nutrient- and mineral-rich soils support the cultivation of organic, seasonal food that helps fill the alms bowls of our community.

In gratitude to Thầy and the ancestors who have already prepared everything. In gratitude to be part of Thầy's continuation and this constantly flowing ancestral stream. In gratitude to be part of this deep and rich Plum Village lineage.

For more information on the Happy Farm, visit thehappyfarm.org.

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.



Inhabiting Interbeing

The Earth Holder Community invites Aurora Conde, founder of Mexican Earth Holders, to tell us a story of three queens.

What does it mean to have Thầy as our spiritual ancestor? What does it mean to touch the stream of the Dharma, the flow of Plum Village's lineage, when you are daily crossed in concrete ways by so many cultures? This is the reality of many Latin-American practitioners who uphold, very naturally and without conflict or feelings of incompatibility, the traditions, beliefs, and rites of different religions.

Due to his exile, our beloved Teacher knew how to transform the mud of territorial and cultural displacement into the lotus of an interfaith movement for peace and for the planet. Therefore weaving the Buddhist practices into our own realities to shape new spiritual experiences is a way of deeply honoring Thầy.

To celebrate Thầy becoming an Ancestor and honor our tradition's spirit of social justice, for this issue we put our regular column into the hands of Abrazadores de la Tierra, the international Spanish speaking community. We invited Aurora Conde, the founder of Mexican Earth Holders, to tell us a story she wrote, with the contribution of the Sangha.

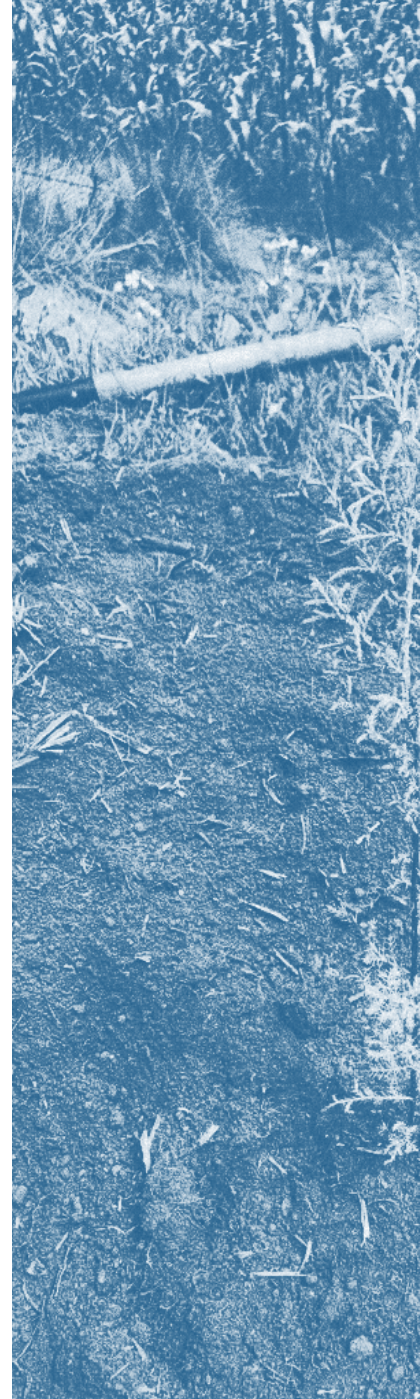
For the "Ascension of the Virgin" holiday in Mexico, the Mexican Earth Holder Community gathered. They meditated together, planted twenty-five trees, touched the wonders of Mother Earth, and, through the beauty of poetry (just like Thầy), they had a ceremony. This is what we heard:

THE THREE QUEENS

That memorable night, the stars shone as if invited to a great party at the foot of Conexque Hill—where the land is fertile and the rain allows the corn to be harvested—in the village of Acaxochitlán, in the state of Hidalgo, in Mexico. Here a big, remarkable meeting took place, filled with light and holy presences. In this deep moment, three beautiful women appeared, all of them Queens.

The first to introduce herself said her name was Xilonen and immediately began to speak: "Dear sisters, I was born in this country. I am the 'Goddess of the New Corn' and I love the people of this land. Since the beginning of time, I have provided them with the corn they need to feed themselves."

Another magnificent woman, dressed in a simple but brilliant



Habitando el Interser

La Comunidad Earth Holder invita a Aurora Conde, fundadora de la Comunidad Earth Holders en México, a contarnos una historia de tres reinas.

¿Qué significa tener a Thây como ancestro espiritual? ¿Qué significa tocar la corriente del Dharma, el flujo del linaje de Plum Village, cuando eres una persona atravesada por múltiples culturas, de manera concreta y a diario? Esta es la realidad de muchos de los practicantes de Latinoamérica, que mantienen, de manera muy natural, sin conflictos ni sensación de incompatibilidad, las costumbres, creencias y ritos de distintas religiones.

Nuestro amado Maestro supo transformar el lodo del desplazamiento territorial y cultural del exilio en el loto del movimiento interreligioso por la paz y el planeta. Por lo tanto, incorporar las prácticas budistas a nuestras realidades, fraguando nuevas experiencias espirituales, es también una manera de honrar a Thay profundamente.

Al celebrar su entrada a la Ancestralidad, honrando el espíritu de justicia social de nuestra tradición, los Earth Holders hoy ponemos nuestra columna a disposición de los Abrazadores de la Tierra, la comunidad hispanohablante internacional. Invitamos a Aurora Conde, fundadora de la comunidad en México, a contarnos una historia que escribió ella con la contribución de la Sangha.

En el feriado por la Ascensión de la Virgen, la comunidad abrazadora mexicana se reunió. Meditaron en unión, sembraron veinticinco árboles, tocaron el esplendor de la Madre Tierra y, a través de la belleza de la poesía (como Thây), realizaron una ceremonia. Esto es lo que escuchamos:

LAS REINAS

Aquella noche memorable, donde las estrellas brillaban en una gran fiesta, al pie del cerro Conexque—tierra fértil, donde la lluvia permite cosechar el maíz—en el pueblo de Acaxochitlán, en el estado de Hidalgo, en México, hubo una gran reunión, sorprendente, llena de luz y de presencias divinas. En ese profundo momento, se reunieron tres hermosas mujeres. Reinas, todas ellas.

Una dijo llamarse Xilonen, nacida en estas tierras. Ella habló; “Queridas hermanas, yo soy la Diosa del Maíz Tierno y amo a este pueblo, le he dado el maíz para que se alimente.”

Otra hermosa mujer, ataviada con un manto sencillo pero

Photo courtesy of Aurora Conde / foto cortesía de Aurora Conde.

cloak, said: “I am Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the son of God. I come from distant lands, beyond the Atlantic. However, I have also nurtured the people of this land with love; they are also my beloved children. And I can assure you of my permanence and unconditionality.”

In a respectful manner, the third deity spoke. She said: “I come from Asia; I am Avalokiteshvara, Personified Compassion. I love the children of this place and I wish them to be compassionate towards each other.”

In a very gentle manner, the three goddesses then began to braid their hair; they knew that when women do that, they also braid and interweave their dreams. Held in interbeing, the three queens were bathed in starlight. A cool breeze caressed them; light rain refreshed them. When they finished their braids, they pointed their hair toward the Earth and felt great love.

A bright light appeared on the horizon, just like when a miracle occurs. With all humility, as only true majesties know how to, the three queens gazed toward the planet Earth; bowing their heads, they smiled. They knew they had discovered a way to lavish, in unison, all their love on the children of these lands.

Immediately, they realized with joy that if the three of them could grant the planet Earth each and every one of their attributes and make Earth the mother of all peoples, they could continue to love all beings in the world with understanding, compassion, and transformative wisdom.

Then, they named the Earth “Supreme Mother” and felt happy and at peace.

From that moment on, the three women met to celebrate Mother Earth every August at the foot of Conexque Hill. In a colorful party, everyone eats freshly harvested corn and plants trees. Tears intermingling with joy, they sing songs full of compassion, and people dance, adorned with traditional Xochimacpal dresses.

All the people of these lands recognize Mother Earth as their creative, loving, and transforming mother, a mother who loves and accepts all her children.

Ever since this special gathering, we feel loved and embraced by many arms because we know that we can nourish and honor all our creeds and roots, certain that every single one of them embroiders a star in our hearts.

(One person is requested to step forward to the center, and be embraced by the other four.)

Aurora Conde, Wonderful Peace of the Heart, was named Daughter of the Sun by her mother. She received transmission of The Five Mindfulness Trainings in 2012 and has practiced Thây’s teachings for fifteen years, hand in hand with her beloved daughter. She likes to create and participate in Sanghas; her heart enthusiastically welcomed the invitation to form an Earth Holders Sangha in Mexico (which meets twice a month via zoom), uniting the two things she loves: caring for the planet and meditative practices. She is an environmental educator focused on the conservation of natural resources and zero-waste. She had the privilege of working to conserve the Chihuahuan desert, where life is fragile and the Earth is strong, has cried watching the stromatolites, and hopes her grandchildren can do the same.



brillante, dijo: “Yo soy María, la Madre de Jesús, el hijo de Dios. Vengo de tierras lejanas más allá del Atlántico, a este pueblo también lo he llenado de amor. Son también mis hijos amados, a quienes les doy la certeza de mi permanencia e incondicionalidad.”

En forma respetuosa habló la tercera deidad, y dijo: “Yo vengo de Asia y soy Avalokiteshvara, la Compasión Personificada. Amo a los hijos de este pueblo. Deseo que sean compasivos unos con otros.”

Las tres mujeres, con mucha suavidad, se pusieron a peinar sus trenzas, pues sabían que, cuando las mujeres lo hacen, también peinan sus sueños y los entretejen. Las tres estaban bañadas por la luz de las estrellas, una brisa fresca y tenue lluvia. Al terminar sus trenzas, apuntaron su cabellera hacia la Tierra, y sintieron un gran amor.

Se vio una luz brillante en el horizonte, igual que cuando se produce un milagro. Y con toda humildad, como solo saben hacerlo las verdaderas majestades, miraron hacia la Tierra, inclinando sus cabezas y sonriendo, porque sabían que habían descubierto la manera de prodigar todo su amor hacia los hijos de estas tierras.

Y con júbilo las tres se dieron cuenta de que, si depositaban todas sus cualidades a la Tierra y la convertían en madre de los pueblos, podrían seguir amándolos, con comprensión, compasión, transformación. Entonces nombraron a la Tierra “Madre Suprema.” Se sintieron felices y en paz.

Desde entonces cada año, en agosto, se reúnen las tres mujeres para festejar a la Madre Tierra. Se hace una colorida fiesta, todos comen maíz recién cosechado, siembran árboles, cantan sones llenos de compasión, llanto y alegría mezclados, y bailan con adornos tradicionales Xochimacpales.

Todas las personas de esta tierra reconocen a la Madre Tierra como creadora, amorosa y transformadora madre, quién ama y acepta a todos sus hijos. Desde entonces nos sentimos amados y abrazados por muchos brazos, porque sabemos que podemos nutrir y honrar todas nuestras raíces, y que cada una de ellas borda una estrella en nuestro corazón.

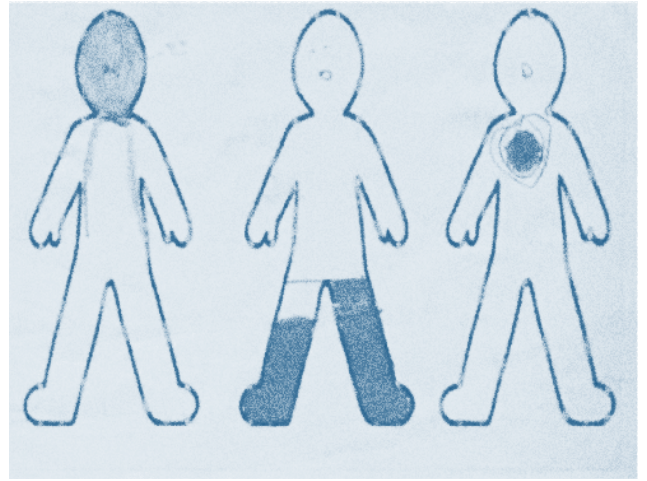
(Se solicita que una persona pase al centro y que cuatro más la abracen.)



Aurora Conde recibió de su madre el nombre Hija de Sol y, desde 2012, lleva también el nombre del Dharma Maravillosa Paz del Corazón. Aurora conoce y practica las enseñanzas de Thây desde hace quince años, de la mano de su amada hija. Le gusta crear y participar en Sangha. Su corazón acogió con gran entusiasmo la invitación para formar una sangha de Abrazadores de la Tierra en México (que se reúne dos veces al mes, vía zoom), ya que pudo unir sus dos amores: el cuidado del planeta y la práctica meditativa. Es educadora ambiental y se ha enfocado en la conservación de los recursos naturales y la no-generación de desechos. Tuvo el privilegio de trabajar en la conservación del desierto Chihuahuense, ahí donde la vida es frágil y la Tierra fuerte. Aurora lloró al observar los estromatolitos, y desea que sus nietos también lo hagan.

Hugging Anger

Nandini Seth shares a curriculum to teach young students how to deal with hurt, guilt, pain, and other difficult emotions.



Every morning, before I went to school, my mother read books to me. This was one of my favourite parts of the day. I would wake up and run to the pale green sofa in our living room, where we would snuggle up with a glass of warm, sweet milk and read. Our explorations ranged from encyclopaedias about amethysts and artichokes to the Mahābhārata to a large number of Plum Village children's books.

I have been visiting Plum Village since I was a three-month-old baby. Plum Village is where I took my first steps, where I had my first ice cream—it is my home. The Plum Village books I read in the mornings, from *The Hermit and the Well* to *Anh's Anger*, took me back to Plum Village, which made me very happy. Additionally, unbeknownst to me, their simple stories and colourful drawings gave me deep teachings.

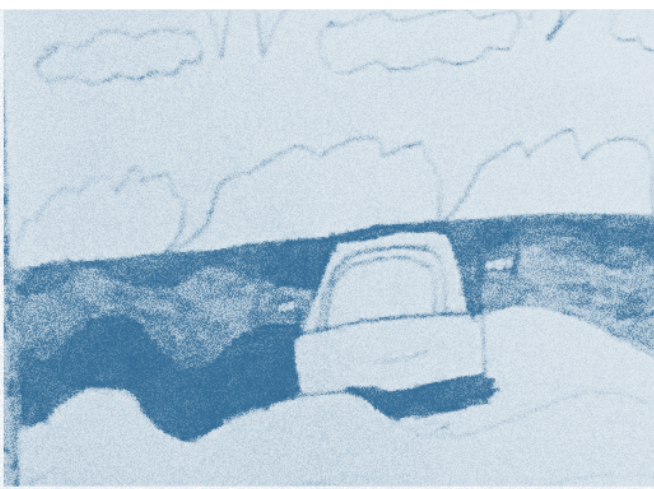
My favourite story growing up was always *Anh's Anger*. This is a story about a boy named Anh who gets angry with his grandfather for interrupting his play time. Anh meets his anger (which appears to him as a giant monster). He talks, dances, and breathes with his anger, and they soon become friends. Anh learns to understand his anger. Though the anger frightened me a little bit, I loved this story and I loved dancing with my own anger, breathing deeply with it, and talking to it. It was exciting to think of my anger in this way; subconsciously, I was transforming my negative emotions. Later in life, confused about the more complex aspects of Buddhist psychology like

seeds or *manas*, I would think about the drawing of Anh's anger flailing around in my brain.

Though I have always loved school, at some point I realised that even with my many, many years of schooling, there were things I had not been taught. In university I was asked to create a fifth grade school curriculum. The first thing that came to mind was the gap in my education that stories like *Anh's Anger* had filled. A gap in knowing how to deal with the hurt, guilt, pain, and other difficult emotions so present in our lives. I wrote a sixteen lesson curriculum that included the first four classes described below:

DAY 1

- Step 1: Ask the students to close their eyes and think about a moment that made them truly happy. Then ask them to feel that happiness in their body.
- Step 2: The children share the moment they thought about with the group.
- Step 3: Have them colour in the part of their body where they experience happiness, noticing and remembering how it feels and looks.
- Step 4: Repeat the process with anger, fear, sadness, and love.



Illustrations by students of Bajaj School for the Deaf and Tibetan Homes School.

Homework: Students try to experience their emotions coming and going in their everyday lives. When they feel an emotion they can put a hand on the part of their body where they located the presence of this emotion.

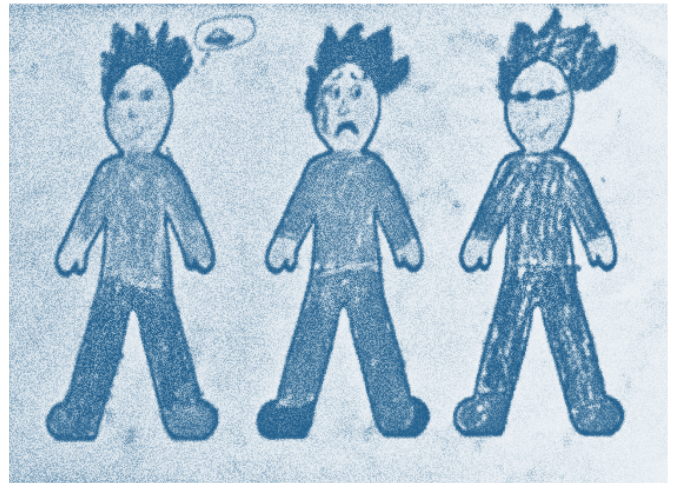
DAY 2

Step 1: Read a book called *Anh's Anger* to the students.¹

Step 2: Ask the class to think about a moment when they felt angry. Identify the emotion, identify the circumstances, try to picture the emotion. Maybe students write down what they are thinking about.

Step 3: Each child draws the emotion they felt in the situation they just thought about. (It's difficult for a child to talk to their anger. Using art can help children have a mental image of a being to talk to.)

Homework: Students watch the video "How to Let Anger Out" by Thích Nhất Hạnh.²



DAY 3

Step 1: Share a summary of the basic ideas of the video, "Taking Care of Anger" by Thích Nhất Hạnh.³

Step 2: Offer students a guided meditation to practise sitting with their anger, loving it, holding it like it's a baby (as shared in the video), and looking at it deeply.

Step 3: Students start a new drawing with the meditation, homework video, and the held anger in mind. They may draw their friend, anger.

Homework: Students practise seeing their emotions come up and talking to them in a kind but firm way in their everyday lives.

DAY 4

Step 1: Students discuss the homework of using the meditation practices to deal with strong emotions in real life—the difficulties and the joys.

Step 2: Students work on both their drawings (the initial anger drawing and anger as a friend).

Step 3: Students present their images and stories.

After I created the curriculum I wanted to share it. I wanted to see if what had helped me could be useful for other children. Working with Wake Up Schools and the wonderful Dr. Orlaith O’Sullivan, I offered these sessions to children between age five and fourteen from three different schools: the Tibetan Homes School, a school for Tibetan refugee children in the Himalayas; the Bajaj School for the Deaf, which offers free education to children with severe hearing disabilities; and Cambrian Hall, a school for middle-class, urban Indian children. Each group had a very different background and very different struggles. I wondered if the effect of the project would differ accordingly. I offered the sessions in a workshop style. My goal was to give something helpful to these children. I came away from the experience feeling very full. I have tried to describe what happened but have been unsuccessful. Instead of writing about my experience, I would like to share with you some of the drawings and stories I received after these sessions.

TIBETAN HOMES SCHOOL

In their happy, sad, fearful stories of the Tibetan children, their parents were always present. These children ranged from five to nine years old and all except one lived far away from their parents. These children’s parents had sent them away from Tibet for a better, more free life. The children missed their families terribly. Surprisingly, they didn’t seem to feel much of a connection with anger. I adapted the curriculum to be about the sadness they felt when they missed their families. It was incredibly powerful to be with these children.

STUDENT 1: Sometimes when I think of my parents I go to the bathroom and cry. Yesterday night I really missed them.

NS: Did you try to hug your sadness like the little boy did in the story?

STUDENT 1: Yes. [Quietly.]

CAMBRIAN HALL

The children in Cambrian Hall had a range of pains. Our discussions ranged from teasing and fights to death and bullying.

STUDENT 2: I feel angry when my younger sister disturbs me when I study.

NS: Do you think about why it disturbs you?

STUDENT 2: Hmm, maybe she wants to play with me? [Smiles a little.]

STUDENT 3: I get very angry and sad in my heart when my parents beat me. [Silence in the class.] I also feel angry when my brother beats me.

STUDENT 4: So do I.

BAJAJ SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

I had expected the deaf children to be the most unhappy, maybe to have feelings of insecurity or anger at the world for being so harsh on their disability. This was not the case at all. There was no resentment. Not one child in the deaf school, not one, mentioned their deafness or anything to do with it in a story of anger or sadness or fear. I found it particularly beautiful, working with the deaf children, to notice the way their emotions seemed much closer to the surface simply because instead of talking about how they were feeling they had to sign it. This impression was particularly strong when the children discussed their happy moments—it looked like they were dancing.

STUDENT 5: I feel happy when I get food, I feel sad when I finish my food, I feel angry when I wait for food. [A bit cheeky this one.]

STUDENT 6: I feel happy when my mother/sister/father/teacher/friend hugs me. [The number of children that talked about hugs was quite overwhelming.] I will hug my anger :)

This issue of *The Mindfulness Bell* is about Thầy's lineage. I started out this essay talking about how Thầy gave me a physical home in the form of Plum Village when I was a child. Eating lunch with him are some of my most cherished and love-filled memories. But what strikes me about Thầy is that he has the power to give children he has never met, children who have never set foot in Plum Village, that same love, and a home in themselves. When I was doing this project and writing this article, the question that kept coming up for me was: Did the workshop work? Truthfully, I am not sure. What I do know, as cheesy as it sounds, is that Thầy's lineage is in each of these children. His lineage is present every time they hug their anger or hold their sadness. And that is magical.

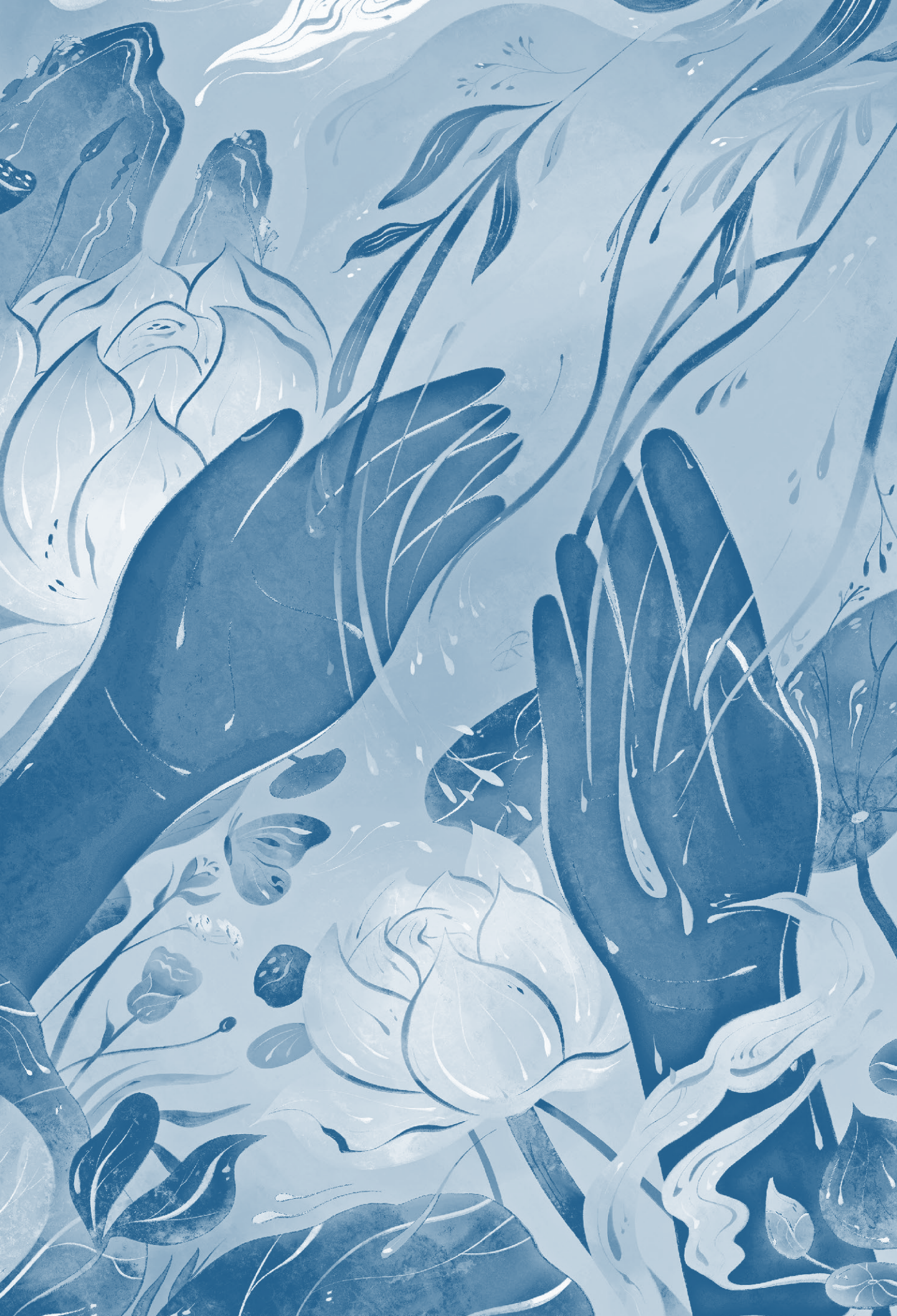
¹ Kinder Studios, 2020, "Story Time: Anh's Anger," YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7fLfnmvfBM>

² Plum Village, 2015, "How to let anger out | Thich Nhat Hanh answers questions," YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTF9xgqLLvI>

³ Plum Village, 2020, "Taking Care of Anger | Thich Nhat Hanh (short teaching video)," YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OvLOna5_1A

Nandini Seth is a twenty-two-year-old woman from India. She has been visiting Plum Village, France since she was a baby. To her Plum Village is home.





Practicing with The Four Noble Truths in the World

**An offering from ARISE¹: Dharma teacher
Marisela B. Gomez uses inspiration from
Thích Nhất Hạnh to show us how to
transform the suffering of
racial injustice.**

A lineage both traces back to our ancestors and continues forward through our descendants. In reflecting on how the fourfold Sangha is a continuation of our dear Thầy, we see, too, how Thầy's teachings can be traced back to the Buddha and the foundational Four Noble Truths. There is the recognition that there is suffering, there are causes of suffering, there is a way to end the causes of suffering, and this way entails seeing and understanding things clearly as they are so we may transform the causes of suffering into sources of happiness.

Thầy is known to the world as one of the founders of socially Engaged Buddhism because he saw and taught clearly that these Noble Truths are the same in our daily interpersonal interactions and in the systemic social inequities that lead to racism, war, and other oppressions. Inspired by Thầy's teaching and example, ARISE Core Group member and Dharma teacher Marisela B. Gomez penned "Practicing with the Four Noble Truths in the World," which invites practice with the Noble Truths through the lens of the intersectional suffering that arises from racial and social inequities. We offer this teaching as a continuation of Thầy's efforts to assure a Buddhism for everyone, no matter where they are located.

The Four Noble Truths was used as the framework for ARISE's recent training entitled Race: A Dharma Door. Thầy transitioned from his body while we were practicing with the Fourth Noble Truth, reminding us that his legacy, when practiced, is the path away from suffering. We are grateful to our beloved teacher for teaching us how to practice with the Four Noble Truths in the world.

With deep gratitude,

The ARISE Core Group:

Antoinette González

Kim Fleisher

Lori A. Perine

Marisela B. Gomez

Renita Wong

Victoria Mausisa

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH: UNDERSTAND THAT THE SUFFERING OF RACIAL INJUSTICE EXISTS

If we were to practice with the suffering in the world, we would be invited to acknowledge and understand this truth and the different ways it manifests—its history and its legacy. We can acknowledge the history of the US, a country built through racial oppression of enslaved African Americans, Native Indigenous peoples who inhabited this land before the colonists arrived, and other people of color who migrated from the Global South, such as Asians, Latinx, and Pacific Islanders. The legacy of this history continues today, in different forms since the 1600s when the first enslaved Black person was brought to the US. The nobility of acknowledging truths that lead us to our liberation is our path. The pain of this suffering, experienced by both BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color), and non-POC can be acknowledged and embraced: “Hello my trauma, anger, sadness, impatience, and hurt of racism; I know you are there and I will do my best to take good care of you; I will not shy away from you and cover you up. I will learn skillful ways to recognize how and where you manifest, the effects on my body and mind, and how this pain affects others, and slowly heal you.”

My dear body and mind, I know that the generational trauma
of racial injustice still lives in my body and mind;
I hold you dearly, with love and tenderness, and release you
to mother earth for transformation and healing.

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH: ABANDON THE PATH LEADING TO THE SUFFERING OF RACIAL INJUSTICE

When we take time to understand the history of racial oppression, we begin to understand why the inequity between whites and people of color exists today and can practice abandoning this path. For example, we understand that enslaved African Americans were exploited to cultivate the land and to labor in all sectors of society to provide great wealth to plantation owners, who in turn participated in an economy that enriched white people in all sectors of society. The effect of individual and collective greed fueling and leading to aversion/hatred of people of color—mediated through a collective delusion of race and class-based inferiority, superiority, and equality complexes—fabricated the ideology and structures of the US and beyond. This fabricated society assured that there was no opportunity for African Americans to own land, to attend schools, to be paid for labor, to receive appropriate medical care, to live in adequate and safe housing, etc, etc. This tremendous disadvantage for African Americans and Native Indigenous peoples (who were displaced from their land) for the past four hundred plus years—and other people of color in subsequent years—has resulted in the greatest wealth and health gap between whites and African Americans—and BIPOC. For example, the life expectancy in neighborhoods of

low-income Black people can be ten to fifteen years less than higher income white neighborhoods. This continues to occur across the US in every city. These structural inequities were enforced against populations of people based on their race and class. This violence caused pain and suffering, traumatizing African Americans, Native Indigenous peoples, and other BIPOC. Racial oppression causes trauma in our body and mind. Hatred is an energy that diminishes the energy of love. No one benefits from hatred, and everyone requires healing. We can take care of this suffering: “My dear body and mind, I know that the generational trauma of racial injustice still lives in my body and mind; I hold you dearly, with love and tenderness, and release you to Mother Earth for transformation and healing. I know that the effects of such violence still live in my body as a descendant of the oppressed and of the oppressor and I acknowledge this pain in me and will take good care of you. Because we are interconnected, the searing of the whip against a Black body is my scar today; I hold it with tenderness and release. There is no separation: as my heart heals and the scars diminish in this oppressed/oppressor body, a heart heals and a scar diminishes in the oppressor/oppressed body. I make the determination to continuously practice abandoning the ways I have internalized and continue to externalize this legacy of violence in my thoughts, speech, and actions.”

I make the determination to realize racial healing and equity in my thoughts, words, and actions; I will not be afraid to acknowledge this pain when it arises, take good care of it, and realize freedom from this pain in each moment.

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH: REALIZE THE END TO THIS SUFFERING OF RACIAL INJUSTICE

As we turn toward this suffering of racial injustice and heal the wounds in our body and mind, we begin to heal this trauma. The release and realization of this suffering in our body and mind heals the fear and anxiety of continued racial trauma. Even while we might continue to experience racial injustice or intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate racial injustice, we meet these new experiences with a heart and mind that is better able to respond. Our response and suffering will not be motivated by an old trauma/second arrow² but instead can address and take good care of the first arrow: the acute suffering of a new form of racial injustice. We will be able to practice right action and take good care of new forms of racial oppression, thereby preventing new traumas and scars from forming. “I make the determination to realize racial healing and equity in my thoughts, words, and actions; I will not be afraid to acknowledge this pain when it arises, take good care of it, and realize freedom from this pain in each moment. I recognize that I must stop and find stillness in order to realize the end of this suffering in each moment and prevent new suffering from developing.”

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH: DEVELOP A PATH LEADING TO THE END OF RACIAL INJUSTICE

This path is our path of understanding and healing. We practice the Noble Eightfold Path by resolving to not continue to perpetuate racial injustice, neither by accepting it nor producing it. Our right view of racial injustice moves us toward right actions of ending existing racial injustice as we fearlessly identify it occurring in us and around us—in our personal interactions and in the structures that actively and silently perpetuate these actions. We practice, motivated by right effort, to prevent new forms of racial injustice and do not participate in livelihoods that lead to racial injustice. Our right mindfulness and concentration allow us to notice when we are participating in thought, speech, and action that perpetuate racial injustice, inside us and around us. This path leads to the cessation of racial injustice. “I am determined to stop and find stillness so I can be aware of and address new forms of racial injustice as they appear, prevent new forms from appearing, and cultivate a heart that heals and understands so I am not affected by the inferiority, superiority, or equality complexes that easily support the enactment and suffering of racial injustice.”

I am determined to stop and find stillness so I can be aware of and address new forms of racial injustice as they appear, prevent new forms from appearing, and cultivate a heart that heals and understands....

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS OF RACIAL INJUSTICE IN DAILY LIFE

The Four Noble Truths guide us on our path of spiritual practice. Directly applying these truths to the suffering of racial injustice is our path of liberation from this injustice. For example, when the president of the US disparages fellow government leaders based on the color of their skin, how could we use The Four Noble Truths to take care of this suffering? As a person of color, I first would acknowledge that this is painful, for me and for others like me. I can acknowledge the fear I feel in my body that there are people like him, in the twenty-first century in the US, who still are emboldened to publicly violate and traumatize me and others like me. This is a truth and it hurts me and I hold fear in me for this—this is a fear that is alive: that if I walk down the street in the midst of a group of white people who have internalized racial superiority, I can be physically, verbally, or emotionally attacked. After acknowledging my fear I would practice to abandon any new triggering of feeling worthless and inferior that this violence might have initiated in me and take good care of old feelings of worthlessness and inferiority that may have been watered by this president and his supporters. Unhealed or unattended old wounds of racial trauma become the second arrow that could easily and quietly take me down old roads of pain. I must remain heedful and practice to let go of these feelings again and again and, through right effort, action, mindfulness, and concentration, to bring myself to clarity that this new arrow by this white male is not my truth to take on. Practicing with the Five

Precepts, I maintain a solid base of mindfulness that provides compassion for myself and others during times of difficulty. I can understand the making of a president (the causes—structures and behaviors—and conditions—ideology, beliefs, experiences, personality—that led to this US-born, English speaking, Christian, able-bodied, wealthy, heterosexual, white male’s understanding and behavior) who is moved to act in violence and model racial oppression that causes suffering for himself and others. I can also act outwardly to organize with others to end violent racial policies against immigrants of color from the Global South through petitions, protests, and building a powerful base of people ready to respond skillfully to this violence. I can support others who are organizing voters and send energy to other campaigns that are addressing the broader policies and procedures that allow the rich to buy political power, evade equitable distribution to the tax base that assures all of our human rights, and assure continued wealth and health inequality. The Four Noble Truths, practiced in daily life, wake us up to racial, intersectional, and social equity.

Initially published on ARISESangha.org, September 24, 2021.

¹ARISE Sangha (Awakening through Race, Intersectionality, and Social Equity) is a community of Plum Village mindfulness practitioners and monastics who come together to heal the wounds of racial injustice and social inequity, beginning by looking deeply within ourselves and using the energy of compassion, understanding, and love in action. See more at ARISESangha.org.

² In Buddhism the ‘second arrow’ refers to the suffering caused by the mind’s reaction to a current pain or suffering, the ‘first arrow.’ This second arrow may or may not be connected to the current harm being caused.

Marisela Gomez, True Manifestation of Reverence, is a member of the Baltimore and Beyond Mindfulness Community for activists and people of color. She is involved in equitable and sustainable community rebuilding and enjoys writing and noticing the movement of natural bodies of water.



WE ARE THE CONTINUATION



Photo by Alda Ngô

Ancestral Roots

Alda Ngô shares how Thích Nhất Hạnh helps her to transform intergenerational trauma and racial injustice and to honour her blood lineage as a first-generation Vietnamese Canadian.

When I was little, my family made offerings to the Buddha and our ancestors on an altar, inviting them to visit us on special occasions.

As a first-generation Vietnamese Canadian, I never understood what this ritual meant. None of my school friends' families were inviting dead relatives to eat with them, so it embarrassed me. Yet I enjoyed how it brought my family together.

My family escaped the American war in Vietnam and settled in Edmonton as refugees. Starting from scratch, we faced many stressors while acclimating to cold winters, learning English, and finding our place in a new culture. My parents worked hard to raise us kids while sponsoring family members to join us in the safety and opportunity of Canada, all in the context of a Vietnamese diaspora. I've inherited many wonderful seeds from my mother and father—among them courage, determination, and resilience.

My family will forever be grateful to the Christian family who sponsored us. They supported us both materially and spiritually. Their kindness and generosity nourished us in a time of uncertainty and scarcity, but the relationship was complicated.

Every week, we joined other refugee families on a school bus that brought us to our sponsor family's church. My family was open and grateful for this kindness.

Then one time, our sponsor came inside and saw our Buddha on the altar. With concern, she shared her view that the Buddha was a false God and that it should be removed. This Buddha statue was precious to my mother in many ways. It had been given to her as an offering of hope and protection at the refugee camp by someone who had little to give. The impact of our sponsor's actions were not what she intended.

My parents were vulnerably caught between not wanting to be ungrateful and wanting to honour their root wisdom tradition. A language barrier made everything harder, and there was a lot of suffering. They couldn't agree to remove the Buddha, putting our family at risk, and we still carry anger and sadness from this encounter.

Although this happened before I was born, my body holds the painful memory. Ethnic, cultural, and spiritual oppression can trigger a strong activation in my body. When I'm faced with such experiences, my body associates it with threat to safety and my sympathetic nervous system fires—chest tightening, jaw tensing, heart racing, and face reddening with heat.

Thoughts that show up are, "How dare they? Who do they think they are? Do they think they're better or more entitled?" Rage, insult, and powerlessness arise. I feel alone and against an offender. Seeds of violence are watered, and I want to yell and fight to teach them they're wrong. Or I freeze and avoid the conflict altogether.

I continue to practise recognizing the activation as a bell of mindfulness to stop and return to my body, noticing bodily sensations and resting my attention where there's less charge. I often find more stability in the sensations of my breath or in the points of pressure in the soles of my feet. When I'm able to anchor my attention in these spots, the activation slowly decreases and I touch calmness. I know that when I'm more calm, I'm better able to see clearly and respond skillfully.

When the activation is overwhelming, I contact someone who can help me feel more stable. Sometimes I'm successful, sometimes I'm not. I've learned that touching nourishing elements like my son's laughter or the warmth of the sun on my cheek can help increase my capacity to be with difficulty.

I'm grateful for the conditions that support my mindfulness practice, and I'm aware that this isn't available to everyone.

Despite having been divorced for twenty years, my parents returned to Vietnam with my sister and me in 2005. It was painful to revisit traumatic memories. During this trip, we were standing at an intersection when my father shared a new story about having fallen off his bike there because a bomb had gone off. It was hard to experience traumatic memories while navigating our family's collective habit energies while in Vietnam together, but our journey was also healing.

I first encountered Thầy by chance during this trip, in a small temple in Huế. He was speaking to a local crowd in Vietnamese about healing war wounds. The familiar language sounded like my relatives' voices, and it particularly sounded like my father's. Hearing Thầy teach about nondiscrimination and interbeing in a language that I associated with suffering was transformative and I couldn't hold back the tears.

Now I'm an adult with my own family, and it wasn't until Thầy transitioned that I set up an ancestral altar in my home.

Not long after Thầy died, my father unexpectedly passed away. In our grieving, we placed a photo of my dad on our altar as well. We make offerings to the Buddha, Thầy, and my dad to remember them and to express our love and gratitude for what we've inherited from them. Without our spiritual and blood ancestors, we would not be where we are now.

The altar reminds us that our ancestors are present in us, and we honour them by watering the wonderful seeds we've inherited from them. I see that I'm the continuation of my spiritual father, Thầy, and also of my blood father.

In my grieving, I see that while many of my dad's habit energy seeds have died with his body, my son and I have inherited some of them. Like many refugees, my dad persevered despite undiagnosed post-traumatic stress. We're grateful for his endurance, sacrifice, and generosity. I recognize his seeds of happiness, creativity, and humour in us, as well as seeds of intolerance, pride, and violence. With mindfulness, I practise choosing which seeds to water.

My family escaped the physical war, but they still brought many parts of it with them to Canada. Bombs exploded outside in Vietnam; in Canada, the pressures of oppression, violence, and poverty manifested as internal explosions.

Dad wasn't able to make peace with our sponsor, but his peaceful legacy can continue through us.

I love Thầy's teaching that when meeting someone, we're not just meeting them as an individual, but rather as their entire lineage, and we too represent all of our ancestors, who are present in us. As best as I can, I aspire to contribute to Sangha eyes and ears—creating

safe spaces to practise skillful sharing and listening without discrimination so that deep collective understanding can heal all lineages and intergenerational traumas.

When we offer a land ancestral acknowledgment at our Sangha gatherings in Edmonton, we also offer acknowledgment and gratitude to our spiritual ancestors—the Buddha, Thầy, and the Plum Village lineage. We acknowledge this lineage as part of the ancestral stream of the Buddha and as a continuation of Thầy’s efforts to renew Buddhism, preserve its relevance, build a beloved community, and share the healing he realised in exile.

As somebody who shares the intergenerational trauma from which this lineage has grown, I feel it’s important to remember and honour these roots, particularly as Thầy is becoming an ancestral teacher. His body no longer holds this acknowledgement, so the Sangha body must.

I continue to grieve for the impermanence of Thầy and my dad while having gratitude that they returned me to my roots. I’m inspired by Thầy’s encouragement to look deeply into our roots in order to better understand ourselves and one another.

Thầy said that if we are connected to our roots, we will know what direction to grow in.

Alda Xuân-Mai Ngô, Chân Khai Truyền/True Unfolding Transmission (pronouns she/her), has been practising in the Plum Village Tradition since 2005, and she became a member of the Order of Interbeing in 2019. Her family took refuge in Canada after escaping the American war in Vietnam, and she is a first-generation Vietnamese Canadian. She is a co-founder of the Going As A River Sangha in Edmonton, Alberta. She practises as a Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture, as well as a mindfulness facilitator and researcher. She loves spending time in nature with her partner, son, and puppy.



As a River of Light

**Alisha Solan, after caring for her dying partner,
experiences deeper insight into continuation.**

Recently, I experienced a profound shift in my relationship to Thầy's teachings on continuation. "No Birth, No Death" was the topic of one of the earliest talks I heard Thầy give in person. After that, I continued to come and practice at Deer Park Monastery, and this teaching was very present in my life. Yet for a long time, I understood teachings about continuation and ancestors primarily in terms of generations and lineage. I honored my parents, grandparents, and teachers (especially Thầy) as my ancestors and recognized myself as their continuation. I also honored my students, nieces, nephews, and godchildren as my descendants and saw them as my continuation. I experienced a new level of insight into the nature of continuation when my life partner was dying of cancer in the fall of 2022.

I was present with Jade through her illness and journey until she died in our home just before the autumn equinox. On the day before she passed, we received a mailing from the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation thanking us for our financial contributions. The mailing included the "A Cloud Never Dies" bookmark with a quote from Thầy. That morning, Jade was in and out of consciousness. I had been singing and reading to her, so I read the quote aloud:

A cloud never dies...

*When conditions are sufficient, a cloud
transforms into rain, snow or hail.*

*The cloud has never been born and will
never die.*

This insight into signlessness and

interbeing

*helps us recognize that all lives continue in
different forms.*

*Nothing is created, nothing is destroyed,
everything is in transformation.*

*There is no real death because there is
always a continuation.*

As I read, a deeper insight into continuation arose in me. Jade and I had been together for more than half of my life, and I was aware that my sense of self was completely intertwined with Jade and with being part of a happy and healthy couple. Now all that was changing. For months, my life had orbited around loving care and being present for Jade in her illness, and now it was clear that her body was transitioning out of life as we knew it. I wasn't sure who I would be on the other side of her transformation. As I read the quote, I spontaneously sensed at a much deeper level—less mental and more visceral—that even though we are of the same generation, I am also Jade's continuation. Our thirty years together have shaped me, and we deeply inter-are. I became curious about how Jade would continue to manifest in me moving forward.

I realized that soon my caretaking responsibilities would be transformed. Not into nothingness, but into taking care of Jade through taking care of her continuation in me. During Jade's illness, I had been very mindful to take good care of myself in order to stay healthy and available as her caregiver. In that moment of insight, I made the commitment to keep caring for myself because I could see that

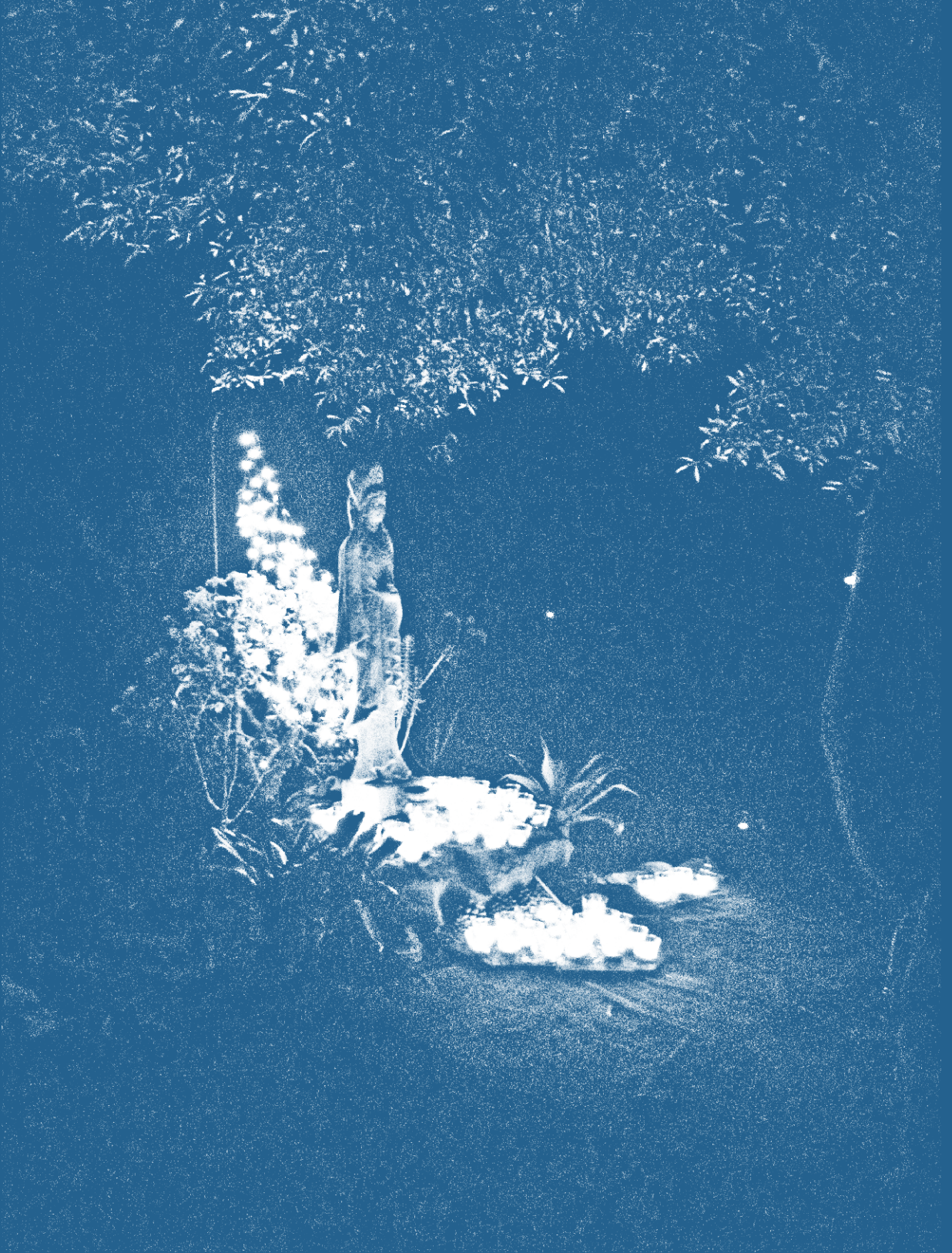


Photo by Jade Solan

even after her transformation, I would still be caregiver of her continuation. So in caring for myself I also take care of Jade. Even during grief's more difficult moments, that insight has been a comfort and a motivation for loving self-care.

In our time together, Jade taught me many things. In particular, I would like to share one insight she taught me a few months before she died. While I was away one day, Jade had listened to an online recording of Thầy talking about the Avalokiteshvara chant. At that time, she was experiencing a great deal of pain from the cancer. She explained that Thầy spoke of the Avalokiteshvara chant as particularly powerful in helping to alleviate pain. So she had tried the chant and was surprised at how much it helped when so many other things had not. "The Venerable was right," she said. "It is important to practice, because life is short and death comes unexpectedly." She pointed out that once one is ill or weak and suffering, it is harder to benefit from practices that require a lot of effort, such as a new or undeveloped practice. Many other mantras, visualizations, and practices did not have the "same juice." They were not as helpful as those she already knew more intimately and experientially in her body.

The Avalokiteshvara chant was rooted deeply in her body and memory from our years as part of the Deer Park Sangha. It also carried the beneficial collective energy of the Sangha. We

usually attended Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve events at Deer Park, and part of the festivities included a candlelit walk up the mountain to the Avalokiteshvara statue in the Circle Garden. In the garden, the Sangha would stand and sing the Avalokiteshvara chant as we placed our candles in front of the statue. It was a beautiful and moving communal ceremony.

On the day when Jade chanted at home, she said, it did not feel empty or alien as some of the other things she had tried. Instead, as she chanted, she could touch the ancestral stream of all those who have chanted to Avalokiteshvara. And she could feel the continuation of the energy and presence of the Sangha in her body from the memory seeded and nourished on all those nights walking up the mountain together, going as a river of light to sing before Avalokiteshvara as part of the Sangha body.

Namo'valokiteshvaraya.

You can listen to the chant on the Plum Village YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZkjX_c4hm4



Alisha Solan, pictured left with Jade, Generous Creativity of the Heart (pronouns she/her), has been practicing in the Plum Village tradition since 2009. She lives in San Diego, California, US, and regularly attends retreats and Days of Mindfulness at Deer Park Monastery. Alisha is a professor who teaches communication studies to help students be more mindful in their communication and relationships.

Jade Solan, pictured right, Grounding Breeze of the Heart (pronouns she/her), wrote poetry during retreats at Deer Park Monastery before her death in the fall of 2022. She received transmission of The Five Mindfulness Trainings in 2013.



Venerable Dishes

Enter the scene:	Suddenly a junior monk appears.	In noble silence,
Noble silence	He has been working,	The Venerable's dishes transfer
Dish line	making breakfast.	gently
After breakfast	He has his blue work apron	from the junior monk's hands
Zen retreat	tied over his brown robes.	to those of the junior nun.
		The junior monk returns to the
		kitchen.
The Venerable Zen Master	He sees the Venerable	
Senior monk	Waiting in the dish line.	
Ordination teacher		The junior nun is in the dish line
Steps behind me	He bows to the Venerable	Behind me
In the line	and extends his palms, open up.	Holding her plate, cup and
To hand rinse		spoon.
Morning's used	The Venerable slowly transfers	
Plates, cups and spoons	His plate, cup and spoon	I am amused.
	to the junior monk's open	I turn and bow to her.
	hands	Eye contact.
I am a simple beginner		Smiles.
A laywoman, and	Then smiles politely	I say quietly, "I will wash them."
I know who he is:	The Venerable gently walks away	
a Zen master	with powerful firm steps.	
Even though he wears	He has been relieved of the	She gently transfers the
the plain brown robes	dishline.	Venerable monk's
of any ordinary monk		plate, cup and spoon
		to my care.
I am alert	The junior monk wants to	
The thought passes,	Go back to his kitchen	I am in the dish line
The Venerable is behind me	duties.	Handwashing the instruments
Holding his dish		of the Venerable Zen Master's
I should offer to wash his dishes	He solicits the junior nun	breakfast
for him.	Now appeared standing behind me	I smile and observe
	in the dish line	He has eaten grapefruit.
In the silence, shyness comes	Eye contact.	I scrape the empty peels
I wait in the space	Smiles.	into the compost bin.
uncertain. My	Bows.	
offer unextended,		
stuck, hanging between thought		
and behavior		

PLUM VILLAGE AND THE PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

SISTER LỰC NGHIÊM AND
SISTER TRÌ NGHIÊM

The Parliament of the World's Religions (PoWR) is a gathering to cultivate friendship and mutual understanding among the world's spiritual traditions to achieve a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world. Its roots lie in the 1893 World's Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, US, where the historic first convening of the PoWR created a global platform for interfaith dialog and engagement.

The connection between Plum Village and the PoWR began in 1993 when Thầy, along with other spiritual leaders, contributed to Towards A Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration,¹ a powerful statement of unity in our increasingly fractured world. It reminds us that religious leaders today have a responsibility to their congregations to transform violence, oppression, discrimination, and war. In a virtual livestream in 2009, Thầy presented The Five Mindfulness Trainings as a viable, nonsectarian proposal for a global ethic at the PoWR in Melbourne, Australia. Now, when religion can be a more divisive than unifying force and young people increasingly identify as atheist or spiritual but not religious, the Plum Village tradition feels built for these times.

Invited by the Elijah Interfaith Institute, we joined a group of twenty religious leaders convening in Chicago in August 2023. We were honored to bring the teachings of Thầy and Plum Village to the PoWR again. Our contributions included offering the practice of Beginning Anew with the Earth during the Climate Repentance Ceremony, led by Sister Trì Nghiêm, and another plenary session, Friendship Across Faiths Initiative, where Sister Lực Nghiêm spoke on the love we need to have in our hearts for dialogue to be possible, sharing examples and experiences of friendship from her peace pilgrimage to Ukraine in spring 2022.

We came together to explore what the notion of “religious leader” means to us and were all asked to write a paper about the religious or spiritual leader who most inspires us. These two papers are our responses to that question.

¹ Available at parliamentofreligions.org

The Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Plum Village Community of Engaged Buddhism

Sister Trì Nghiêm describes her experience of Thầy as a truly great spiritual leader, and highlights the importance of embodiment of the practice of mindfulness as a foundation for true spiritual greatness.

A TRUE SPIRITUAL MASTER INSPIRES A TRULY SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

I heard of Plum Village long before I had heard of Thích Nhất Hạnh. When I first went to Plum Village, it was to practice with the community, not to meet the master. What I did not realize at the time was that the Sangha and the master are the same thing. They inter-are. The term “interbeing” was coined by Thầy to describe the interdependent nature of all that is. To be is to *inter-be*. We cannot be by ourselves alone. This central Buddhist teaching on dependent co-arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) underpins all Thầy’s teachings. This is because that is; if this is not, that is not. If we look deeply, we can find the teacher in the community and the community in the teacher. If we take our teacher, Thầy, out of Plum Village, it is no longer Plum Village, and if we take the Sangha out of the teacher, then Thích Nhất Hạnh is not who he is either. They rely on each other to manifest.

Just as a flower is made of non-flower elements such as rain and sun and soil, we, too, are made exclusively of non-self elements. No matter how hard we try, we cannot find a separate self. Thích Nhất Hạnh is made entirely of non-Thích Nhất Hạnh elements: his parents and ancestors, his culture and education, the experiences he has had in his life, and his students and worldwide community of practitioners.

“The bread in my hands is the body of the cosmos.”

—THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

When I first went to Plum Village in the early 2000s, I witnessed something truly awe-inspiring. Watching the Plum Village monks and nuns walk up to chant before Thầy gave a Dharma talk was like watching a wide river in summer slowly advancing. There was no turbulence, only the faintest ripples in the water as the monks and nuns mindfully made their way down each side of the hall towards the stage. Relaxed, upright, unhurried individuals wearing long brown robes merged into a collective stream, a seemingly aimless, gentle flow of water. This was my first impression of mindfulness, my first experience witnessing the truly sacred.

The hall was filled with almost one thousand people, and yet there was a peace, a calm, a sense of oneness. One thousand people practicing mindful breathing is like a still, deep ocean. The energy is palpable. There is something in the air. Wherever there is the energy of mindfulness, we are in the presence of something truly awe-inspiring, truly sacred.

“Peace is every step”

—THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

When Thầy came into the hall, or when he joined the circle before walking meditation, he was barely noticed—his quiet, mindful energy meant he hardly made a ripple in the air, his steps barely made a sound. One day, when the community was singing before walking meditation, I became aware of Thầy’s hand resting on my shoulder. He was right behind me, a benevolent smile on his face. Why didn’t I notice him approaching? Thầy moved through a crowd, went in and out, appeared and disappeared without a sound, without a disturbance, without a stir. When we truly *embody* mindfulness the way Thầy did, we are in complete harmony with ourselves and the world around us. There is no disturbance. We are aware of our body, our feelings, our mind, and of the objects of mind.¹ Body and mind are one, anchored peacefully in the present moment. This is the miracle of true presence, the miracle of mindfulness. In moments like this, we touch the wonders of life; we touch peace. We are one with ourselves and with the entire cosmos.

“Just the way he opens the door and enters a room demonstrates his understanding. He is a true monk.”²

—THOMAS MERTON

These moments are what Thầy calls “touching nirvana,” a moment of enlightenment. He reminds us that nirvana is not something in the distant future, not in a distant place, and not a permanent state. We can touch it right here and right now. This is what makes Thầy’s teachings so appealing and accessible—the assurance that anyone can touch nirvana at any moment. With every mindful breath, every mindful step, we can touch the Pure Land of the Buddha, the Kingdom of God, Heaven

on Earth. The wonders of life become available to us. As Thầy said, “The Kingdom of God is available to us, the question is if we are available to it.”

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF EMBODIMENT

Thầy walked the talk. To walk behind Thầy was to walk in another dimension—one of awe and wonder, peace and joy. Walking mindfully in his footsteps, time seemed to slow down, and everything came to life: the birds in the trees, dewdrops on green blades of grass, the blossoms of flowering trees. His presence and mindfulness generated healing, calming energy around him. I have never seen Thầy hurry, look stressed, or be unmindful. He was at peace—a master of awareness of the breath and body; all his movements were in mindfulness. His mind was clear, his energy calm.

I was struck by the way Thầy and the members of the community knew how to cultivate peace and joy. I observed their easy smiles, their joyful laughter, the brightness of their faces and eyes. They were aware of their footsteps, could follow their breathing, and stop their racing minds. They came back to the present moment to recognize what was there: the many conditions for happiness but also the suffering within. I wanted to be like that.

Thầy teaches us how to recognize and embrace our suffering tenderly, like a mother, allowing it to transform naturally. Relaxing our body and following the breath is the gateway to restoring peace and calm in body and mind, the prerequisite for peace and for seeing a person or situation clearly. Not letting our strong emotions cloud our view is the ground for Right Action (one aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path)—knowing what to do and what not to do to help the situation.

Thầy realized that all of us—Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike—need to learn these skills for true peace to be possible. As a result of this insight, Thầy integrated mindfulness practices into all activities of daily life so that everyone can practice, regardless of faith, religion, or background.

“I only have one style of walking, and that is walking meditation.”

—THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

Every step is made in mindfulness no matter where we go—to the restroom, from the car to the office, shopping, at the airport etc. “I can do this,” Thầy said and encouraged all his students to do the same. Thầy once handed the entire assembled community small business cards with “100%” stamped on them to remind us to invest 100% of our energy into becoming 100% mindful 100% of the time.

THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS IS KEY

When Thầy discovered the teachings from Source Buddhism³ on *The Full Awareness of Breathing*⁴ and *The Four Establishments of Mindfulness*,⁵ his life and practice changed forever.⁶ These foundational teachings on awareness of the breath and awareness of the body, feelings, mind, and objects of mind were crucial to Thầy’s understanding of mindfulness and its role in healing and transformation, in gaining insight into ourselves and the nature of reality. They were the key to touching true peace and happiness. Thầy would continue to teach these sutras for the rest of his life, impressing on his students the importance of *embodying* the practice.

Only when we are embodied, when we are aware of what is happening in our body, our feelings, our mind, and our perceptions of the world around us, can we truly be the kind of force for positive change in the world that has a chance to succeed.

I practice daily to increase my awareness of my breath, my steps, and my body with all its different parts—from the cellular level (mitochondria, neurons, epithelial cells) to the organs and musculoskeletal system, the brain, and nervous system. I do the same with my feelings, my thoughts and states of mind, and my perceptions of the world around me. I become familiar with them, name them, learn to relax my body, calm down my strong emotions, and continue to question my perceptions. Then I help others to do the same.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AS A NECESSARY FOUNDATION FOR ACTIVISM

National and international politics, economic, social, racial, educational, public health and environmental policies have their part to play, but mindfulness is essential if we are to know what actions to take to address extremism, discrimination, violence, fear, and degradation of the planet. Thầy taught us that knowing how to recognize and take care of strong emotions like anger, hatred, and fear is imperative if we are to cultivate Right View, nondiscrimination, non-fear, understanding, and compassion.

“Man is not our enemy.
Our enemy is hatred, anger,
ignorance and fear.”⁷

—THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

We need to know how to calm ourselves so we can see the situation more clearly, correct our wrong perceptions, and know what appropriate action to take.

HOW DO I CONTINUE THẦY’S TEACHINGS?

As a Plum Village Dharma teacher, I help carry Thầy’s teachings into the future. I share the practice of mindfulness with others, whether Buddhist or not. These are life skills not limited to a particular religion, culture, or faith. I train myself every day in the practice of mindfulness. I don’t rely on Thầy’s word alone, I use discernment based on my lived experience. Just as the Buddha admonished his students,⁸ Thầy also encouraged us not to blindly believe what he says but to test it with our own experiences, to “practice intelligently.”

“Are you sure?”

—THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

As a teacher I can only share what I have realized. I offer my understanding born of experience. Everything else is just hypothetical, theoretical, or speculative. Thầy encouraged us not to engage in metaphysical or speculative discourse, but to keep the practices concrete, updating them as needed to remain relevant to our time and applicable for all.

Inspired by Thầy, I question my perceptions and I encourage others to do the same. We know that the subject of perception and the object of perception arise at the same time. What we see depends on what is in our consciousness. If we have strong seeds of fear in our store consciousness, we see danger. If we have love in our hearts, we see friends.

“[Thích Nhất Hạnh] shows us the connection between personal, inner peace, and peace on earth.”

—HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

THE WAY OUT IS IN

As religious leaders, teachers, and spiritual practitioners, it is our duty to practice. We need to recognize, embrace, and transform our suffering, heal our wounds, and cultivate love, understanding, acceptance, and compassion for ourselves so that

we can then cultivate love, understanding, and compassion for others. We embody the practice so we can help others do the same. I feel this is the best contribution to the world I can make, and all my efforts are towards this end. This is how I bring Thầy into the future. By practicing mindfulness, I do my part to contribute to a collective awakening, one heart and mind at a time. This gives me hope and my life a sense of meaning and purpose.

If we all practice like this, Thầy’s legacy will live on. Like the cloud that becomes rain, it may change form, but it can never die.

Sister Trì Nghiêm/True Holding (pronouns she/her) is a Plum Village Dharma teacher who has been living and practicing in Magnolia Grove Monastery, Mississippi, US, since 2019. Ordained by Thầy in Plum Village, France, in 2009, she received the Lamp of Transmission in 2018. Born and raised in Australia, she lived almost thirty years in Switzerland before moving to Plum Village to ordain with Thích Nhất Hạnh and his Community of Engaged Buddhism. Sister Trì Nghiêm has been editing Thầys books with Parallax Press since 2011. She loves connecting with people and caring for all animals and our precious planet.



Religious leaders at PoWR in Chicago,
August 2023; photo courtesy of Sister
Lực Nghiêm



¹ Discourse on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 10, <https://plumvillage.org/library/sutras/discourse-on-the-four-establishments-of-mindfulness>.

² Thomas Merton, 1966, “Nhat Hanh is my Brother,” Plum Village. <https://plumvillage.org/thomas-mertons-words-on-thich-nhat-hanh>

³ Source Buddhism refers to Theravada, the Way of the Elders.

⁴ Ānāpānasati Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 118

⁵ Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 10

⁶ Thầy was introduced to the practice of mindful breathing and walking from a text he read while still a novice at the Báo Quốc Buddhist Institute, 1946-49. The

Minor Stopping and Looking Deeply by Master Zhiyi of the Tiantai School became the basis for Thầy's practice of mindfulness. Thầy applied this practice of awareness of the breath and steps to heal himself from his serious illness in the late 1950s. He realized that counting his steps rather than the breath was an effective way to stay relaxed and focused, and not think about anything else. Later, while teaching at a university in Paris in the early 1970s, Thầy had access to the full sutras and was able to study them in depth.

⁷ Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2019, “Recommendation,” Plum Village. <https://plumvillage.org/articles/recommendation/>

⁸ Kesamutti Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 3.65

The Next Buddha is the Community, Not an Individual

Sister Lực Nghiêm answers the question: How can a mindful living community play a role in spiritual leadership, and how can it respond to the multiple crises of our time as an example for change?

“One Buddha is not enough.
We need many Buddhas.”

—THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH’S SPEECH
ADDRESSING THE 2009 POWR IN
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT A COMMUNITY INSTEAD OF A RELIGIOUS LEADER?

Our teacher, Thích Nhất Hạnh, always told us that as Buddhist practitioners, our individual career is the career of the Sangha, which is the work of spreading the Dharma, the teaching of love and understanding, through our daily actions of body, speech, and mind.

Thầy used to say, “People do not benefit from my talks alone; they benefit from the collective energy of the Sangha. This is why I only accept invitations to speak if I can bring my Sangha along with me.”

Thầy alone wouldn’t have been able to reach out to millions of people without his community. Building community was at the heart of his work.

The same is true for the Buddha, who went to look for the five spiritual friends who had been practicing asceticism with him before. Right after

Shakyamuni Buddha reached full enlightenment, he gave his first teaching, Turning the Wheel of Dhamma (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta), in the Deer Park near Varanasi to his former five companions. From there, more and more people joined and followed him, a development that continues today.

COMMUNITY LIFE AS A MODEL FOR PEACEMAKING

Brotherhood, sisterhood, and siblinghood are the most important things in our practice and community life. The ability to live in harmony with others is paramount.

“The greatest talent is to know how
to live in harmony with others.”

—THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

Plum Village, France, a monastic and lay residential community, has been a living community cultivating peace, harmony, and healing (collective and individual) since its inception in 1982.¹ We have witnessed that when arriving on the grounds of Plum Village (or in one of our mindfulness prac-

tice centers around the world), people instantly feel something shift in their bodies and minds.

Thanks to the collective energy of mindfulness generated over the last forty-one years through simple yet very powerful practices, Plum Village visitors benefit directly. Integrated in subtle ways, this energy of peace and gentle awareness of each moment helps us to touch and recognize what is happening in our deeper layer of consciousness.

When as a community we commit to practicing walking meditation, following our breath, slowing down, and stopping with the sound of the bell, we develop a powerful collective energy of awareness and concentration that by itself creates a safe space for everyone. In this very present moment, we build the future.

Fully aware of what is happening in the here and now, it becomes easier to act in a way that supports goodness, beauty, compassion, peace, and reconciliation. We refrain from uttering hurtful or divisive words or from acting in a way we know will continue the cycle of violence and suffering. The way we are encouraged to speak to each other using mindful and skilful speech, to act with calm and ease, to look at reality through the lens of impermanence, non-self, and interbeing, has an immediate impact on the quality of our being and of our presence. Our state of consciousness, our awareness, is the crux of the answer to the crises of our time. We need not a state of doing or reacting, but a state of being. We must know how to calm our body and mind and learn how to be a true human being, not a human doing.

THERE IS NO BOSS

Just like other “corporations,” the monastics of Plum Village need to have many meetings to prepare retreats and to make all kinds of decisions relating to community life. Our meetings are a laboratory where we explore our own hearts and minds! Only one person shares at a time, and everyone else listens without interrupting. We invite a bell to sound to help us come back to ourselves and breathe together if strong emotions come up. We take the time to ask everyone to give input,

because we know that the most powerful kind of action is based on the collective insight and wisdom of the group. The eyes of the community see far more clearly than any one individual’s eyes, no matter how good that person’s ideas are. Collective action is not action for boosting our ego, taking part in the battle of competitiveness and one-upmanship, or having more fame, power and success. In Buddhism, we consider such dynamics to be aspects of the three main roots of suffering: illusion/ignorance, hatred/violence, greed/desire.

Living every day with people from different generations, backgrounds, countries, and cultures, we often encounter challenges and difficulties, but at the same time we encounter beauty and hope. No one tries to impose their views on others or pushes for a certain decision to be made, even if they are an elder in the community. *There is no boss* who is making the decisions for the community. It is always a decision based on the consensus of the council of fully ordained monks and nuns. The decision-making body is the community itself.

Compassionate leadership is an art²: the art of being present for each other, listening to each other, and trying to understand each other. We try to understand the other person’s hopes and joys as well as their fears and suffering. It is often only when we have enough understanding among the members of the community that a decision can be made harmoniously; often, almost everyone has to let go of their original ideas and viewpoints to let the decision be shaped by the collective consciousness. Then great action is possible, because everyone feels part of it—included, full of energy and enthusiasm.

This is why Thầy always suggested to politicians, CEOs, and business leaders that they come together within their teams or corporations to practice the art of togetherness: mindful breathing, walking meditation, eating meditation, and “just listening” to each other, “just being present” for each other. We need to bring calm, sanity, and ethics into our corporate world and political parliaments to support decisions that make sense in the face of the many complex problems of our times. If we want peace, we need to *be* peace.

GOING BEYOND “YOU AND I”

When we take refuge in the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha—we are not taking refuge in doctrines or scriptures or a guru, but in a way of life, a way of living together as one body. We stop seeing ourselves as a separate cell in the body with special needs and demands. We clearly experience that Being rather than Doing is the most important contribution we can make to benefit the community. We go beyond the idea of “same and different,” beyond the dualistic thinking of “You and I.” We free our mind from thinking, comparing, judging, or criticizing.

This experience of togetherness supports each of us widening the elusive borders of our “unique-separate-self-ego-Me” that has brought about much of the suffering of our modern, industrialized countries: competition, insatiable desires, despair, loneliness, burnout, and unworthiness, all of which have led to the ongoing exploitation and destruction of our relationship with the Earth and others. The joy, love, and hope that comes from feeling truly alive and from living the reality of togetherness is like a flame in our hearts that brightens our days and the days of the people we live and work with. We become the light.

COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The community of mindful living is a soil for understanding, transformation, and healing, both on a personal level and on a larger scale. When everyone takes refuge in oneself and in the collective at the same time, our powers of discernment and action are strengthened.

When we understand the delusion of our mind and stop trying to avoid unpleasant feelings while desperately searching for happiness outside of ourselves, we lay out the foundations for resilience and peace both within us and in the world.

It isn’t always easy, but with the energy of mindfulness and concentration supported by each community member looking deeply into themselves to gain more understanding and bringing their ancestral and spiritual heritage to the group,

we are building a magical communion, a reunion, a coming-together-as-one human family: one loving family.

The love generated through joys and tears, love rooted in the deep source of life, makes us touch life as a miracle—we treasure and respect it as the most precious gift we have. This reverence for life should be the ground on which national and international political decisions are made. The ability of religious and spiritual communities to be part of this decision-making depends on an individual and collective shift in consciousness so that we can come together, talk together, and listen to each other; in this way, we can build the world we want to see.

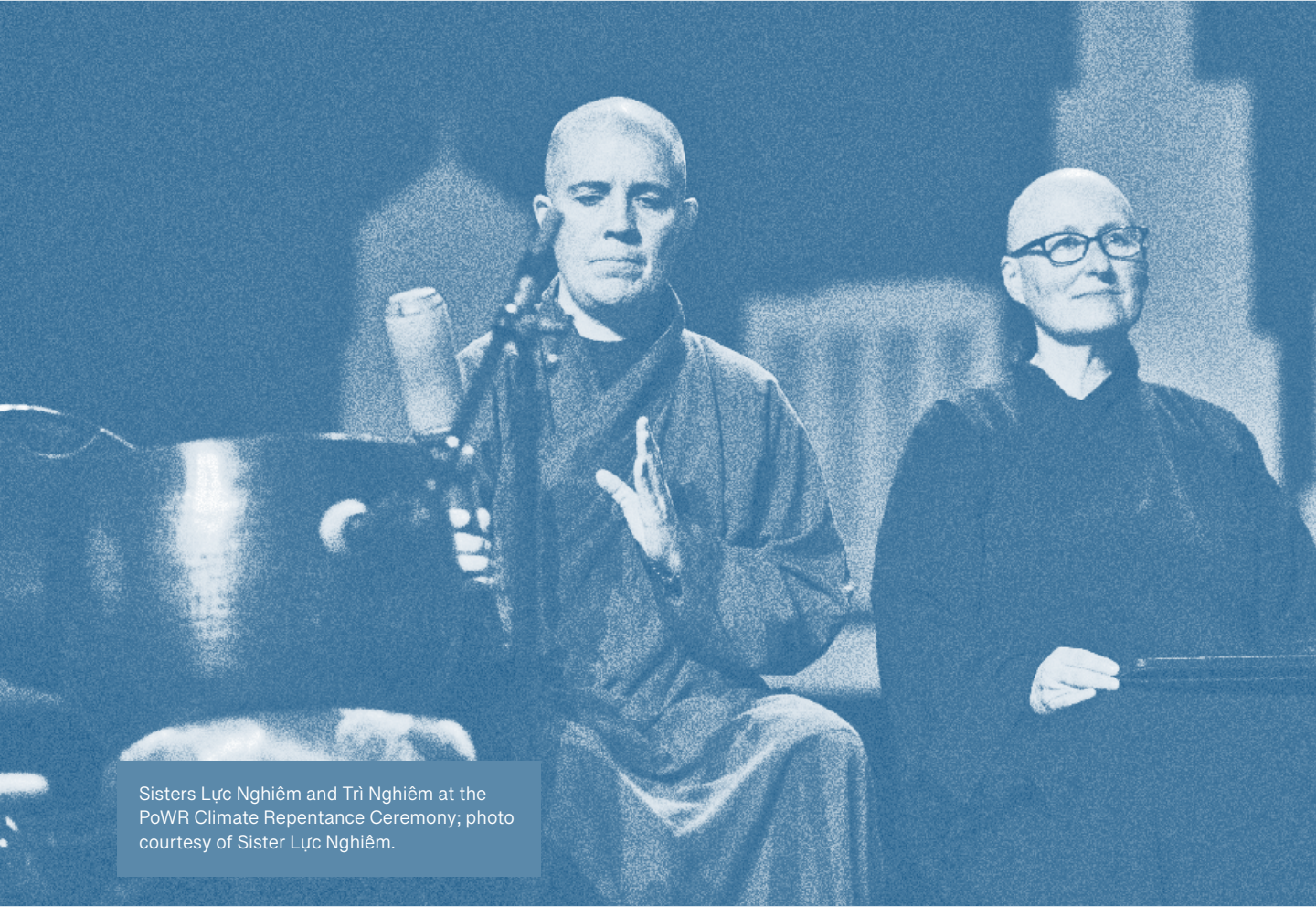
¹ For more convenience to the reader, I will use our root community in France called “Plum Village” as the main subject of this paper, bearing in mind that each of our eleven monasteries practice and live in the same way, applying the same principles.

² Examples of Thầy’s actions in the 1950s that supported togetherness and showcased his art of leadership:

- In 1954, Thầy, aged twenty-eight, was appointed director of studies of the Ấn Quang Institute in Saigon. There was so much poverty and hardship in the country at that time—everyone was desperate for food, clothing, and shelter, and an attitude of “chacun pour soi” (each man for himself) reigned. Thầy made efforts to change this attitude: he took out walls in the dorms so that monks lived, studied, worked, practiced, and played together, thus learning to care for each other.

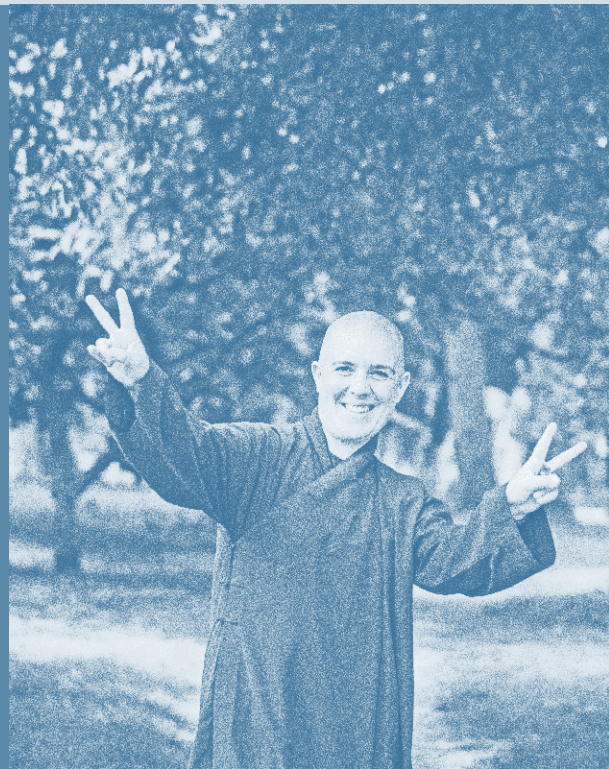
- 1956: Thầy became chief editor of the official Buddhist association magazine in Saigon—he then brought all the different Buddhist groups together to promote peace and reduce suffering. But there was a lot of opposition, especially from the religious leaders—they feared they would lose their positions and “power” if they joined a larger entity.

These are excerpts from papers written for the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago, Illinois, US, in August 2023. The complete versions of these papers can be found at mindfulnessbell.org.



Sisters Lực Nghiêm and Trì Nghiêm at the PoWR Climate Repentance Ceremony; photo courtesy of Sister Lực Nghiêm.

Sister Lực Nghiêm was ordained in 2008 by Thích Nhất Hạnh in Plum Village, France, and received the Dharma Lamp in 2016. Sister Lực Nghiêm has offered retreats in Israel/Palestine and continues to organize opportunities for young Palestinians to come to Plum Village to experience mindfulness practice in the spirit of friendship, joy, and compassion. In 2016, Sister Lực Nghiêm started a Happy Farm in the Lower Hamlet and reached out to local organic farmers and grocery stores to help her community eat more locally and organically. She is always looking for ways to improve and deepen her relationship with Mother Earth and to be in touch with the suffering of the world in order to find answers in herself and within her community. Sister Lực Nghiêm is the co-founder and a core member of Gardiens de la Terre (the francophone Earth Holder Community). She has a strong aspiration to walk the path of spirituality, exploring the art of merging contemplation and action, and giving space to let her musicality and her love for mountains be heard and explored.



The Three Earth-Touchings

THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

Before touching the earth, the practitioner reads the words below, either aloud or silently. While prostrating, the practitioner contemplates the text that follows. If practicing in a group, one person can read the text aloud while the others touch the earth and contemplate.

FIRST EARTH-TOUCHING

Touching the earth, I connect with my ancestors and descendants, from both my spiritual and blood families.

[bell]

[With the sound of the bell, the practitioner or the whole group touches the earth.]

My spiritual ancestors are noble teachers, saints, and realized beings throughout the ages, and also my teachers of this lifetime. Whether you are still living or you lived long ago, you are all truly present in me. You have transmitted to me the seeds of peace, wisdom, love, and happiness. You have awakened in me seeds of peace, insight, compassion, and happiness.

When I look at you, my spiritual ancestors, I see those who are perfect in the practice of the Mindfulness Trainings, understanding, and compassion, and those who are still imperfect. I bow down and accept you all as my spiritual ancestors, knowing that within myself are shortcomings and weaknesses.

[Three breaths]

Aware that my practice of the Mindfulness Trainings is not always perfect, and that I am not always as understanding and compassionate as I would like to be, I open my heart to my spiritual descendants and accept you all. Some of you practice the Mindfulness Trainings, understanding, and compassion in a way that invites confidence and respect. There are also those of you who are struggling with many difficulties and are constantly going through ups and downs in your practice. Aware of my own weaknesses and faults, I open my heart and accept you all.

[Three breaths]

In the same way, I accept all of you, my ancestors, on my father's side and my mother's side of the family, with all your good qualities, your talents, and your virtuous actions, as well as your faults and your weaknesses.

[Three breaths]

You, my spiritual and blood ancestors and descendants, are all present in me. I am you and you are me. I do not have a separate self. We are all part of a wonderful stream of life constantly flowing together.

[Three breaths]

[bell]

[With the sound of the bell, the practitioner or the whole group stand up.]

SECOND EARTH-TOUCHING

Touching the earth, I connect with all people and all species that are alive in this moment in the world with me.

[bell]

[With the sound of the bell, the practitioner or the whole group touches the earth.]

I am one with the wonderful pattern of life that radiates out in all directions. I see the close connection between myself and all people and all species, how we share happiness and suffering.

I am one with the great beings who have transcended birth and death. I see how we can look at all phenomena such as birth and death, happiness and suffering, with a calm gaze. I am one with those wise spiritual friends—who can be found a little bit everywhere—who radiate peace, understanding, and love, who can touch the nourishing and healing wonders of life, who can embrace the whole world with a loving heart and arms of caring action. I am one with those who have enough peace, happiness, and freedom to be able to offer non-fear and the joy of being alive to everyone around them. I do not feel alone or cut off from others. I feel supported by the compassion and joy of great beings, who help me not to drown in despair but to live my life fully, with meaning, peace, and joy. I see myself in each one of you and I see you all in me.

[Three breaths]

I am one with someone who was born disabled or who has become disabled because of war, accident, or illness. I am one with

someone who is caught in a situation of war, oppression, or imprisonment. I am one with someone who has never enjoyed happiness and peace in family life. Cut off from my roots, I am hungry for understanding and love, and am always looking for beauty, truth, and goodness, which can give meaning to my life and in which I can take refuge.

[Three breaths]

I am one with someone who is at the point of death, and I am very afraid because I do not know what will become of me. I am one with a child living in a place where there is miserable poverty and disease; my arms and legs are as thin as matchsticks, and I have no future. I am also one with a manufacturer of armaments that are sold to poor countries. I am one with the frog swimming in the pond, but I am also one with the grass snake who needs to feed on the frog. I am the caterpillar and the ant, and also the bird hunting for insects to eat. I am the forest that is being cut down, the rivers and the air that are being polluted. I am also the person who clear-cuts the forest and pollutes the river and the air. I see myself in all species, and I see all species in me.

[Three breaths]

[bell]

[Then with the sound of the bell, the practitioner or the whole group stand up.]

THIRD EARTH-TOUCHING

Touching the earth, I let go of all ideas that I am this body and this limited life span.

[bell]

[With the sound of the bell, the practitioner or the whole group touches the earth.]

I know that this body, made of the four elements (earth, water, air, fire), is not truly me, I am not limited by this body. I am a river of the life of spiritual and blood ancestors, which since beginningless time has flowed to the present and will continue to stream onward into the future without end. I am both my ancestors and my descendants. I am life manifesting in thousands of forms. I inter-am with all people and all species, whether they are peaceful and fearless or suffering and afraid. In this moment, I am present everywhere on this planet. I am also present in the past and in the future. The disintegration of this body does not touch me, just as the falling plum blossoms do not mean the end of the plum tree. I see myself as a wave on the surface of the ocean. My true nature is the ocean water. I see myself in all the other waves, and I see all the other waves in me. The appearance or

disappearance of the form of the wave does not affect the ocean.

My Dharma body and spiritual life are not subject to birth and death. I see myself present before the manifestation of this body and after its decomposition. Even in this moment, I see how I exist elsewhere than in this body. My life span is not limited to eighty or ninety years. My life span, just like the life span of a leaf or the buddhas, is unlimited. I can go beyond the idea that I am a body separate in space and time from all other manifestations of life.

[With the sound of the bell, the practitioner or the whole group stand up.]

This is an excerpt from Chanting from the Heart, Volume 2 by Thích Nhất Hạnh, published by Parallax Press. An expanded excerpt including the explanation of this practice can be found at mindfulnessbell.org.



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.





Sangha Stream

Local Mindfulness Groups Share Dāna in Many Ways

At the opening of Deer Park Monastery and the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall in California, US, in August 2000, Thầy said that when a new meditation hall or bell tower is constructed, it's wonderful to see the final product.

A hundred times more important, he said, is the brotherhood and sisterhood built by lay friends and monastics when they work in harmony and joy toward a common goal.

“When we do things with all our love and all our hope, then even though it's not visible, it is something real that we can see with our mindfulness,” Thầy said. “We do it not because we want some kind of fame or profit. It is the energy of love that propels us. And it is this energy of love that creates this great monument.”¹

It's in this spirit of love that a growing number of the 1,200 local Sanghas around the world are committing themselves to contributing *dāna* (a Sanskrit word for generosity) in a variety of ways to support Thầy's International Plum Village Community.

For some Sanghas, *dāna* takes the form of financial support from individual members or on behalf of the entire group. Support may be offered on a regular basis or for specific projects.

Support can be non-financial, too. Sanghas hold special fundraising events, such as luncheons and dinners or days of mindfulness and invite participants to donate *dāna* to the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation. The Foundation, in turn, disburses the funds to meet the most pressing needs of the monastic community's eleven global practice centers.

About nine years ago, Organic Garden Sangha in West Los Angeles, California, spearheaded fundraising to help build a new residence for the nuns at Deer Park. For two years, Sangha members main-

tained a blog on the campaign's progress, sent out bi-monthly newsletters with stories and updates, and facilitated fundraising events by Sanghas along the West Coast.

In 2023, members of the original lay team committed to support the monks of Deer Park to expand their hamlet and provide beds for their growing community. A new core lay team was formed to include practitioners with experience in sales, marketing, and social media.

The core lay team committed to continue its efforts until the funding goal was met. In support of that work, it has launched outreach programs to the hundreds of Sanghas that call Deer Park their home monastery, which has resulted in dozens of local Sangha fundraising events and Sangha support of events organized by monastics.

“Our goal is to support the monastics so they can use their time and energy to teach the Dharma,” said Mary Gorman, an Order of Interbeing member and Organic Garden Sangha member. “And it's not all about raising money; it's an opportunity to build Sangha, for Sanghas to come together joyfully to work together toward a common purpose.”

For communities not close to a monastery, Sanghas sometimes bring the monastery to them by hosting Days of Mindfulness and other events with visiting monks and nuns. The Sangha covers the cost of monastic travel and accommodations and *dāna* gathered at the event is donated to the monastics' practice center.

In 2021, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and temporary closure of the community's monasteries, monks from Deer Park traveled on their “Road Retreat” to multiple Sanghas in the Western United States to share the

Dharma in person. Eyes of Compassion Sangha in Denver, Colorado, held a fundraising event in conjunction with a Sangha evening.

In 2014, Lansing Area Mindfulness Community (LAMC) in Michigan—with help from and involvement by Michigan State University—brought five monastics from Blue Cliff Monastery in New York to Michigan to visit Sanghas around the state capital.

“We supported the monastics so they could support us in Michigan,” LAMC cofounder and Cedar Society member Carolyn White said.

Sometimes, Sanghas reach beyond their core community and seek donations from professional peers, friends, and relatives. Through this approach, they raise funds for our monastics and awareness about their own Sangha’s activities as well as Thầy’s legacy.

Other Sanghas contribute dāna in the form of volunteer and in-kind service to support fundraising events led by monastics. Blue Cliff Monastery in New York, which is raising funds to build a new nuns’ residence, has received considerable support from the Vietnamese Liên Châu Sangha, a Zoom-only community with members from Delaware and several surrounding states.

“To us, the most important thing is to maintain and grow our regular practice at home, together as

a Sangha,” said Hạnh Nguyễn, a member of Liên Châu Sangha. “This way we can generate the energy of mindfulness and compassion and ‘pay forward’ the fruit of the practice to our local communities. We also attend retreats at the monastery and provide support for cooking, cleaning, and other tasks such as fundraising, so that the monastics can focus their full energy on guiding retreatants,” he added. “We carry out this work as an expression of our gratitude for Thầy’s teachings, which have deeply changed our lives, and also to repay the brothers’ and sisters’ kindness and compassion.”

When practitioners come together in harmony and happiness, united in a common goal, the outcome is far greater than the opening of a new monastery or other capital improvements. The act itself, as Thầy said at Deer Park in 2000, “is a monument that will always be alive in the heart of each one of us.”

Is your Sangha interested in contributing regularly to the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation? Visit us at <https://thichnhatanhfoundation.org/ways-to-give> or email us at giving@tnhf.org.

¹ Deer Park Monastery, *The Day I Turn Twenty* (2020), page 4.

Photo on pages 74-75 by Maksim Lakutin.

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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AS A YOUNG DHARMA TEACHER IN VIETNAM,
Thay formed a group of 13 students whom he
trained to become “like strong cedars to help
support the Buddha’s teachings,” revitalize
Buddhism, and meet the needs of people suffering
during difficult times.

Named the Thirteen Cedars, they helped ensure
that Thay’s work continued after the war and made
it possible for his teachings to take root in the
West. We are here because they were there.

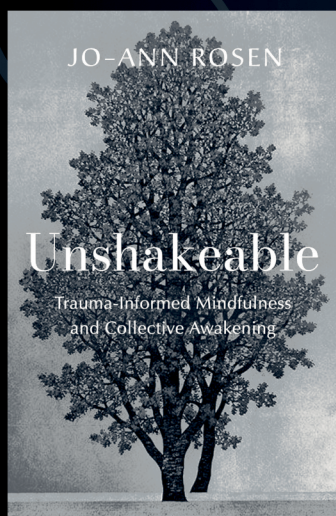
A number of the Thirteen Cedars are still with us;
our aspiration is to grow a forest of 1,300. We invite
you to join the Cedar Society, and through your
legacy gift help us share Thay’s teachings and
practices for generations to come.

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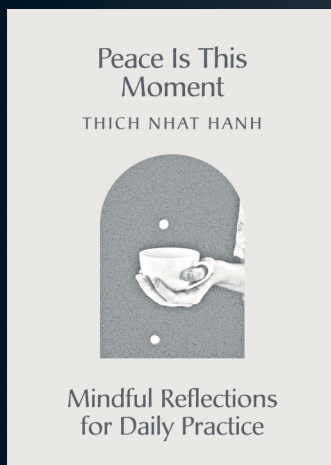
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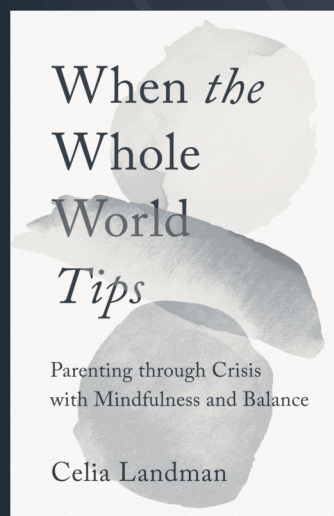
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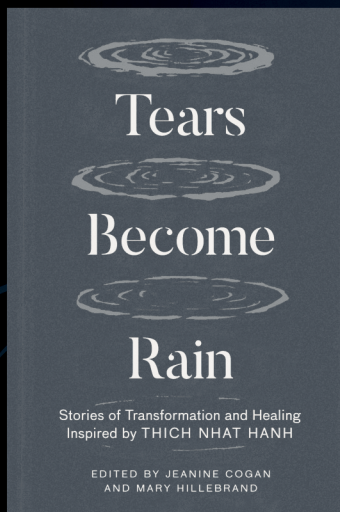
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—Tara Brach, author of *Radical Acceptance*



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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
nhapluu.org

Mountain Spring Monastery, Australia
mountainspringmonastery.org

Asian Institute of Applied Buddhism, Hong Kong
pvfhk.org

Plum Village Thailand
thaip Plum Village Thailand

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
tnaudio.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

The Goodwill of Our Ancestors
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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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