



the
mindfulness
bell

The Radiant Insight of Nonduality

ISSUE 94 - 2024

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Welcome Letter

Dualism is a basic feature of words—and consequently our thinking: left/right, up/down, black/white, alive/dead, coming/going, one/many. Thầy trains us to be skillful with words and not get caught by their trap of ideologies and concepts. Dogmatic and absolutist thinking arises from seeing the world through a dualistic lens of words and thoughts. To break through in our practice, we train ourselves to use words without letting ourselves be used by them. Through meditation we develop nonconceptual awareness—we touch what is right here and now when we bring our attention back to our breathing, to the visceral experience of the breath entering our nostrils and moving down through our trachea, filling our lungs, and to the air then being expelled back up and out, lending CO₂ to the atmosphere. There is nothing dualistic about such lived experience, and yet so often we simplistically and erroneously stake our beliefs on the mental tool of language—a kind of technology tens of thousands of years in the making. The Buddha intuited this during lengthy periods of silent introspection; he saw that the key to observing things as they really are (and thereby avoiding dogmatic or absolutist thinking) was moving beyond conceptual thinking, asking himself, “Am I sure?” with regard to every assumption or preconceived notion.

Yet words can be a skillful vehicle. Using them, this issue of *The Mindfulness Bell* explores the radiant nature of nonduality at a critical moment on our planet, at a time when our tendency toward dualism seems to be taking over the collective consciousness, leading to dangerous and violent polarization. Never before have Homo sapiens been so well equipped to wreak destruction on a massive scale as we are now. The realization of nondual awareness in every moment is urgent in our own lives.

I hope the stories, poems, and experiences shared in these pages inspire us to act, here and now, to recognize the hidden ways in which we base our actions on dualistic beliefs. May we free our mind with the practice of nondual awareness, for our healing and transformation.

Brother Pháp Lưu

ADVISOR AND EDITOR

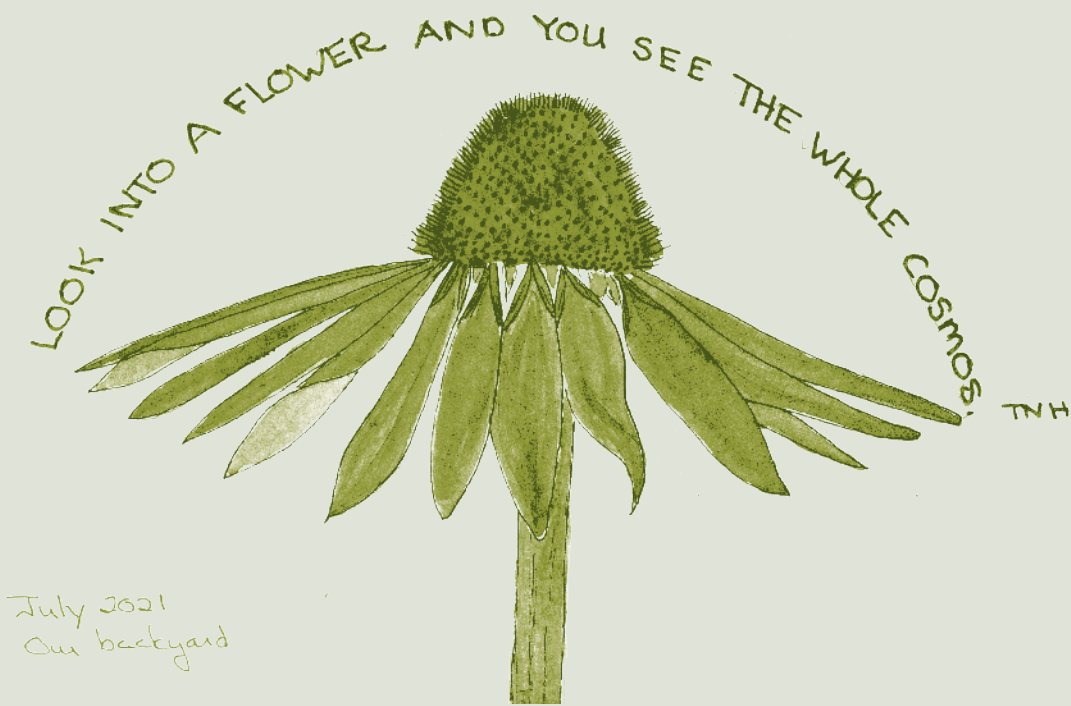


Ordained in 2003, Brother Pháp Lưu (Brother Stream) received the Transmission of the Lamp from Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh in 2011. He leads mindful backpacking retreats in nature around Deer Park Monastery and initiated The Buddha the Scientist retreat and symposium series. He is currently working with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

Roses and Garbage

Thích Nhất Hạnh offers a deep teaching on the futility of hate and discrimination, and on the insight of interbeing and nonduality as the way to liberation and non-fear.

THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH



echinacea by Starr DiCiurcio

“Defiled or immaculate” and “dirty or pure” are concepts we form in our mind. We see a beautiful rose in a vase and think it is immaculate. Its fragrance is pure and fresh. It supports our idea of purity. The opposite is a garbage can. It smells horrible and is filled with rotten things. We identify this as defiled. But if we look deeply at the concepts of defiled and pure, we have a chance to touch the insight of interbeing.

In just five or six days, the rose will become part of the garbage. We do not need to wait five days to see this. If we just look deeply at the rose, we can see it now. And if we look deeply into the garbage can, we see that in a few months its contents can be transformed into a rose.

If you are a good organic gardener, if you have the eyes of a *bodhisattva*, looking at a rose you

NEITHER GOOD NOR EVIL

We are imprisoned by our ideas of good and evil. We want only good, and we want to remove all evil. But that is because we forget that good is made of non-good elements. Suppose we hold a lovely branch in our hand. When we look at it with a nondiscriminating mind, we see a wonderful branch. But as soon as we distinguish that one end is the left and the other end is the right, we get into trouble. We may say we want only the left, and we do not want the right, and there is trouble right away. Politically, if the right is not there, how can you be on the left? Let us say that we do not want the right end of this branch, that we only want the left. So, we break off half of this wonderful reality and throw it away. But as soon as we’ve done this,

Politically, if the right is not there, how can you be on the left?

can see the garbage, and looking at the garbage you can see a rose. Roses and garbage inter-are. Without a rose, we cannot have garbage; and without garbage, we cannot have a rose. The rose and garbage are equally important. The garbage is just as precious as the rose.

the end that remains becomes the new right—because as soon as the left is there, the right must be there also. If we become frustrated and do it again, breaking what remains of the branch in half, we will still have a right and a left.

The same may be applied to good and evil. You cannot have only good. You cannot hope to

remove evil completely, because thanks to evil, good exists, and vice versa. When you put on a play about a heroic figure, you have to provide an antagonist in order for the hero to be a hero. In Buddhism, the antagonist is named Māra, the demon who attempted to distract the Buddha from reaching enlightenment. The following story about Buddha and Māra reflects the Buddhist insight into the relationship between good and evil.

One day the Buddha was in his cave, and Ānanda, who was the Buddha's attendant, was standing outside near the door. Suddenly Ānanda saw Māra coming. He was surprised. He didn't want that, and he wished Māra wouldn't notice him and would go away. But Māra walked straight up and asked Ānanda to announce his arrival to the Buddha.

Ānanda said, "Why have you come here? Don't you remember that long ago you were defeated by the Buddha under the bodhi tree? Aren't you ashamed to come here? Go away! The Buddha will not see you. You are evil. You are his enemy."

When Māra heard this, he began to laugh and laugh. "Did you say your teacher has enemies?" That made Ānanda very embarrassed. He knew

that his teacher had not said that he has enemies. So Ānanda was defeated and had to go in and announce Māra, hoping that the Buddha would say, "Go and tell him that I am not here. Tell him that I am in a meeting."

But the Buddha was very happy when he heard that Māra, such a very old friend, had come to visit him. "It's Māra? Let him come in!" the Buddha said. Ānanda was distressed. When Māra came in, the Buddha stood up to greet him as if he were a special guest, invited him to sit in a place of honor, and took his hands in his in the warmest way. The Buddha said, "Hello Māra! How are you? How have you been? Is everything all right?"

The Buddha asked Ānanda to go and make herbal tea for both of them. "I'm happy to make tea for my master one hundred times a day, but making even one cup of tea for Māra is miserable," Ānanda thought. But since this was the order of his master, how could he refuse? So Ānanda went to prepare some herbal tea for the Buddha and his so-called guest, but while doing this he tried to listen in on their conversation.

The Buddha repeated very warmly, "How have you been? How are things with you?"

In international politics, each side pretends to be the rose
and calls the other side the garbage.

Mara said, “Things are not going well at all. I am tired of being Māra. I want to be something else—maybe someone like you. Wherever you go you are welcome, people bow before you and make offerings.”

Hearing this, Ānanda became very frightened. Māra said, “You know, being a Māra is not a very easy thing to do. If you talk, you have to talk in riddles. If you do anything, you have to be tricky and look evil. I am very tired of all that. But what I cannot bear is my disciples. They are now talking about social justice, peace, equality, liberation, nonduality, nonviolence, all of that. Before, they used to listen to everything I told them. Now they are in revolt. The commanders of my army are demanding to do sitting meditation. Can you believe it? They want to practice mindfulness, do walking meditation, eat in silence, protect life, protect the environment and the Earth. They are driving me mad. I do not know who is influencing them. I have had enough of it! I think that it would be better if I hand them all over to you. I want to be something else. Maybe we could change roles.”

At this, Ānanda began to shudder with fear. Māra would become the Buddha, and the Buddha

would become Māra. It made him very sad.

The Buddha listened attentively and was filled with compassion. Finally, he said in a quiet voice, “Do you think it’s fun being a Buddha? You don’t know what my disciples have done to me! They put words into my mouth that I never said. They build garish temples and put statues of me on altars in order to attract bananas and oranges and sweet rice, just for themselves. And they package me and make my teaching into an item of commerce. Māra, if you knew what it is really like to be a Buddha, I am sure you wouldn’t want to be one.”

• • • • •

In the West, we have been struggling for many years with the problem of evil. How is it possible that evil exists? It seems difficult to understand. But in the light of nonduality, there is no problem: as soon as the idea of good is there, the idea of evil is there. Buddha needs Māra in order to reveal himself, and vice versa. Buddha is as empty as the sheet of paper; Buddha is made of non-Buddha elements. When you perceive reality in this way, you will not discriminate against the garbage in favor of the rose. You will cherish both.



Irradiating by Alfonso Montellano Lopez

THE PROBLEM OF NAMES

For many years, the United States has been trying to demonize other countries, from North Vietnam, to the countries of the former Soviet Union, to Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Some Americans even have the illusion that they can survive alone, without these other countries. Other countries may believe that they, too, can exist without the US. They call the United States the American imperialists or the infidels and believe the US must be eliminated for happiness to be possible. But that is the dualistic way of looking at things. It is the same as believing that the right side can exist without the left side. If you take sides, you are trying to eliminate half of reality, which is impossible.

If we look at the US deeply, we see Iran. If we look deeply at Iran, we see the US. In international politics, each side pretends to be the rose and calls the other side the garbage. Recently, a young person asked me, “Why do we give different names to different things, since they’re really together, they’re really one?” That was a very good question. I replied, “Names are at the root of so many problems. We give places different names, like America, Iran, and Iraq. But in fact they all belong to the Earth. Israel and Palestine are two hands of the same body.”

You have to work for the survival of the other side if you want to survive yourself. Survival means the survival of humankind as a whole, not just a part of it. This is true not only for the United States and the Middle East, but also for the East and West, the North and South. If the southern nations cannot survive, then the northern nations too will crumble. If developing countries cannot pay their debts, everyone will suffer. If we do not take care of poorer countries, the well-being of richer countries is not going to last, and we will not be able to continue living in the way we have been used to for much longer. Only when we can touch the wisdom of nondiscrimination in us can we all survive.

In the Majjhima Nikāya, one of the collections of the Buddha’s discourses, there is a very short passage on how the world has come to be. It is very simple, very easy to understand, and yet very deep: “This is, because that is. This is not, because

that is not. This is like this, because that is like that.” This is the Buddhist teaching of Genesis.

Our lives are like this because other lives are like that. The citizens of every country are human beings. We cannot study and understand a human being just through statistics. We can’t leave the job to governments or political scientists alone. We have to do it ourselves. If we arrive at an understanding of the fears and hopes of a citizen from Iraq or Sudan, Afghanistan or Syria, then we can understand our own fears and hopes. If we have this very clear vision of reality, we do not have to look very far to see what we have to do.

We are not separate. We are inextricably inter-related. The rose is the garbage, the soldier is the civilian, the criminal is also the victim. The rich man is the very poor woman, and the Buddhist is the non-Buddhist. “This is like this, because that is like that.” No one among us has clean hands. None of us can claim that the situation is not our responsibility. The child who is forced to work as a prostitute is that way because of the way we are. The refugees who are forced to live in camps have to live like that because of the way we live. The arms dealers do their business so that our economies can continue to grow and they can benefit. This helps to create that, and that helps to create this. Wealth and poverty, the affluent society and the poor society, inter-are. The wealth of one society is made of the poverty of the other. Wealth is made of non-wealth elements, and poverty is made of non-poverty elements.

We are responsible for everything that happens around us. If we look into ourselves with the eyes of interbeing, we see the young prostitute, the child soldier, the starving mother, and the migrant worker; we bear their pain, and the pain of the whole world. It is from this insight of interbeing that true compassion will be born in our hearts and we will know what to do and what not to do to help the situation.

This is an excerpt from *The Other Shore* by Thích Nhất Hạnh, published by Parallax Press.



Felt Buddha made by Katherine Quirk



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.

HAPPY FARM

Touching the True Nature of the Earth

Happy Farm Manager Mick McEvoy shares
about his living practice of nonduality
with the Earth and “others.”



Happy Farm photo
by Sara Wilhelmsson

I still remember the moment I discovered Thầy's book *Love Letter to the Earth*. It has become a north star for me and our Happy Farm project. I have absorbed every page into the marrow of my bones. I have no shame in sharing that I "consumed" the book and it has helped me fill a spiritual vacuum. I fell in love with *Love Letter to the Earth* as Thầy shared that of course you have permission to take your spiritual practice outdoors into the natural world. I heard him profess that the forest was as reverential as any meditation hall or house of worship. As someone who has an allergy to some of the ritualistic and devotional aspects of spiritual

practice, I found Thầy's words a deep teaching of nonduality, beautifully expressed in his encouraging words to practice walking as if we are "kissing the Earth with our feet."

My allergy to the devotional and ritualistic in spiritual practice has everything to do with childhood and teenage years. I still remember my first retreat in Plum Village, France when the community in Upper Hamlet practiced "touching the earth." I physically could not bring myself to bow down and kneel. As I observed one hundred or so humans moving, kneeling, bowing all in unison, I thought to myself "not again." Irish Catholic! It



took some time for me to be offered a deep introduction to the practice of touching the earth and what exactly I was being invited to participate in. I remember a deeply moving Dharma talk from Sister True Dedication that focussed solely on this practice. Wow.

*“I aspire to practice to love Mother Earth, Father Sun...”*¹ Now when I have the good fortune to practice touching the earth I become deeply energised. Goosebumps! I think of Thày inviting me to touch the Earth to “*Bodhisattva Gaia, Great Mother Earth*” and to Father Sun, “*Buddha of infinite light and life.*” Such skilfulness to include Earth and Sun in this practice. With the utmost respect, I think of Thày as a “*Badassatva.*” I am not being invited to bow to deities I see as fictional but to that blazing orb of fire that makes all life possible. Real life. I can see it and I can feel it. Earth and Sun. This is my devotion and ritual, in direct contrast to the spirituality of my upbringing, where religious dogma penetrated every aspect of life: home, education, society, and politics.

I grew up in Northern Ireland in a segregated community divided by sectarianism. We were divided by an imagined reality. My society was deeply dualistic. In his book *Sapiens*, Yuval Noah Harari argues that the intricacies of our modern societies are all built on imagined realities: “There are no gods in the universe, no nations, no money, no human rights, no laws, and no justice outside the common imagination of human beings.”² With that way of thinking we humans can create societies of paradise or societies of immense suffering.

*“... for human beings to love one another with the radiant insight of nonduality and interbeing in order to help us transcend all kinds of discrimination, fear, jealousy, resentment, hatred, and despair ...”*¹

Growing up in Northern Ireland we experienced war. Daily reports of murder. Bombs and guns. Flags flew to mark territory. Our schools were segregated based on religion. The Catholic and Protestant communities lived separately, divided into specific areas of our villages, towns,

I aspire to bear witness to the violence, the hatred, and the discrimination we humans enact on each other and on the natural world ...

and cities. Streets for them and streets for us. This deep duality meant that as a society we had a very limited chance to meet “the other.”

Our lived reality was rooted in real suffering. There was entrenched discrimination born from colonialism of Britain in Ireland. A combination of political, religious, and social differences plus the threat of inter-communal tensions and violence led to widespread self-segregation of the two communities. Catholics and Protestants led largely separate lives in a situation some have dubbed “self-imposed apartheid.” Every aspect of life was full of human-created dualism.

The result? Fear, jealousy, resentment, hatred, despair. Some 3,720 people were killed as a result of the conflict. Approximately 47,541 people were injured. There were 36,923 shootings and 16,209 bombings.³

When asked what the insight of nonduality and transforming the delusion of separateness means in my personal practice, I can respond that peace is possible, and social justice is possible. Today we have peace. We work for it every day. Removing the delusion of separateness is possible whilst retaining the beauty of individual cultures and traditions. Yet divisions remain. I have a daily practice of contemplating and internally accepting that the horrors that unfolded in my country for over thirty years actually took place. I look deeply and see that this violence and injustice stretched back hundreds of years to the beginning of the coloni-

sation of Ireland. I adore Thầy's words "man is not our enemy."⁴ I have been gifted great resilience by Thầy's teaching that we are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.

I aspire to bear witness to the violence, the hatred, and the discrimination we humans enact on each other and on the natural world: between Belfast and Gaza, Derry and Darfur; every conflict, every victim, every genocide, every ecocide; all those killed by other humans acting out of their fundamentalist beliefs; the Earth extracted, polluted, degraded for our consumption.

I have had the good fortune to have touched the radiant insight of nonduality and interbeing. I have awoken from the delusion of our separation. Then I forget. I other. I discriminate. I aim to remember and wash my eyes to begin to see clearly. I have begun the perpetual work of removing the dust from my eyes and the practice of transforming the delusion of our separateness. It is not a destination I reach so as to never have a discriminatory mind again. I feel this practice is just like following my breath and steps. I forget, and then I hope to remember and come back to my breath, my steps. Each time I hope I strengthen this habit of deeply living the reality of our interconnectedness whilst bearing witness to the horrors and tragedy that we as a human family can enact on each other in our imagined realities of nationality, religions, genders.

Peace is possible. Social justice is possible. May we awaken from the illusion of our separateness.

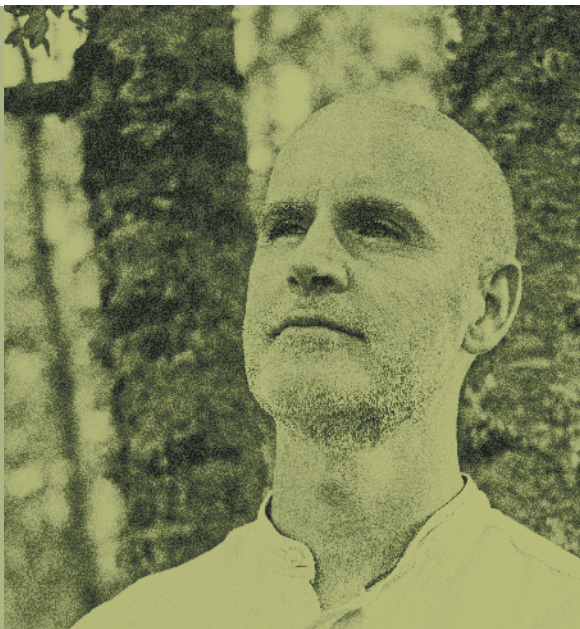
¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Love Letter to the Earth* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2013), p. 126.

² Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens—A Brief History of Humankind* (Visalia: Vintage, 2015).

³ *Conflict Archive on the Internet*, 2007, "Fact Sheet on the conflict in and about Northern Ireland," CAIN. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/victims/docs/group/htr/day_of_reflection/htr_0607c.pdf

⁴ Thích Nhất Hạnh, 1965, "Recommendation," Plum Village. <https://plumvillage.org/articles/recommendation>

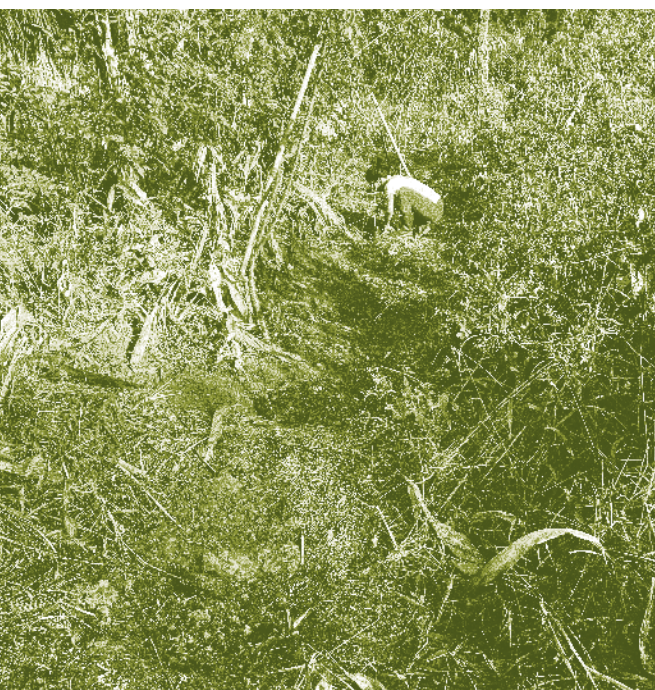
For more information on the Happy Farm, visit thehappyfarm.org.



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 the Plum Village 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.

Nonduality and Earth Holding

Members of the Care-Taking Councils of the Earth Holder Community, the Abrazadores de la Tierra (Spanish-speaking EHC) and the Gardien.nes de la Terre (French EHC) share their experiences of nonduality in their daily mindful activism.



Maíra planting coffee

MAÍRA FERNANDES DE MELO (BRAZIL, EHC/ABRAZADORES DE LA TIERRA)

I was in my graduate studies and had been attending the Sangha in Rio for a few months. One day, I was having lunch in the university canteen, which was operated by a multinational food company that my dualistic mind would definitely label as “bad.” I had been diligently practicing eating meditation, and eating by myself in that context made me realize I was interconnected not only to the sun and the sky, but also to the “greedy” landowners involved in feeding me in that very moment. I can tell you that this was a hard insight for a beginner.

Eight years later, this past season, I was blessed with the opportunity to go to the Rains Retreat in New Hamlet, Plum Village, France. Among

many moments of deep practice and shared joy, being able to breathe the same air as our beloved teacher, Sister Chân Không (True Emptiness), was of course the best. On one lazy Monday, she offered us a surprise: an unscheduled session of touching the earth! When I got to the big hall, almost all the long-term retreatants were already there, but aware of my deep devotion to her, my friends had left the mat closest to Sister Chân Không open for me. So there I was, honoring the French land ancestors as she guided us through the connection with everything around us: “I see that I am the blue sky above me; I am the air being polluted and the one that pollutes it; I am the leaves, the caterpillar, and the bird; I am one with the food from our Happy Farm and also the food from other farms, and I am the pesticide ...” – Wait, what??? I don’t remember this part from the Plum Village App version—I AM THE PESTICIDE?

In the previous year, pesticide use had been a frequent topic in my activism; Brazil had started using hundreds of new synthetic agrotoxins that were forbidden in Europe and the United States. So, eight years after I experienced my “Sodexo insight,” every day more and more aware of what I was eating in my own quest to compassionately defund those I may have perceived as “greedy landowners that steal people’s lands and poison the Earth,” I received a new teaching on transcending discrimination, a question directly from the voice of Emptiness: How am I the landowner? How am I the pesticide? Many times in the agroindustry, pesticides are euphemistically called “defensives.” So for me it’s interesting to observe the situations when—with the excuse of defending myself and

others—I can be the poison itself, through my actions of body, speech, and especially mind. This kind of deep looking encourages me to be more diligent in my practice of loving the Earth and all of her beings with less discrimination, if not complete nondiscrimination.

Walking meditation with XR Buddhists and Bridge of Faith members, April 2023 Berlin, photo by Anne Albrecht/Bridge of Faith

I have learned that for me to be a wholeheartedly present and aware person, I must remember that all aspects of and in my life are interrelated. Being a mother, a spouse, an employee of a humanitarian organization, or a person sitting on the bus, doing housework, or going grocery shopping—these things are not separated from my Sangha, Earth holding, and activist life. It is not only the interrelationship between my little self and all of what is on this precious Earth that matters; I also have to be a coherent and inter-person.



**DANIELA SIMM (GERMANY,
ABRAZADORES DE LA TIERRA)**

Loving all beings on this precious planet with no discrimination allows me to see how interwoven all of our problems are. We cannot separate war and conflict from exploitation of natural resources and destruction of ecosystems. We cannot separate social injustice between the Global South and the Global North and within our countries from the effects and root causes of climate change. The understanding of this interrelationship helps me to be motivated and engaged wholeheartedly in all aspects of what I do or don't do in my life. We will make a change only when weaving our efforts together as a Mahasangha of all beliefs, all religions, and all aspirations.

When preparing a climate-change-related “medit-action” for a German audience, I have to keep in mind the horrible conflicts in the Global South, such as the many people displaced, killed, and suffering gender-based violence in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Knowing that conflicts around resources enable the beautiful and easy life of many people in the Global North, as well as the lives of the privileged in the Global South. Additionally, we should consider enabling the participation of a colleague from a partner organization in the Democratic Republic of Congo in our activities in Europe, exchanging knowledge with them so that their topics are heard and interpreted according to what we can digest and understand as Europeans.

Being an Abrazadora de la Tierra enables me to interrelate my Earth-holding activities in Germany with a wider Spanish-speaking Sangha whose people are rooted in other cultural backgrounds and who thereby may reflect on the roots of our global systems in another way so that I may transmit these realities to my siblings in Germany.

LEÏLA DENIS
(FRANCE, GARDIEN.NES DE LA TERRE)

One practice that helps me contemplate nonduality is a practice with impermanence received from Sister Giác Nghiễm during a weekend at La Maison de l'Inspir. It's about becoming aware of impermanence in all the little actions of everyday life. I've incorporated it into my morning practice. When I get to the door of the room where I'm meditating, I stop and say to myself: "My feet were shod, now they're bare: impermanence. The door was closed, now it's open: impermanence. The room was dark, now it's lit: impermanence." With each step toward the window, it's impermanence that keeps me walking. And it's impermanence that every morning offers me the gift of fresh air, new sunshine, birdsong emerging from silence, a bud, or a quiver in the branches. Sister Giác Nghiễm suggested we simply practice this every day for at least three weeks. No thought, no concept. Just a practical experience and profound observation: everything is woven of impermanence. Impermanence reveals to me its shimmer, the infinite flowering of its gifts. I tame death and loss. I learn to open my hand.

With Gardien.nes de la Terre, this teaching unfolds. Sometimes one of us is tired or less available. Their investment becomes less present. But does that mean they have disappeared? No. Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed. We are a great body that continues its life through a thousand little deaths. My action is beautiful because it's part of this stream of continuation. Who knows which ancestor is rejoicing with us right now? Who knows which distant descendant will sit in peace thanks to our combined actions? And who knows how all these movements currently at work around the planet are connected, feeding and healing each other without even thinking about it?

**CAROLINA LEÓN ROLÓN (ARGENTINA,
ABRAZADORES DE LA TIERRA)**

Each day as a teacher, I have the opportunity to listen to the bell of awakening in the form of interactions with my secondary school students and colleagues. The dominant, inherited dualistic views and hierarchical narratives that condition schools need to be transformed as part of the systemic change necessary for us humans as a collective to continue our existence as beings of Mother Earth.

Every being of the Earth and of the Cosmos contributes to the nourishment of many other beings indiscriminately. How can we inter-be in the classroom like beings inter-are in the jungle, up in the mountains, deep in the wide ocean, along the mighty rivers, or across the Milky Way? How can the classroom be an environment where the vitality of the collective is a testimony of flourishing diversity? All the above are variations of one question that lies deep in my practice and ignites it: How can the classroom be a community where one can take refuge and enjoy inner freedom, happiness, and peace?

I imagine the answer that Thầy might give me if I had the opportunity to ask him how to escape the inherent dynamics of our educational systems: "The classroom of the future is already in the present moment." That is why I can be certain that I don't have to wait for an external transformation. Every group of students incarnates the opportunity to build a community where our actions are moved by understanding, compassion, solidarity, and love. It takes time; our old inherited habits are deeply rooted, even if we are children. But gradually, as a group, we begin to feel it is acceptable and preferable to be relaxed during the class, to remember we do not have to rush to do a lot of tasks, and that real joy and friendship emerge in cooperation rather than in competition—it is beautiful to be ourselves, and our nuances can be recognized and celebrated as nourishing to the collective. It takes time and requires patience; as with any other skill we learn, we have to renew our practice with every in-breath and every out-breath.

I wrote a paragraph to inspire myself when oblivion approaches, to train myself as a schoolteacher:

Aware of the suffering caused by a teaching practice that is in any way discriminatory, self-centered, not understanding, apathetic, indifferent, destructive, or violent, I am committed to promoting mindful interactions with and among my students. I am committed to looking deeply to recognize the suffering that lies in any violent behavior, listening deeply to recognize the true volition and necessities of my students, and speaking with truth and love to nourish with joy the capacity for wonder, learning, and creativity of my students. I am committed to training myself to come back to the present moment to recognize the conditions for happiness that surround us and can contribute to building a classroom where teaching and learning can occur in an atmosphere of solidarity, compassion, and peace and where we can learn from Mother Earth, our teacher of loving kindness, how to inter-be in order to flourish beautifully as a diverse collective in the present moment for a happier future.

CHANTAL CARRARA
(FRANCE, GARDIEN.NES DE LA TERRE)

In my personal practice, nonduality means I no longer let myself get caught up in my judgments. I see them as such, and therefore as misperceptions, and I clear the space through mindful breathing to open my consciousness. I see that it's my fears, those of others, and those of the collective consciousness that inhabit me. So I take care of my fear by welcoming it until it fades and is transformed into trust. Sometimes this practice is fragile, and I have to come back to it several times.

I'm more and more aware of nonduality: what this person does or says offends me. This person

isn't just that one thing; as I look deeper, I see their suffering, and my compassion is born. I am aware that our cultures, histories, personalities, and sensitivities can cause us to mishandle, shock, and misunderstand each other. As soon as I touch this perception, I look at it and let it teach me about myself and about the other, and open once again: there is welcoming, kindness, space, inclusion, and liberation.

As a result of this practice, at sixty-eight years old I'm more at peace than ever. The historical dimension certainly exists. But the ultimate dimension is also in my present moment, and I can let all the disturbances of history melt away in that moment.



Feeling grief and showing respect and love to trees to be cut for highway extension during a walking meditation organized by Bridge of Faith in March 2024. Photo by Anne Albrecht

ISA SALINIER
(FRANCE, GARDIEN.NES DE LA TERRE)

I hear the rustling insects and wake up to the warmth of a spring morning. Insects are the most numerous and diverse creatures on our planet. We are currently witnessing a global decline in the number, density, and diversity of their populations. Without the insects, the world as we know it today would not exist; their ecological functions within ecosystems are countless—from pollination to recycling waste and nutrients. If there were no insects to pollinate them, most flowering plants would die out.

This observation arouses in me a sense of concern and fear about the future of our planet as well as feelings of injustice and horror at the suffering created by the appropriation and unbridled exploitation of animate and inanimate beings. All of this is associated with the illusion that we, as human beings, are separated from other species and from the Earth itself. On the other hand, I also know that connecting with these marvelous beings in the joy of observing them, vibrating with them, and interbeing with them is a source of balance and openness in my heart.

This experience of nonduality invites me to practice doing no harm, not killing, and actively protecting Mother Earth. It supports my commitments and my practices of caring for all living things in and around me, together with Gardien.nes de la Terre.

LAURÈNE GIRIN
(FRANCE, GARDIEN.NES DE LA TERRE)

In my personal practice, I try to see life and every living being as a wonder, with the curiosity of discovery.

I try to see and live every situation as an opportunity to learn, and to learn playfully with the joy of discovery.

For more information about the Earth Holder Communities, visit earthholder.training, gardiensdelaterre.earth, and [Abrazadores de la Tierra](https://www.facebook.com/groups/3002998039961021) at facebook.com/groups/3002998039961021 or [youtube.com/@abrazadoresdelatierra1584](https://www.youtube.com/@abrazadoresdelatierra1584).

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



Daniela Simm, Mindful Spring of the Heart (pronouns she/her), started her engagement with social and Earth justice in the area of agroecology and rural development alongside rural and indigenous communities and movements in Latin America, as well as humanitarian assistance since 2007. Rooted in Catholic theology of liberation, she embraced the Plum Village tradition in 2018. Dharanimdhara, the *bodhisattva* of Earth holding, is her motivation: building bridges and weaving networks of understanding, compassion, love, and trust between all peoples and beings on this precious Mother Earth.



Leïla Denis, Authentic Presence of the Heart (pronouns she/her), met Thầy when she was nineteen, reading his book *La sérénité de l'instant*. Trying to take care of the simple actions or non-actions of daily life seemed to her a very beautiful way of living her life. Thirty years later, she feels very grateful to have met two beautiful Sanghas: Le Jardin de l'Instant, and les Gardien.nes de la Terre, with which she learns to be and inter-be, act and inter-act. She lives in the countryside near Paris with her husband and their two teenage sons, and shares embodiment and healing practices, as body intelligence is her way to touch the miracle of life.



Carolina León Rolón, Peaceful River of the Heart (pronouns she/her), is a thread of a colorful ancestral tapestry from the Colombian Andes. She currently lives near Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the ancestral land of the Querandí people, where she participates in the weaving of the Mahasangha in the pluricultural Latin America. She trains herself to be a happier teacher for happier students while she teaches linguistics and literature with a social and Earth justice perspective in the Global South. She smiles with amazement at the cosmic elements present in her morning cup of hot chocolate.





Chantal Carrara, True Land of Concentration (pronouns she/her), has been practicing meditation for forty years and reading Th  y's works since 1996. She has regularly gone to Plum Village with her husband and daughter since 2002, when her daughter was nine. Since then, Chantal has been involved in the Sangha around the city of Lyon, France. She became a member of the Order of Interbeing in 2012 and is in harmony with her Sangha body.



Isa Salinier, Marvelous Vitality of the Source (pronouns iel/they), lives in the countryside of France, among the oak trees of Quercy. Having dedicated themselves professionally to social work, they are currently retired. A feminist, they actively participate in an association supporting women who are victims of violence within the family, as well as ecological groups. They are a member of L'  le int  rieure Sangha (the inner island) and the Gardien.nes de la Terre Sangha. Through their pictures of insects and birds, they testify to the beauty and wonders of the living world.



Laur  ne Girin, Mindfulness Awakened from the Heart (pronouns she/her), lives at the bottom of the French Alps, near Grenoble. She is deeply grateful for having met Th  y's teachings in 2018 as she sees how they are transforming her life toward more joy and happiness. She dreams of a society that supports life and is a big fan of Joanna Macy's Work That Reconnects interactive group process. She aspires to live fully and support all beings, with simplicity. Every day since she was a child, she has marveled at the beauties that life on beautiful planet Earth offers. She enjoys arts (specifically theater, clowning, drawing, and taking close pictures of tiny beauties such as tree bark, plants, flowers, and small animals).

J'essaie de voir la vie,
chaque être vivant,
comme une merveille
Avec la curiosité de
la découverte. Voir et
vivre chaque situation
comme une occasion d'apprendre
et d'apprendre en jouant,
avec la joie de la
découverte



Text from Laurène Girin

This Freedom

Richard Brady reflects on how Lamp Transmission supported his healing and growth in freedom to share mindfulness with others in person and in his writing.



Photo courtesy of the Plum Village website team

Ted, my therapist, writes a few words on a pad, then tears the sheet off. “Here’s your assignment, Richard.” I look down; on the first line he’s written *freedom from*. Halfway down the page he’s written *freedom to*. I suppress a sigh. *Will this really lead me somewhere?*

A few months earlier I received a message from Thích Nhất Hạnh inviting me to receive Dharma Lamp Transmission to become a Dharma teacher in his tradition. The ceremony would occur just before Christmas in Plum Village, France. *I’m not a Dharma teacher*, I think. *I’m a math teacher*. I have begun bringing mindfulness into my high school classes, hoping to help students learn this life skill that will increase their capacity to pay attention. I’ve also been leading mindfulness retreats for fellow educators. These are ways of sharing some of the precious gifts I’ve received from Thầy.

When I first heard this invitation might be coming, I felt excited, but I also began to worry about the expectations of others. I don’t want to travel around the country offering retreats and Days of Mindfulness like some Dharma teachers do. My focus is on sharing mindfulness with students and teachers. Perhaps I can call my friend Anh-Huong, Thầy’s niece, and ask her to discourage the invitation. But the invite arrives, and it’s too late for anyone to intervene. I’m surely not worthy of this honor, but I defer to Thầy’s wisdom, trusting that taking this step will help me grow. With that thought, I feel deeply and humbly grateful.

... an *insight* poem presented at a formal ceremony
before Thầy and the Plum Village community?
How could I possibly write that?

During the ceremony, I will be asked to present an “insight poem.” I’m not a poet. I’ve written poems for Elisabeth on her birthday and our anniversary, but an *insight* poem presented at a formal ceremony before Thầy and the Plum Village community? How could I possibly write that? The poem I write for Thầy is supposed to express insight about *something*. Hmm. What might that be? Remembering words from my study of Marshall Rosenberg’s nonviolent communication, I ask myself, *What is alive in me? What is my vision?* Since reading Thomas Wolfe in high school, I’ve been drawn to people who seem to be *free*: Henry Miller, Ram Dass, the Grateful Dead, Thích Nhất Hạnh. Do I have my own vision of freedom?

What does freedom *mean*? Where have I found
freedom in my life? Where should I be looking?

I’ve been reading alternative education texts and incorporating new methods into my math teaching, yet moments of true freedom in my personal life are rare. Unresolved issues dating back to childhood plague my relationships, including with myself. I’d like to learn something fresh about freedom that might inspire me. So, I begin discussing this with friends. No insight appears. Finally, a month before the ceremony in Plum Village, I raise my questions with Ted. “What does freedom *mean*? Where have I found freedom in my life? Where should I be looking?” Twenty minutes into the session, Ted interrupts me to ask how I am. Confused, I reply, “I’ve been telling you how I am for the last twenty minutes!”

“No, you haven’t,” he says. “You’ve been telling me about your family, your school, and your spiritual community. How are you?”

I realize I don’t know how I am. My habit is to look outside myself to find out how I am. Thoughts and feelings about others obscure my connection to myself and to my feeling free. At the end of our conversation, Ted hands me the paper with the assignment. During the days that follow, I write responses for both categories: *freedom from* and *freedom to*. Nothing new shows up. Disappointed, I report my results to him at our next meeting. Taking in my disappointment, Ted listens, remaining present with me.

I see that my knots—my habit energies—are a *part*
of me and that untying them is *not* a prerequisite
for freedom.

I wake up a few days later with a fresh understanding. I see that my knots—my habit energies—are *a part of me* and that untying them is *not* a prerequisite for freedom. This revelation manifests as the poem I respectfully offer at my Lamp Transmission ceremony:

This freedom—not freedom *from*,
from childhood habits,
from childhood fears;

not freedom *to*,
to open to the love enfolding me,
to know and live my truth.

This freedom—freedom *with*,
with habits, with fears,
with heart protected,
truth hidden deep inside.

This freedom—freedom with this moment,
just as it is. *

• • • • •

In the twenty-three years since, life has offered me significant opportunities to practice with my insight of “freedom with.” My childhood fears, related to the unknown and the unfamiliar, went untended. Had my loving parents been emotionally expressive, I might have entrusted these fears to them. As it was, I was alone, ruminating on my fears and planning in order to reduce my chances of negative experiences in the future. Rumination and excessive planning became part of who I was, covering up my fear.

At the time I received Lamp Transmission from Thầy, I’d been living in the Washington, DC area for thirty-five years. I’d been teaching high school math for thirty-one, married for fifteen, and enjoying being a dad for fourteen. My life was familiar to me. I was mostly occupied with *doing*. Conditions seldom watered my negative seeds. Attending Sangha and being on retreats provided all the peaceful respite for *being* I seemed to need.

**This practice helped me focus on what was present
in my life, rather than on what I had left behind.**

Six years later, in 2007, I retired from high school teaching. The following year my partner Elisabeth and I moved to Putney, a small town in rural Vermont, US. I left behind my identity as a schoolteacher, my daily schedule of classes, my Sangha, my friends, my home—all that had been familiar to me. Arriving in Putney, I hoped to offer mindfulness to local schools, but that failed to materialize. I was adrift. It was time, I realized, to call on “freedom with.” With that insight I adopted an attitude of curiosity. I began to write weekly “Vermont Reflections,” which I sent to friends and family members. This practice helped me focus on what was present in my life, rather than on what I had left behind. However, I

still had plenty of empty hours to worry about what the future might hold. My worries were realized early in our second year in Vermont when I came down with an undiagnosed illness that laid me low. No Western or Eastern treatment helped. Weak and spending much of my time in bed, I read and listened to music. I rested, letting myself just be. This was a freedom I hadn't experienced before, truly freedom with.

... my heart was softening and long-held tensions in my body were beginning to release.

A year later, an acupuncturist introduced me to Chinese qigong practice, where I learned to give and receive qi energy and to circulate it through my body. I began what would become a twice-daily practice, accompanied by a recording of Plum Village monastics chanting to Avalokiteshvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion. In their chant they sent compassion to themselves, to a loved one, and then out to the world. I silently joined them. All the while, my heart was softening and long-held tensions in my body were beginning to release. Without my conscious awareness, I was opening to the love surrounding me, and I was developing a foundation for knowing and living my truth.

* The first portion of this article is adapted from *Short Journey Home: Awakening to Freedom with Thích Nhất Hạnh* by Richard Brady, Parallax Press, 2024.

Richard Brady, True Dharma Bridge, leads retreats in the Plum Village tradition for educators, writes, and coordinates Wake Up Schools. He was ordained as a Dharma teacher by Thích Nhất Hạnh in 2001. He is the author of *Walking the Teacher's Path with Mindfulness: Stories for Reflection and Action* and *Short Journey Home: Awakening to Freedom with Thích Nhất Hạnh*. Richard practices with the Mountains and Rivers Mindfulness Community and lives with his partner, Elisabeth, in Putney, Vermont, US.



In the Green Valley

I found my heart in the green valley just outside the door.
“Tidy up” says the Zen Master of ancient ways and ancient days.

Broken by love, by loss, by fear, and by hope
my hands are still wet with the dewdrops of my tears.
Lie down in the grass of the present moment,
smell its patience,
feel the wind of its forgiveness,
letting go, letting go, letting go.

Come back from the sea of comparison, of up and down, winning and losing.
they are all fool’s gold, not worthy of your true mystery, depth, and greatness.

Enter the cave of your heart, face its walls for nine years, nine months, nine days, nine hours,
nine minutes, nine seconds, nine nano-breaths and tidy up.
Calming your mind from its restlessness caused by imagining ten thousand things.

Rest in the divine abodes of love as your comfort and your strength.
Abide in the bright light of non-dualism, free from I-Making that causes suffering.

For the satisfied heart, the happy heart is the heart of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and,
the happy and satisfied heart can be found only in your precious heart.

Larry Ward (pronouns he/him), PhD, is a poet, writer, spiritual teacher, and co-founder of The Lotus Institute. He is the acclaimed author of *America’s Racial Karma: An Invitation to Heal*, and a senior Dharma teacher ordained in the Plum Village tradition. Dr. Ward holds a PhD in Religious Studies with an emphasis on Buddhism and the neuroscience of meditation. As a teacher, Larry interweaves insights with personal stories and resounding clarity that express his Dharma name, True Great Sound.





Photo by Matt Dorma

NOURISHING OUR ROOTS: BIPOC RETREAT



Photos courtesy of Deer Park monastics

MAY 2024 AT DEER PARK MONASTERY



A Thousand Rivers of Moonlight

Sister Hoa Nghiêm offers insights from exploring
Thầy's lifetime of peace activism.



Photos courtesy of Sister Hoa Nghiêm

FOLLOWING IN THẦY'S FOOTSTEPS

Last autumn, Blue Cliff Monastery welcomed two guests from Vietnam, Mr. Thanh and Mr. Huy. Mr. Thanh, the director of a documentary about our teacher, Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh (or Thầy), had come to learn more about Thầy's life in the 1960s, the crucial period when he came to the United States to pursue a Master of Arts degree and to advocate for peace in Vietnam.

Together, monastics and the documentary film crew visited Princeton University, where Thầy had studied. Dr. Brian Shetler gave us a guided tour of the library, which displayed a wide variety of materials both by and related to Thầy, and pointed out Brown Hall, where Thầy had resided.

The path leaving the library was strewn with gold and red leaves. Here, where Thầy had walked, we practiced walking meditation. Pausing under a rippling maple tree, we sat in a circle and listened to a passage from Thầy's memoir, *Fragrant Palm Leaves*. As the wind scattered golden leaves from swaying branches, beauty carved a path into my memory.

*"On the day you return,
if the sky is torn asunder,
look for me in the depths of your heart."¹*

We sat inside the cabin by a wood-burning stove as Thọ, a lay practitioner and close friend of Blue Cliff, collected leaves and dry wood for the fire, which soon filled the room with warmth. It was in this very cabin that Thầy had written a short book titled *A Rose for Your Pocket*. Later, a musician took a part of the prose and put it to music. Inspired by the surroundings, Sister Noi Nghiêem invited us to sing this song in memory of Thầy. Everyone joined in, and it felt as if Thầy was sitting with us. I felt the urge to sing to offer homage to Thầy and to those present: *"A light cloud pillows the mountain peak. Listening to the fragrance of tea carried by the wind, we continue to place trust in the faith that we have. We happily continue our journey ..."* But I suddenly felt my throat constrict and was unable to continue. Thầy has gone far away. I heard again the faith he gifted us: *"Continue the path that Thầy has traveled. Don't give up, my child ..."* In my heart I responded, *"Yes, I will never give up!"*

"If you want to cry, just cry. Don't suppress it. There's nothing shameful about crying. Being aware that you are crying is enough."

CONTINUING THE PATH

Our next destination was the Pomona wood cabin at Camp Ockanickon for Boys in Medford, New Jersey. The cabin sits next to a large lake where Thầy had once paddled on a small boat, playing among the water lilies until evening. As it was now Autumn, yellow leaves were falling from the trees onto the surface of the lake. I imagined Thầy as a young monk, sitting contemplatively and reminiscing about his homeland, Phương Bối, and the pain of war in his native country. I recalled reading *Fragrant Palm Leaves* and tearing up at two verses written as a farewell to Thầy by Ly, a social activist. Even now, reading them again, my emotions well up:

BEING AWARE IS ENOUGH

The next day, we continued our trip and visited Union Theological Seminary in New York. We began walking meditation at 306 West 109th Street, the house where Thầy resided before returning to Vietnam in 1964, and we continued to Columbia University. The city was bustling with people. Passing fruit stalls, I tried to put myself in Thầy's shoes: I imagined buying vegetables or bread alone on these streets. There would have been almost no other Buddhist monks around. I know Thầy confronted internal conflicts and feelings of loneliness in a new environment while also carrying the intense sorrow of knowing war was ravaging his homeland.

My eyes welled up with tears of compassion for that young monk, my teacher, who shouldered such a heavy burden. At first, I quickly wiped away my tears, but then I remembered Thầy telling me, “If you want to cry, just cry. Don’t suppress it. There’s nothing shameful about crying. Being aware that you are crying is enough.” As the sun of awareness shines, light floods in, and I remember that we don’t need to suppress emotions. Being aware that I am crying, how can I continue crying?

CONNECTING ACROSS TIME

At Columbia University, we explored the eleventh floor of Butler Library and I marveled at walking past the same bookshelves my teacher had perused. It was here, Thầy wrote, that he had opened a book and found that two people had borrowed it before him, on dates decades apart: “I was able to encounter two people in space but not in time.”² Now, in Butler Library, I felt that I too was meeting Thầy in the space of my own consciousness, if not in time.

In a small, secluded room of Burke Library, we were shown pictures and documents from the school’s founders and professors. I was surprised to see a picture of Thầy in a glass case alongside other renowned professors. Thầy, at thirty-six, looked very young. When I saw the display of his master’s thesis, *The Problem of Knowledge in Vijñānavāda Epistemology*,³ I felt pride and admiration for my teacher, a young monk who had eloquently presented the epistemology of Buddhist philosophy to a Western academic environment long before Buddhism was familiar.

A MOUNTAIN TO WITHSTAND THE STORM

Mr. Thanh also wanted to visit Riverside Church, where Thầy gave a talk on September 27, 2001, after the Twin Towers were attacked on 9/11. When we arrived, it was already quite dark. Initially, the church didn’t want to receive us—they had closed. But upon hearing that we were making a documentary about Thầy’s life, an elder in the church told the security guards to let us in. The kind,

elderly man welcomed us and led us to the main church, where he had been present when Thầy had addressed over two thousand people.⁴

I remember September 2001. We were on our way to Kim Sơn Monastery when we heard that the Twin Towers had been attacked. Thầy asked the driver to stop the bus and told us to join our palms and recite the names of the Buddha and *bodhisattvas* for those who had died. Afterward, US Sanghas seeking an antidote to the fear and aggression growing around them invited Thầy to give a Dharma talk at Riverside Church. Some of us who accompanied Thầy that evening, including me, were very worried—what if a bomb exploded while Thầy was giving his talk!? But Thầy was very calm as he walked into the church with steady steps. Following his lead, each trailing monastic took mindful steps up to the podium. Sitting behind Thầy, I breathed awareness into my fear and accepted that anything could happen to me at that moment. A bomb could go off. But the vow of a bodhisattva is to not be afraid of suffering, to think not only of oneself, to go to the places that need help, and to dare to speak out and call for peace in the world. Our society today, just like in Thầy’s time, needs many bodhisattvas to speak up together for world peace. One bodhisattva is not enough; we need a Sangha, for only a Sangha can create a mountain able to withstand the storms of war. Remembering these teachings, I understood Thầy’s fearlessness in giving the Dharma talk at Riverside Church.

THE PATH OF PEACE CONTINUES

The day I asked Thầy to join the monastics, I wanted to become a nun because life at Plum Village was so fun. There was nothing to worry about. Every day, I could do sitting and walking meditation with the Sangha and eat in silence, and every week I could listen to Thầy’s Dharma talk. I didn’t need to look for a job or compete for an important position, nor did I need to think about money. Life was simple and happy. But over time, I saw that the path I was on was not as simple as I thought. I began to have work and responsibilities assigned to me by the



Sangha. I became more worried about monastic life, because at that time, Plum Village was not as developed as it is now. I started thinking about how to raise money for Plum Village so we would have enough to live, and I became worried.

I asked Thầy for permission to raise bees to sell honey. Plum Village has up to 1,250 plum trees; every spring they bloom, and bees fill the garden. I had other ideas, too: selling spring rolls at the market in Sainte Foy, for example. Thầy shook his head, looked straight into my eyes, and said very strictly, “Don’t worry, my child. Just keep practicing! If one has virtue, one will not lack for food. Instead of worrying, put *Transformation and Healing* on your bedside table and read one chapter a day for me.”

Transformation and Healing, a commentary Thầy had written about the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, is very simple and easy to understand. Reading it, I felt like I had struck gold. A new perspective opened up in front of me: my true homeland, I realized, is right inside me, not somewhere far away.

Previously, when Thầy told me, “Out there,

people are suffering a lot. They really need our help, so we should study and practice properly,” I agreed, but my mind was blank. With time, and the opportunity to come into contact with the cultures and diverse lives of many people, I have come to understand: regardless of nationality, race, skin color, location, or class, people cannot avoid suffering in life.

Living in a wealthy country like the United States, I thought there would be less suffering than in poorer countries. But I was wrong. I have been residing at Blue Cliff Monastery for nearly ten years now and the suffering here is as full as the Atlantic Ocean. I know a family whose son committed suicide. I listen to students with wounds from sexual or physical abuse committed by their parents, to people who feel lonely in their lives, and to young people mired in addiction and debauchery. There is also much mental illness in society. What must we do to help our loved ones overcome emotional storms and distress? Isn’t it too late to wait for the storm to come before finding a solution? I see now that the need for mindfulness practice is very

strong. I clearly see the reason for my presence and my practice. I am not practicing only to achieve my own personal goal of enlightenment. My existence and practice are to help alleviate pain of all who suffer.

Tonight, the bright moon outside the window at Blue Cliff reminds me of the time I sat with Thầy on a bench, watching the moon. He told me, “Only when we are free can we see the bright moon.” Did Thầy want to tell me that only when I am not busy with family or social matters, only when my heart is not filled with desires, wishes, and sorrows, will I be able to truly be in touch with the bright moon? As Thầy’s parallel verses in the Great Togetherness Meditation Hall of Blue Cliff Monastery say:

*The blue water is clear,
thousands of rivers have water,
thousands of rivers and moons appear.
Mountain Cliff is beautiful,
every time you look at it, it is brand new.*

I would like to say to Thầy, “Dear Respected Thầy, I am very happy. Every day I see our direction clearly and know where I am going. The gratitude I have for my teacher, for the patriarchs, for my spiritual family, for my parents, and for my blood family will never run dry. I know that you are roaming freely, and that you will be in our hearts forever.” Thầy’s peace activism continues in me, and in the Sangha.

November 30, 2023
Chân Hoa Nghiêm

¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves: Journals 1962-1966* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998), p. 51.

² Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves: Journals 1962-1966* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998), p. 75.

³ Thích Nhất Hạnh’s thesis is available on Columbia University’s website at <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/efz6-7n73>.

⁴ Sister True Dedication and Sư Cô Định Nghiêm, “Thích Nhất Hạnh: Extended Biography,” Plum Village. Accessed May 9, 2024. <https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/biography/thich-nhat-hanh-full-biography>

Translated by Sister True Vow



Sister Hoa Nghiêm became a nun in 1991 and received transmission to be a Dharma teacher in 1998 from Thích Nhất Hạnh. She has lived at Plum Village in France, Green Mountain Dharma Center in Vermont and Deer Park Monastery in California, US, Tây Linh Temple and Diệu Trạng Temple in Vietnam, and Plum Village Thailand. Sister Hoa Nghiêm now lives at Blue Cliff Monastery in New York, US, where she serves as an eldest sister, Dharma teacher, and retreat organizer.

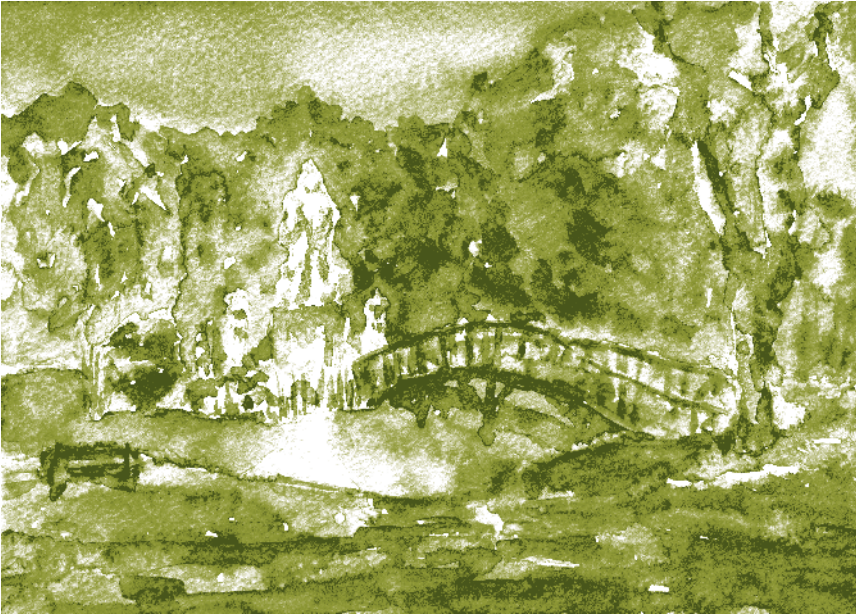
Thirty-Three Years to the Other Shore

**Herbert Gooden shares the transformative effects
of a BIPOC retreat at Magnolia Grove Monastery.**

My story begins in 1989 when I woke up one morning in an addiction recovery facility. Although I had a traditional Black Belt Southern Baptist Christian beginning, there I sat. After trying to live a Christian life as I understood it, I was internally questioning how I could have ended up in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. Today, I am free, and the BIPOC Retreat at Magnolia Grove moved the needle for me.

My journey searching for freedom allowed me to reach into the bags of many traditions. I became a licensed and ordained Christian minister. I became a Unity Church and recovery chaplain. I studied various disciplines and facilitated many spiritual groups. This helped because I was torn between Christianity and Buddhism. Although the Buddhist teachings were having a positive effect on my spiritual and psychological life, I had been so brainwashed that Jesus was good and Buddha was wrong. Around the year 1997 I came upon Thích Nhất Hạnh's *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. It was a breath of fresh air, revealing the similarities between Zen Buddhism and Christianity. Thầy's teaching on the similarities of Buddha and Christ freed me of my internal war. It brought me peace. I have not looked back. I have stopped feeling like a hypocrite. I can embrace both. I call myself a hybrid. I walked away from the pulpit. I left the Christian pulpit because I lost my zeal for traditional Christianity. I no longer believed in original sin, or that all are lost except Christians. I began to be open to the universal love of all. It relieved a fair amount of stress; Eastern teachings and disciplines positively affected me. Thầy's teaching on mindfulness meditation became essential and impactful in my personal life and spilled over into my Christian faith. The Buddhist teachings became part of my moral compass.

But I was shaken approximately six years ago. I had been free of my addiction for fourteen years. I had returned to the pulpit. I had been treading relatively well between the Western and Eastern teachings. I had entered an institution seeking a higher degree in biblical studies.



Magnolia Grove Monastery watercolor by Brent J. Rowley

A professor made a statement that penetrated my core. He stated that he had gay people who attended his church, and they loved them, they contributed financial support, but they could never become members. I sat there, stunned for a moment. The first thought that came to my mind was that one of my daughters is gay. Secondly, my heart went out to those who were gay and who attended this church. Thirdly, I was saddened. I knew then that I would leave that institution, not knowing until that moment that the pastor was practicing exclusiveness.

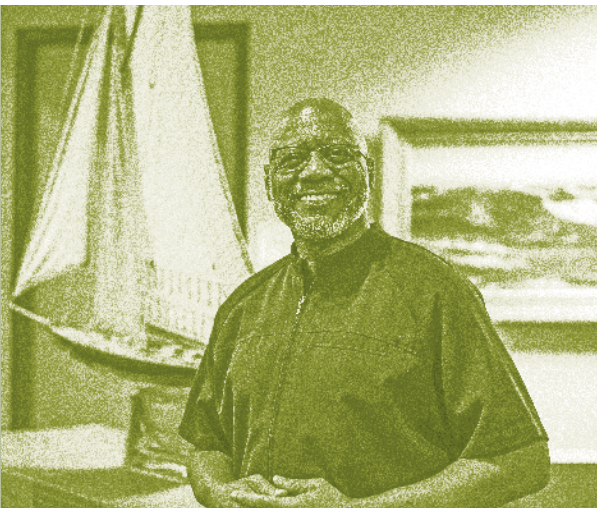
In 2021, I began a two-year Mindfulness Meditation Teachers Certification Program. One of the sessions included The Five Mindfulness Trainings. Six months were devoted to BIPOC training (part of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Track) that I needed to familiarize myself with. Before my training, I was not aware of the BIPOC acronym. My peer group in the training consisted of people of color from other countries. They shared how they were oppressed because of their color. Within the program, I was educated on the different forms of racism and oppression and their impact on people of color. I gained a better understanding of internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism. In 2022, my mentor asked if I had been on a retreat recently. I looked up retreats and discovered Magnolia Grove Monastery.

In April 2022, I reached the other shore at Magnolia Grove Monastery. As I headed to Mississippi from Alabama, I didn't know what to expect. As I arrived at the property, I knew I was where I was supposed to be. It was a BIPOC retreat. A fellow attendee mentioned that there would be a transmission of The Five Mindfulness Trainings, which I was not aware of. My body system was informing me that I was safe; I felt an ease throughout my body. I felt open and unguarded. I saw all the different flowers of all sexual orientations. My instinctual defense calmed. Realizations of unity in suffering overcame me. Joy entered my heart.

Eager to hear a Dharma talk, I was happy, and peace overcame me. But listening to Sister Peace didn't last long; I fainted during her talk. I had never fainted in my life. All I remember is looking up from the floor and Sister Bội NghiêM asking, "Mr. Herbert, are you all right?" Two angels attended and took me to the hospital for safety. One was a doctor and my advocate, ensuring I was thoroughly checked out. They found nothing organic wrong with me. I had experienced an overwhelming feeling of joy that I had not experienced in decades.

I had seen Sister Peace in a documentary. The Universe consistently arranges things beyond our planning. I was fortunate to be part of Sister Peace's Dharma sharing group. I joked with her that her talk was so good I passed out. I felt at home—in the presence of my family and fellow journeyers. We were there to learn how to relieve or manage our suffering while strengthening ourselves to help others. Sister Peace led masterfully. She listened and guided us, allowing plenty of space for personal insights. On April 10, 2022, I received my Five Mindfulness Trainings certificate in a ceremony etched in my memory for life.

Through my experience at Magnolia Grove Monastery and the profound teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh, I have come to understand the deep interconnectedness and interdependence of all existence. Mindfulness has become a guiding principle in my daily life as I strive to cultivate compassion for myself and others. I advocate for nondiscrimination and for recognizing and honoring the inherent worth and dignity of every being, irrespective of race, gender, or sexual orientation. Embracing imperfection and vulnerability with kindness, I practice nonviolence in all facets of existence, promoting peaceful conflict resolution and preventing harm toward all beings. Gratitude fills my heart as I acknowledge the impermanence of all things, and I strive to be fully present in every moment, practicing deep listening without judgment. Letting go of fixed ideas and possessions, I engage in applying Buddhist principles to social and environmental issues, endeavoring to promote peace and justice throughout the world. Through one transformative BIPOC retreat at Magnolia Grove, I have crossed to the other shore.



Herbert Gooden II, Ancestral Jewel of the Source (pronouns he/him), has a private practice at The Children's Hospital of Alabama, providing stress management services. He is a certified trauma-informed mindfulness meditation teacher, a state-certified recovery support specialist, a Heartmath practitioner, and a clinical and neuromuscular massage therapist.

My Mothers' Hands

Order of Interbeing member Carole Moore explores the deep connection she shares with her mothers through sewing and expresses her gratitude to them.



photo by Carole Moore

Like the sewing box filled with her things, my mother is in me, in every cell of my body.

Thầy teaches us that our ancestors are in every cell of our bodies. There is a thread running through us, generation after generation, and into future generations. Thầy teaches me that my ancestors are in me.

At fifteen years old, in 1942, my mum left home to work in a factory, where she began to learn the dressmaking and tailoring skills she was to use throughout her life.

Breathing in, I see my mother suffering as a child.

She started to teach dressmaking in the evenings and then trained as a teacher in the 1970s. She taught dressmaking in secondary schools until she retired.

Breathing out, I smile to my mother.

My mother made my sister and me clothes during our childhood and taught us many sewing skills as we grew up. We learnt to make patchwork cloth, which we turned into long, flowing skirts; we tie-dyed T-shirts; we learnt to embroider and knit, and we learnt dressmaking.

When we were in our teens, our parents went on holiday and left us alone. Instead of having wild parties, we turned the living room into a sewing room and spent the week making clothes. I cut

up an old mock fur coat that had belonged to my grandmother and made a new coat for myself, while my sister made a velvet patchwork dress. We cleared up completely before our parents' return.

Recently, I started sewing again and decided to make a pair of trousers. I chose a beginner's pattern and carefully cut out the jade green linen, then started on the pockets. I struggled when the pieces didn't fit together, but I couldn't believe that I was unable to do it. Silently, I asked my mother for help. A little while later, a voice in my head said, "The pattern is wrong." No, I said, how can the pattern be wrong? Trust the pattern. So on I went and managed somehow to fit the pocket.

In the middle of the night, I thought I would look on the Internet for feedback on the pattern. Yes, there was an error in numbering on the paper pattern:

Pocket linings AB incorrectly numbered.

5 is 6 on the pattern.

The larger of the pieces is referred to as 5 in the instructions.

Piece 7 (pocket facing) is attached to piece 6 (smaller of the two pocket pieces) then sewn to piece 5.

The pocket had been joined incorrectly. My mother was right. Later, I was asked by the pattern to make eyelets or buttonholes for the ties on the

trousers. Again my mum said to simplify; use the most straightforward way. So I did. No eyelets or buttonholes, just elastic and a very neat waistband.

As I stitched, I realised that the thread I was using was from my mum's sewing box, a rich jade green. She had made sewing boxes for both myself and my sister. Mine was made from a rich turquoise-patterned satin and lined in deep red. It was filled with scissors, buttons, needles, pins, and thread.

The buttons varied in size and shape. Many were large black buttons, but there were colourful ones, too: Victorian painted ones, small mother-of-pearl buttons, and I remember one that looked like a piece of black and white striped liquorice.

The skills I was using were the skills she taught to me as a child, and they were being used again now that I was much older.

Breathing in, I am sewing with my mother's hands.

Breathing out, I smile to my mother.

Like the sewing box filled with her things, my mother is in me, in every cell of my body. The buttons, the pins, the needles, even the scissors. There is a thread running through me. I realise that this connection is not just in the skills that have been passed on, but in my feelings, emotions, and the seeds deep within me. Sometimes I wonder where that feeling came from, and then I find a small mother-of-pearl button in my sewing box.

My mother died on the 27th of January, 2015. The thread that connects me to her is also the thread that connects me to all my ancestors and to the cosmos.

I was adopted, which complicates things for me. I know very little about my birth mother and I have no sewing box from her; I just have a few stray buttons, a few photos, a few stories, and an invisible thread which connects us.

Breathing in, I touch my mother's hands.

Breathing out, I smile to my mother's hands.

Another sewing box that I inherited was from my mother-in-law. Using her threads connects us: old threads on wooden spools and many, many more buttons.

Buttons and attachments.

Breathing in, I smile; so many buttons.

Breathing out, I smile to the buttons.

Breathing in, I stitch.

Breathing out, I stitch.

Breathing.

Stitching.

Carole Moore, True Deep Loving-Kindness (pronouns she/her), is a retired teacher and facilitates at the Sea of Calm Sangha in Kent, England, co-facilitates local Days of Mindfulness, and practises with Plum Village UK Sanghas online.





Happy Farm
Photo by Guillaume Nicolle

Living into Nondual Parenting

**Alicia LeClair and Owen Zinaman explore
their insights into building a community of care.**

Walking into a school building a little over three months after giving birth, my body still tender and bruised, a swirl of conflicting feelings churned in my stomach. It felt unnatural when I left our new son Ari for the afternoon so I could work with teachers and students on developing social emotional learning skills (a task I, Alicia, had dedicated the last five years to with great passion). I wanted to be home with this new, unbelievably precious being, present to the moment-to-moment miracle of his awakening to the world. Reverence for life had never been stronger in me, and while I knew my work in schools was important, it suddenly paled in comparison to being with my son.

Given my state of unease, a moment of insight took me by surprise. As I walked past a lunchroom full of babbling children, I saw each and every child as an Ari, each child as someone's unfathomably precious baby. The urgency of deeply caring for and providing these magical beings with quality

learning opportunities suddenly became even more pressing. When I later stopped at the grocery store on the way home, the insight broadened even further and I saw each adult wandering the aisles as an Ari—as someone's precious baby, however long ago they had been born. No one was separate from him.

While I was holding this insight of interconnectedness with tenderness, Owen and I were navigating the reality of new parenthood within the hyper-individualistic, dualistic, nuclear family model pervasive in US culture. The juxtaposition between this felt sense of interconnectedness and the relatively isolated nature of our parenting experience was too hard for us to ignore; it laid bare how flawed, unrealistic, and at times inhumane our US cultural norms around family life can be.

Neither of us have immediate family nearby, and while we both feel deeply fortunate for the incredible and rich communities we are part of, the collective consciousness seems to have imparted to us an expectation that we should be able, willing, and even happy to go at this alone, no matter how exhausted, strung out, or unprepared we are. We are told we are separate families with separate children, and we need to largely handle this immense responsibility by ourselves. The struggle of the absolutely exhausting and relatively isolated first year of parenting is often bizarrely framed in our cultural mythology as an unavoidable rite of passage for new parents, who compare their "war stories" in sympathetic jest.

In contrast to our lived experience, we began to dream of the possibility of raising a child

**We have to practice
mindfulness as impulses
to control, discriminate,
and judge arise.**

within a community of care, where people lived into not only the practical benefit of supporting one another, but also the greater truth of our interconnectedness.

We have come to believe that one of the biggest gifts we can possibly give our child is to imbue his nervous system with a sense of safety in early childhood. That way, as he grows older and inevitably encounters challenges, he will always be able to regulate back to a strongly rooted emotional foundation. Through deeply looking at ourselves and our situation, it became clear that in all likelihood, our siloed, nuclear family existence—as loving as it is—may not allow us to truly offer this to Ari. Without having the experience of a safe and nurturing community, how could he come to believe that he himself is safe in the world?

Our guiding question became: *How do we stop just talking about this and actually start doing something?* How do we start living into a life of a more nondualistic existence? As the practice has reminded us time and time again, and as a piece of paper on our refrigerator regularly reminds us, the how is Now. We take care of the future by taking care of the present moment.

Even before we had Ari, at times to the surprise and momentary social discomfort of the people around us, we were already experimenting with playfully acting as if a more interconnected way of being were normal and natural, curious what the results would be. When one set of neighbors was down a car, for example, we insisted they use ours to cover their needs for over a year. We regularly help with house projects that could be considered far outside the normal scope of neighborly aid, share our food with those around us, and on the evening of Ari's first birthday, we had twenty neighbors from our block over to celebrate. In this broader social experiment, we found that many people (after momentary awkwardness or confusion) were more than happy to lean in and reciprocate in kind—all we had to do was act like everything was completely normal.

The other dimension of leaning into a more interconnected existence was finding ease in receiving from others. Our cultural narrative had

By forcing ourselves to say yes to help, we have been humbled not only by the generosity of others, but also by how much help we, as two new parents, actually could use.

taught us that any help received could be an imposition on others and potentially a breach of a social contract that insists upon our self-sufficiency. To resist this, a family rule we established after Ari was born was: "Say yes to all help that is offered." By forcing ourselves to say yes to help, we have been humbled not only by the generosity of others, but also by how much help we, as two new parents, actually could use. This has further solidified our feelings that something is amiss in our mainstream cultural narrative.

These practices helped us both see that the seeds of community care and a more nondualistic way of being exist within all of us. Everything we need is here already. But in our society, sometimes we must resist certain cultural norms in order to encourage the watering of these seeds.

Our many trips to Deer Park Monastery to practice with our beloved spiritual family helped reveal the next step on our family's path toward more nondualistic parenting. When Ari was surrounded by a large community of safe, regulated adults at the monastery, we realized he was experiencing that felt sense of community safety we so wanted for him. We also gleaned some insight into the immense benefits and practical challenges of community life and the importance of our core Plum Village practices in fostering and maintaining harmony in the community.

In the spirit of trying to bring a slice of Deer Park back home with us to Denver, Colorado, in December of 2023, we invited a fellow Sangha



Photo by Tig Ogdon, Storied Photography

member to live with us and embarked on a small, humble experiment of community living within our own home—splitting house tasks, cooking and caring for each other, practicing together, and defining family as something beyond the nuclear confine.

While it has been an experience filled with much joy and a deep sense of relief not to be “going it alone,” it has not come without challenges. The seeds of hyper-individualism still exist strongly within us. Personal practice has been vital as we encounter our edges. Having another adult join our home means we can no longer curate our environment to our exact preferences, for example. We have to practice mindfulness as impulses to control, discriminate, and judge arise. We often have had to let go and trust in our abilities to cultivate peace and happiness in ourselves and our community, regardless of whether our preferences are being met. We’ve also had to practice radical

transparency, deep listening, and loving speech at our regular house meetings as we water flowers and shine light on challenges that have arisen, all in the spirit of building that felt sense of community safety we aspire toward—not only for Ari, but also for ourselves and our world.

Outside of our home, living into a less separate reality with neighbors from many walks of life has meant practicing openhearted, nonjudgmental curiosity. In previous chapters of our lives, each of us has been guilty at times of waiting around and longing for this thing called “community” to show up, unconsciously thinking that when it arrived, we would have deep personal alignment (if not a “soul connection”) with every single person involved. Through our time spent at Deer Park and engaging with our communities here in Denver, we have realized that community can take so many different and rich forms, and that we need to let go of our incomplete conceptions of what it means or

should look like.

Our focus on building community and connection has subsequently involved continuously showing up and offering care in small and thoughtful ways to those around us, cultivating relationships slowly with presence and patience, letting go of expectations, and allowing each relationship to be exactly what it needs to be in any given chapter. This new approach has allowed relationships—including those with people we might not have normally connected with—to blossom in lovely and unexpected ways.

As we sat down recently with a new neighbor and her children and listened to stories and strongly held beliefs significantly outside of our own life experiences, we both had to actively practice Right Diligence by watching thought patterns arise that wanted to discriminate between “our family” and “theirs,” “our worldview” and “theirs.” Right Diligence has helped us notice when we are watering seeds of separation with our thoughts and, without suppressing or shaming them, choose a different path by turning toward thoughts that water seeds of kindness, compassion, and

interconnectedness. We have recognized through this practice that we do not need to be best friends with everyone to raise children in a harmonious community with them. We just need to be known to one another, to show up with care for each other and our children, to build trust over time, and to practice looking past surface-level judgments that reinforce our perception of separateness.

Nondual parenting, to us, is about so much more than our relationship with our child. We cannot separate that relationship from our relationship with each other, from our relationship with our neighbors and larger community, or from our relationship with the world. Nondual parenting feels inseparable from nondual living, and we aspire to take small steps to live into it every day.



Alicia LeClair, Loving Lotus of the Source (pronouns she/her), is based in Colorado, US. She is passionate about helping transform classrooms and school communities into mindful, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive communities of care and exploring what it means to be a mindful parent. Alicia has been practicing mindfulness since the age of thirteen, when her mother introduced her to it. She enjoys sitting by rivers, learning from children, and deeply connecting with those around her.



Owen Zinaman, Wholesome Steadiness of the Heart (pronouns he/him), is based in Colorado, US. He is a regular visitor to Deer Park Monastery and is a founding member of the Denver Wake Up Sangha. Owen enjoys wandering through alpine zones and practicing walking meditation in his local botanic gardens. He has spent his career advising governments and international aid organizations on the transition to sustainable energy.

Peace Education:
Unlearning Separateness
and Remembering Interbeing

Peace ed art by Stephanie Knox Steiner



Stephanie Knox Steiner shares her efforts to be a continuation of Thầy through her livelihood and vocation as a professor at the University for Peace.

Aware that much suffering is caused by war and conflict, we are determined to cultivate nonviolence, compassion, and the insight of interbeing in our daily lives and promote peace education, mindful meditation, and reconciliation within families, communities, ethnic and religious groups, nations, and in the world. We are committed not to kill and not to let others kill. We will not support any act of killing in the world, in our thinking, or in our way of life. We will diligently practice deep looking with our Sangha to discover better ways to protect life, prevent war, and build peace.

-The Twelfth of The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings



The words *peace education* rang through me like the great bell at the front of the hall.

The bamboo hut
Photo by Stephanie Knox Steiner

When I first heard the Twelfth Mindfulness Training, I knew I was home. I had just graduated with my master's degree in peace education from the University for Peace (UPEACE) and had moved back to San Diego, California, US while working on a teacher professional development program in peace education for Teachers Without Borders. I had been inspired on my path of peace education by reading Thây's book *Peace Is Every Step* when I was about twenty. This book set me on a path of making my life a work of art for peace. Eventually, this aspiration took me to UPEACE to study peace education and then to San Diego and Deer Park Monastery. There, in the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall, I first heard the Twelfth Mindfulness Training during The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings recitation ceremony. The words *peace education* rang through me like the great bell at the front of the hall. Here was a spiritual path and community that aligned with my vocational path and deepest aspirations; I knew I was at home. Fast forward fourteen years. I am now a resident faculty member at

UPEACE, teaching in the peace education master's program as my humble effort to be a continuation of these teachings in my livelihood, vocation, and life.

For me, the essence of peace education is unlearning the illusion of separateness and remembering or relearning our interbeing. One hand of peace education is understanding the root causes of violence. Each of The Mindfulness Trainings begins with "aware of the suffering." To start, we have to be aware. So much violence in our world is rooted in the illusion of separateness, which allows people to create hierarchies enforced through domination and violence. The illusion of separateness underlies colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy—systems and cultures of violence, domination, and separation. These systems permeate our relations at personal and global levels and have been operating for centuries, causing harm internally and externally for each of us, albeit in vastly different ways dependent on our identities and positions.

Peace education means seeing clearly and understanding this illusion, in a historic and contemporary context. It means understanding these roots and how they have become systematized; it means disrupting this illusion within ourselves when we notice it; it means healing from the violence, harm, trauma, and destruction of this separation; it means imagining other ways of living and remembering our interbeing with each other and with life itself.

Remembering our interbeing is the path forward, the other hand of peace education. If we remember our interbeing, we no longer want to hurt each other. Instead, we want to find ways of being and living well together—ways that allow everyone to be free and to thrive, that allow us to transform conflict nonviolently and creatively, that allow us to relate to the Earth as our mother and great ancestor rather than something to exploit.

A beautiful vision of peace that I love, which comes from the Earth Charter, describes peace as “the wholeness created by right relationships with

oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.”¹

This description aligns with the vision of interbeing at the heart of peace education. In the UPEACE classroom, we practice this vision of peace in many ways. We are very lucky: our physical classroom space is a bamboo hut at the edge of a protected forest in Costa Rica. We are immersed in beautiful natural surroundings; we do not need to try for nature to be our teacher, we just need to be aware. Our recent introductory peace education class took place in the peak of the rainy season, and every day we had to trudge through mud, trying to avoid slipping, to get to class. The breeze through the leaves of the trees, the birdsong, and the sweeping views of Costa Rica’s Valle Central all permeated our learning experience, reminding us that we, too, are nature.

We begin class with music to touch and water our seeds of joy, calm, and happiness. Then, we share a moment of mindfulness to allow us to arrive together and help us be aware. Our moment

We see ourselves as a learning community;
we are not doing this learning and
unlearning alone.



Learning altar for introductory peace ed class.
Photo by Stephanie Knox Steiner

of mindfulness allows us to be in touch with our bodies, minds, and feelings so that as we move through our class time and perhaps touch upon difficult topics, we can stay present to our inner landscape. In fact, this awareness becomes a key part of our learning process. Peace requires our presence and attention, and it is hard to cultivate peace if we are not present to ourselves and those around us. We create a learning altar to honor our roots and lineages, to honor the teachers we learn from and with, and to remember each day that the path of learning is sacred, not just a transaction.

We check in so we have a sense of how we are doing as a collective, to understand what each of us is bringing with us that day. We see ourselves as a learning community; we are not doing this learning and unlearning alone. This, for me, is the heartbeat of peace education and the most important, most beautiful, and sometimes most challenging work we do together. This is interbeing in practice—to understand and practice that we are not separate individuals learning alone; we are a community, we inter-are. This extends well beyond the classroom as we choose to be together beyond the formal spaces of learning.

Modern formal schooling can be highly individualistic, which is part of how many of us learn the illusion of separateness. Even though at UPEACE we are in a formal academic system still very much rooted in some of these philosophies, we disrupt this illusion as much as we can, especially through collaboration and co-creation. We write poetry and articles together. Students create group projects and co-facilitate classes. We dance and sing and howl and meditate together.

Modern formal schooling often overvalues rational and intellectual thinking as the only way of knowing. Part of our peace education practice is remembering there are many paths to know, and learning is not just lectures and readings. We can learn from our bodies, our emotions, our relationships, and our experiences outside of the classroom. We think about who our teachers are, knowing the Earth is one of our greatest teachers. As the Second of The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings reminds us, truth is found in life; life is our greatest teacher. In

peace education, we try to remember this daily.

As I reflect on my own role as a teacher, I am taken back to the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall. In 2011, I was on retreat with Thầy and the Sangha. After reading Thầy's words for many years, it was the first time I had the opportunity to be in his presence. More than anything he said during those days, what I remember most are little things—how he opened a door, how he erased the white board, how his smallest actions embodied and radiated peace. In the packed hall of one thousand people, you could truly feel his peaceful presence and how powerful his peace was. I can still feel it today. This, for me, is the greatest peace teaching I have ever received.

At a moment when we are witnessing and experiencing so much violence at the collective level, peace can feel very far away. Peace education is not a fast solution, but I believe it is part of the long-term work needed to shift toward more life-affirming and life-giving ways of being, knowing, and living. If we want to see a more peaceful world, we need educational spaces that teach toward it. Returning to Thầy's words and living example, which continue to reverberate long after he has left his physical body, we can touch peace in every step and every breath, and we can cultivate peace right where we are, in ourselves and in our relationships. In my office, I have a copy of Thầy's calligraphy: *Peace in oneself, peace in the world.*

¹ Earth Charter Commission, 2000, "IV Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace," Earth Charter. <https://earthcharter.org/read-the-earth-charter/democracy-nonviolence-and-peace/>

Even when peace in the world might feel far away, through our actions in this moment and through unlearning separation and remembering our interbeing we can create peace together, knowing we are not doing it alone.

Stephanie Knox Steiner, PhD, True Earth Dwelling (pronouns she/her), is an assistant professor and peace education program coordinator in the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University for Peace in Costa Rica. She is an ordained member of the Order of Interbeing and has been a member of the Earth Holder Community Care-Taking Council and board since 2017. She writes about interbeing, education, enchantment, and magic on her Substack, Enchantable (enchantable.substack.com).







Magda De La Paz
Cabrero

Long before the words “climate change” and “global warming” were everyday parlance, Thày was teaching us to be grateful to Mother Earth for her many life-sustaining gifts. When I first put on my brown jacket in 2001, I knew that the color represented the Earth. As Order of Interbeing practitioners, we wear a visible sign of respect for the planet and the web of life it sustains. What a critical, timely gift of awareness our beloved teacher offered to us!

“Everything outside us and everything inside us comes from the Earth. We often forget that the planet we are living on has given us all the elements that make up our bodies. The water in our flesh, our bones, and all the microscopic cells inside our bodies all come from the Earth and are part of the Earth. The Earth is not just the environment we live in. We are the Earth and we are always carrying her within us.”¹ This profound teaching is beautiful, reflecting the poet Thày was. But it also issues a challenge for the times we live in, calling us to consciously deepen our connection to the planet and all its life forms. The lessons we receive from that connection, born of regular, dedicated practice, light our way forward.

How can we connect more deeply to our Mother Earth? There are many ways, but one that is nurturing increasing numbers of people around the world is nature journaling. This is the practice of journaling in words, numbers, and images on the topic of nature. Journals are as varied as their creators. They may include scientific data, artwork, charts, poetry, graphs, sketches, quotes, and much more. A journaling practice may be done in solitude or in the company of others; it is a joyful activity for families, friends, and Sanghas. This interfacing with the natural world is a mindfulness practice focused on interbeing, which employs all our senses, our hands, and our curiosity.

Mindful Nature Journaling: A Practice for Our Times



Order of Interbeing member
Starr DiCiurcio encourages
us to connect deeply with
Mother Earth by sharing
her journaling practice.

Here are some helpful steps:

1. STOPPING

It can be difficult in our daily lives to stop our pre-occupying thoughts and become truly present to reality. But as we begin a nature journaling experience, it is essential to center ourselves and set aside our worries and plans for a while. To do this in a deliberate manner is helpful, giving ourselves the gift of practice for this designated time. Centering on the breath can support this process of stopping, simply noting each inhale and exhale as we have been taught.

2. SETTING YOUR INTENTION

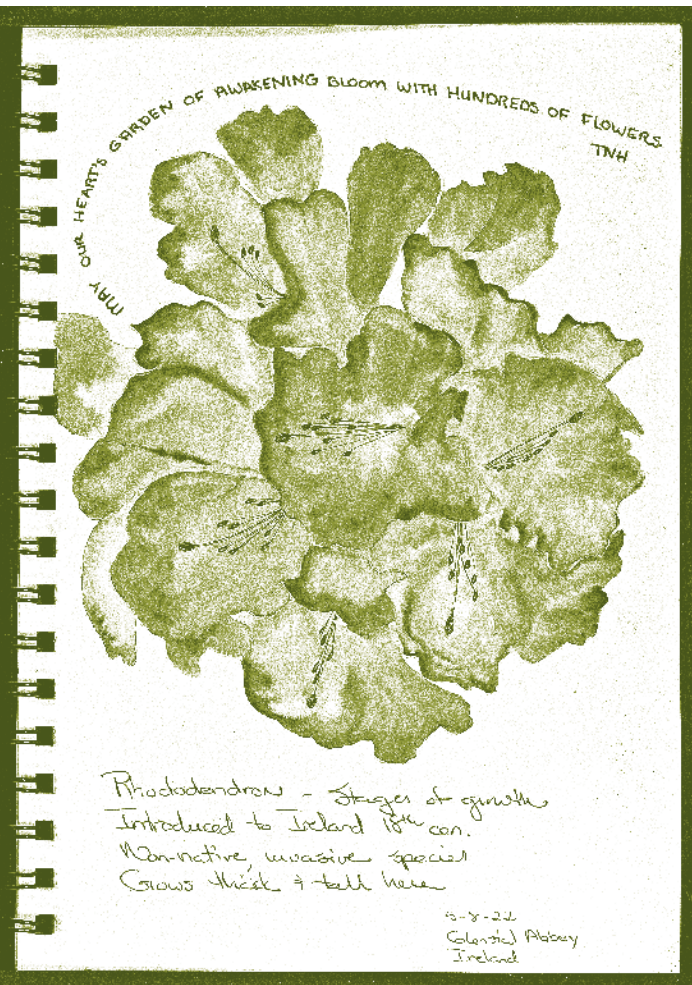
As you calm your mind and body, it can be helpful to set an intention. This might be quite specific, such as learning about a species of tree, or it might be general, such as enjoying the beauty before you. Decide what would nourish you during this time. What truly nourishes you, nourishes the planet.

3. MEDITATION

As you continue to deepen your practice of nature journaling, you may wish to meditate. This can be done before setting out, or while in nature. Walking meditation is a beautiful way to enter the natural world, perhaps as you seek the place where you would like to journal.

4. CONTEMPLATION

Once you have found your place in nature, you can turn your attention to the landscape around you. One by one, invite your senses to explore the environment. See, hear, touch, smell, and taste (in ways that keep you safe and that respect all living beings). These doorways of your consciousness all have information to offer.



5. NOTING

As you look around you, take note of the panoramic view and its many smaller elements. This is the time to choose your journaling topic. Will it be the glowing sunrise, the lapping lake, or the tiny ladybug climbing a blade of grass at your feet? Will it be one subject or several? Take your time selecting what strongly connects with your heart and mind.

6. INVESTIGATING

Now it is time to take out your materials. They may be as simple as a notebook and pencil. Or you may wish to use other favorite tools such as colored pencils, paints, a camera, or a magnifying glass. There are many choices, but few necessities. Open your journal and record what you have chosen. This may include words, numbers, and/or images. You might also have questions. They can be added too. What do you want to learn more about? What do you want to remember?

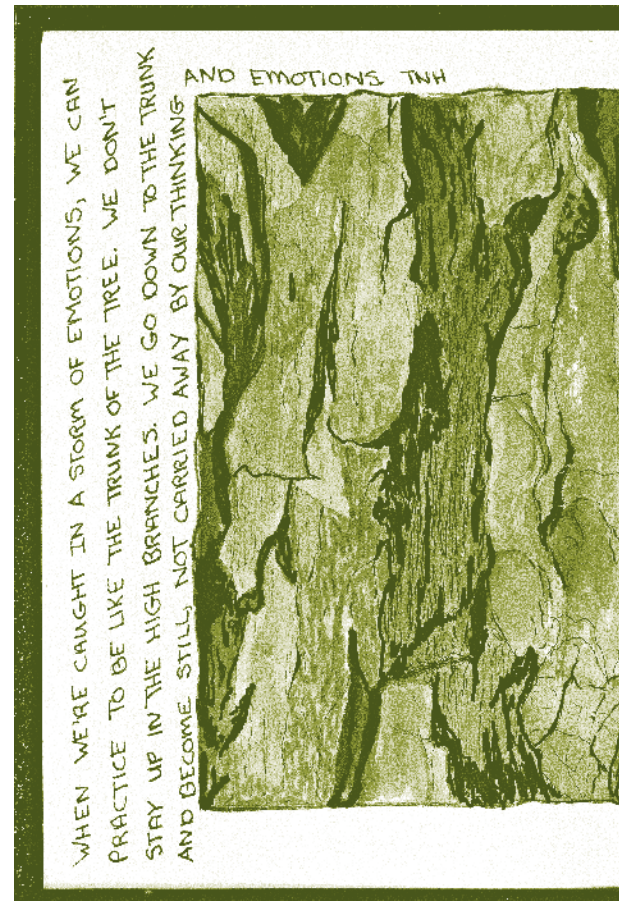
7. REFLECTING

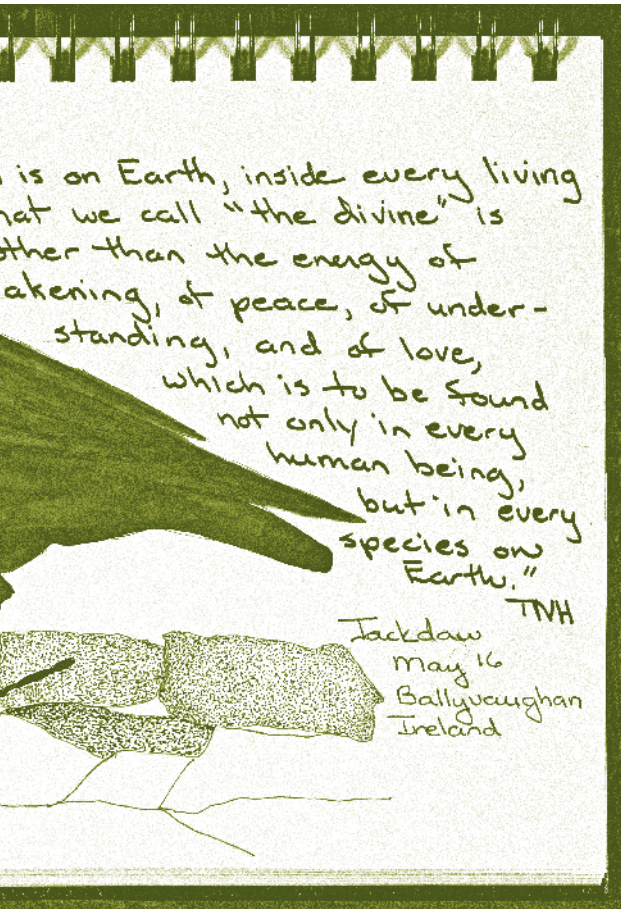
Your journaling can slow now as you reflect on your experience. What have you learned and what do you wish to learn more about? As we deeply enter into the physical world of nature, interbeing becomes our reality—not just an idea. We open to wonder and a deep, quiet joy. We come to truly love the Earth, and out of that love comes our dedication to her protection.

8. EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Before bringing this practice of nature journaling to a close, we bow deeply in gratitude for this opportunity we have had to commune with life and deepen our appreciation of interbeing. We are humbled and strengthened by the practice and we continue our day refreshed with greater clarity and openheartedness.

Thầy taught us that the Earth has a number of virtues: stability, creativity, nondiscrimination, strength, patience, and compassion. But how can



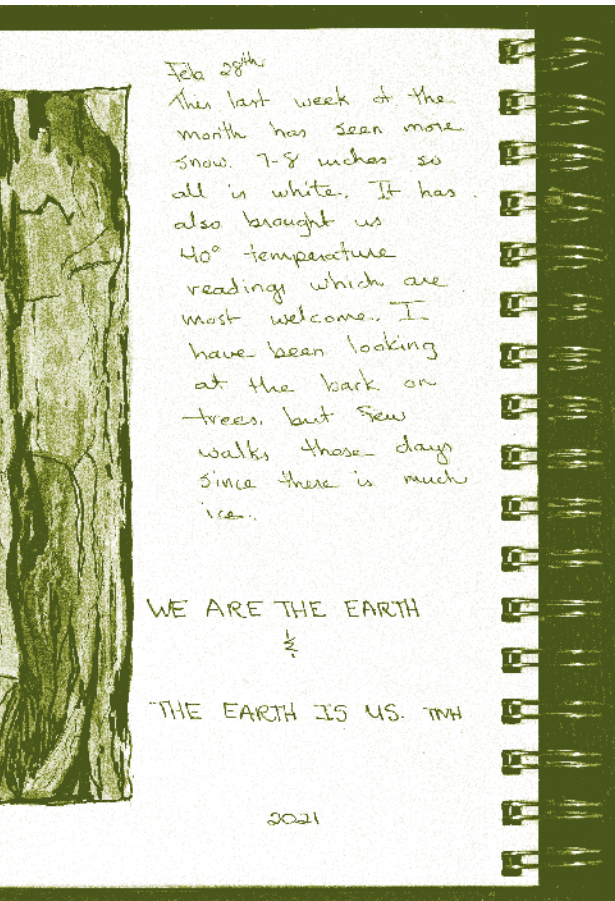


we learn from her if we do not slow down and consciously enter the deep connections that underlie all phenomena?

Nature journaling offers a pathway to understanding the Earth and her virtues. It also offers an opportunity to better understand ourselves. We live in relationship to all other life forms. Practicing right relationship comes with deliberate centering and the cultivation of our *bodhicitta*. Nature journaling is a powerful mindfulness practice that nurtures both our personal inner joy and the well-being of this precious planet. As Sister True Dedication taught us, "Cultivating a strong training in meditation and mindfulness is not an opiate to escape what's going on but a way for us to truly still the mind and look deeply, in order to see ourselves and the world clearly."²

¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Love Letter to the Earth* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2013), p. 8.

² Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2021), p. vi.



Starr Regan DiCiurcio, *True Understanding of the Sangha* (pronouns she/her), lives in Upstate New York, US where she has practiced with Kingfisher Sangha for twenty-three years. She became a member of the Order of Interbeing in 2003. Starr's latest book is *Dwelling in Wonder: Nature Journaling as a Spiritual Practice*.

Among Fruit Trees, Expectations, and Practice

Among fruit trees, green fields, and golden pastures in Southwest France, three large bells ring every day. The community that lives around them takes a conscious breath each time they hear their sound.

Breathing in, they dwell in the present moment. Breathing out, they smile.

I first heard about Plum Village from my mother when I was fifteen years old. One day my mother told my siblings and me that it would be a dream to go to France, to a place where people were very happy. She vividly described how the beautiful sunflowers and plum trees blossomed while people there meditated, walked, and farmed together. More than twelve years later, I finally arrived.

The reality of Plum Village exceeded the high expectations I had. I came for the first time to an Earth retreat in 2023, and I returned the same year as a volunteer for the summer. My experience at the mindfulness center founded by Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh was the perfect equation of spending time healing myself and helping others at the same time. It was not a full round bliss as there were moments of suffering (needed as the lotus needs the mud), but I can confidently say it is still the best summer I've ever had. I experienced life firsthand, connected to friends and non-friends, to family (even if they were very far away in Mexico) and ancestors, to flowers and insects, to nature, and to myself.

After living thirty days in New Hamlet, I reflected on the courage it takes to be softer. It is hard to be tender when we perceive our environment as harsh and cruel. Many people applaud those who are “stronger, cooler, or more powerful,” those who pretend that nothing matters, as if they are above all suffering. For many years I clung to a mask of

indifference that helped me survive. I feared being swallowed up at the first sign of weakness, so I couldn't look people in the eye. I had to look at the ground and, when I had no choice, I looked up with eyes of prey, trembling like a mouse ready to flee, hide or attack back. During my stay in Plum Village, I felt lighter and freer. While practicing with the monastics, aspirants, and lay friends, I inhabited myself for the first time: fully conscious. I relearned how to eat, how to walk, how to breathe. Now I can even smile at strangers, as I practiced very often in Plum Village.

I have felt full and joyful moments with friends and family before. But the difference between those moments and what I experienced in Plum Village is that before I didn't take “others” into account. The distinction between *us* and *them* was very common wherever I went: prioritizing “our family,” “our friends,” “our group,” “our religion.” In Plum Village, although we all came from different places and cultures, we were all worthy of a smile, a warm meal, and a listening ear. Everyone has a job to do; everyone contributes and cleans up in some way. There are no “hired hands” to clean or serve. Serving is another practice we do, and even if you have to do the dishes, throw out the rubbish or wash the toilets, you do it willingly, knowing that it is an offering to others. It is being grateful for the precious moments you are living, and it is a mindfulness practice too.

The consideration for others goes beyond those who live in the monastery and those who go on retreat. In the meditations, everyone is thought of. There is no group that is better than the others, and we all need each other as we *inter-are*. And all living beings are included: animals, plants, minerals.

I will remember for as long as I can the sunny

**Yanexy Pinedo shares her experience and insights as a volunteer
for a retreat in New Hamlet, Plum Village in France.**

moments in Plum Village: singing together around the big bell, following the voice of the sister or brother, not trying to get the perfect note, but being one with the present moment. I will treasure the memory of fresh plums and their delicious aroma. The first one I tasted was an appreciation gift from a dear friend. Because it smelled so good, I wanted to keep it for a long time. I'm glad I ate it; now I have the memory of its taste and that will last longer.

I will cherish, too, the walking meditation around the lotus pond with a smiling sunset in the background, where I remembered my grandma. I thought she would have loved the sunset, the fig tree, the plums, and serving each other. Later, in fact, she did enjoy it with me. That day I walked with her, feeling her presence.

Although I could not bring my mother with me to Plum Village, I felt grateful to her for showing me this beautiful path. I often thought of her: walking among the sunflowers, reading the calligraphies, and admiring all of Thầy's books gathered in the bookstore, the ones she always searched for wherever she could (it was hard to find them in Mexico ten years ago). If the conditions are right, one day I would be delighted to share a retreat with her.

My aspiration is to keep practicing and learning ways to dwell in the present moment. I have dreams but I am not attached to them. I have learned that they will not bring me happiness in exchange for achieving them. I generate happiness day by day; I cultivate the seeds of joy even in suffering. When there is suffering, I welcome it, embrace it, and let it be for as long as it needs. There are still cloudy and rainy days; but each time, the sun comes back sooner and sooner.

Thank you, dear Thầy, dear monastics, and dear beautiful Sangha, from Yanexy, a lay friend.



Photo by Yanexy Pinedo

The grid that held the sky

Whenever doubts clouded my mind
—Should I do this or that?—
I searched the sky for an answer.

Then a mark was drawn
by a divine self
or it seemed like it.

A trail of a plane crossing the sky
as white chalk on a blue board,
offered me the peace I needed:

“Is okay, my child,
I will show you the way”
was read from it.

Sometimes there were two
or three white traces
or even the plane itself.

The sky could be deep blue
or full of clouds, while the lines
played hide-and-seek behind them.

Finally, and without looking for it,
one day I arrived
to the place where all lines met each other.

I was mesmerized
as I contemplated
the grid that held the sky.

I had arrived home,
below the crossing lines,
All my questions were answered.

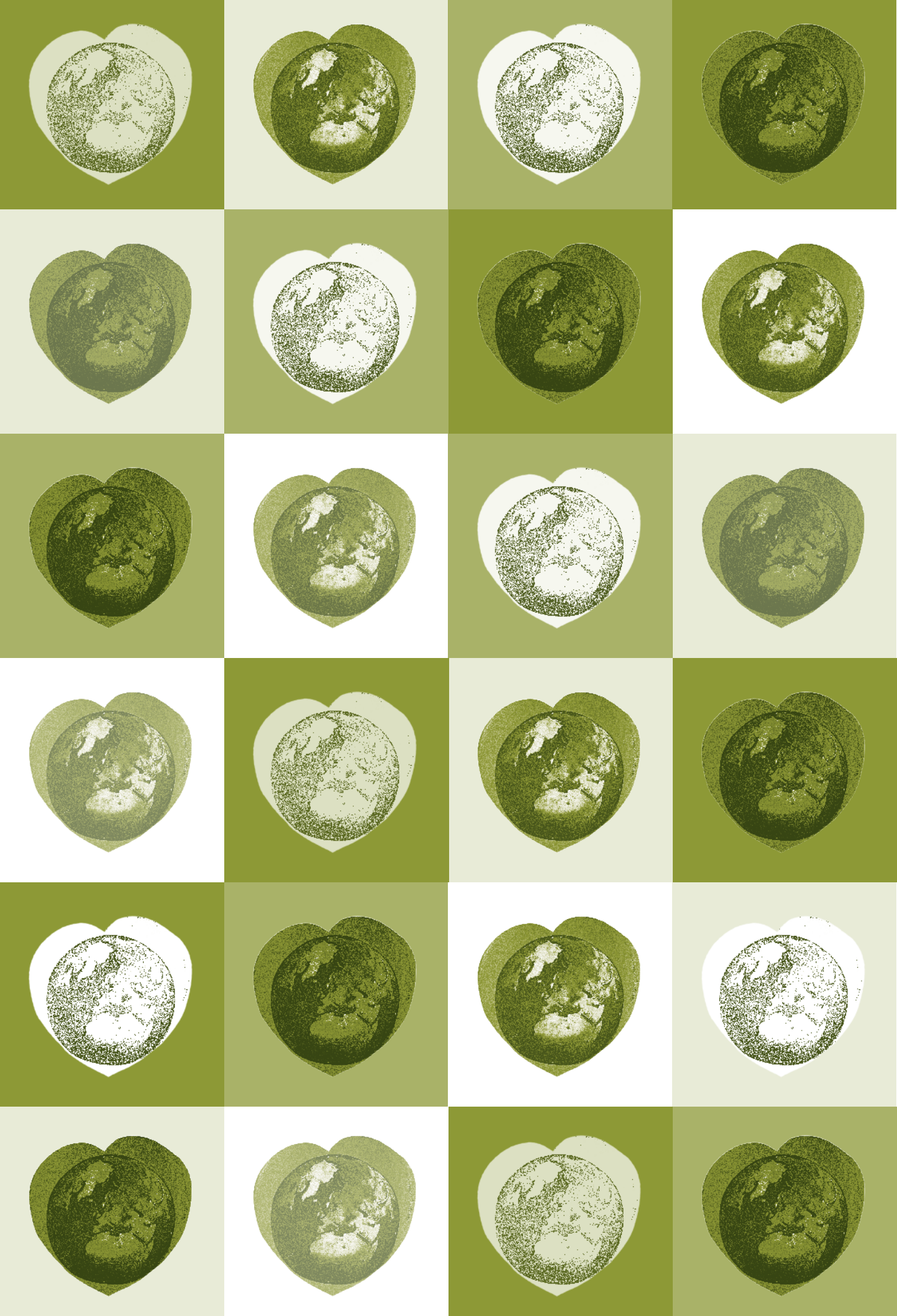




Photo by Yanexy Pinedo

Yanexy Pinedo, Compassionate Reverence of the Source (pronouns she/her), is a lay friend and everyday practitioner of the Plum Village tradition who enjoys reading Thầy's books, hearing Dharma talks, and writing in Spanish and English.





Healing Personal, Global Divisions with the Dharma

**Grappling with unwholesome seeds
watered by war, Sharon Aschaiek seeks
to transcend the illusion of separateness.**

At a recent demonstration near Toronto, Canada about the current war in Gaza, anger was palpable among protesters on both sides of the street.

On one side, I stood in front of a synagogue with other Jews and Israelis, steeped in our suffering caused by the October 7, 2023 massacre of civilians in Israel, and the wave of antisemitism spreading across Canada and worldwide.

On the other side were people steeped in their own suffering about the struggles and oppression of Palestinians and the devastating consequences of Israel's war in Gaza.

Propelled by visceral pain, both sides shouted their grievances—but no one was truly listening, and no one was truly heard.

I am a Jewish person who was raised by Israeli parents—one, the daughter of a Polish Holocaust survivor who lost almost her entire family to murder by the Nazis, the other the son of Iraqi Jews who endured pogroms and expulsion. The ethnic persecution of my ancestors has passed down intergenerational suffering that shapes how I think and feel about the war, its diverse causes, and the consequences of discord and division.

But as a mindfulness practitioner in the Plum Village tradition, I know that the Buddha's teachings as so skillfully presented by Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh offer a meaningful path to personal and collective healing and harmony.

**Opposite page:
Artwork from protest sign
photo by Sharon Aschaiek**

UNWHOLESOME SEEDS

That day at the protest, and in all the days since October 7th, I have grappled with many unwholesome seeds that surfaced in my consciousness and created significant challenges for me to work with in my meditation.

Indignation that our local religious temple was targeted for protest, suggesting it is acceptable to blame all Jews for the actions of the Israeli government.

Fear about my safety as a Jew in a country where escalating antisemitic violence is being perpetrated against Jewish schools, places of worship, and neighbourhoods. From verbal threats to physical assaults, from Nazi graffiti to the firebombing of a Jewish-owned business, they are all meant to intimidate and dehumanize Jewish people, and they trigger the personal and collective trauma associated with being part of a historically persecuted minority.

Anger and disappointment with our elected leaders, who have done little to quell the ethnic hatred intensifying on our streets, thereby emboldening hateful mobs and leaving Jews vulnerable. Anger and disappointment at the Israeli government, for unfair and harmful policies and practices that have jeopardized the safety and human rights of both Gazans and Israelis.

Sadness at seeing my lifelong home country, with its wonderfully vibrant cultural diversity that I have always felt was a source of strength and unity, descend into division, duality, and discrimination caused by tribal violence.

Harsh judgment of protestors on the “other side,” triggered by old habit energies, family and cultural conditioning, and toxic narratives in my social environment.

THE WAY OF AWAKENING

In meditating on how to deal with my painful feelings and cultivate the inner peace that could allow me to meaningfully contribute to a solution, I turn to the wisdom of Thây. Since I started practicing in the Plum Village tradition in 2019, and especially in the days since October 7th, Thây’s rich teachings on mindfulness have been a vital source of strength, wisdom, and comfort.

The more wholesome feeling that surfaced during the protest was a deep intention to embody the insight of interbeing in my words and actions. I know expanding my awareness beyond the pervasive “us versus them” mentality is necessary for dissolving divisions and cultivating reciprocal understanding and compassion. I wanted to walk into the middle of the street and let my sign, a red heart with planet Earth in the middle, convey my sincere wish for collective peace, unity, inclusiveness, and love. Alas, concern about my safety over a violent reaction from one group or the other, not to mention the traffic and heavy police presence, sapped my courage.

But I know that sustaining and strengthening my mindfulness practice will increase my capacity to notice and not water my unwholesome seeds of discrimination, fear, and hatred. By staying with my breath and the present moment, I can more clearly perceive what is manifesting within and around me, and generate the awareness, sensitivity, and equanimity needed to act with a wise heart.

When others unskillfully express their pain by trying to define me as an unworthy “other” for being a Jew, and when this prompts an emotional reaction in me of negatively “othering” these individuals, I will follow Thây’s advice and tend my wounds with the

gentle kindness of a parent tending to their upset baby. I will remember that only love can heal suffering—mine and others’.

While discord, discrimination, and division manifest in the historical dimension, I will take comfort from understanding our inseparable nature of nonself and interdependence in the ultimate dimension. I will remember and embody the fundamental truth of our common humanity, our common status as Earthlings, our oneness with everyone and everything in the universe.

The Three Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha help me foster my capacity for openness and inclusiveness, find support and strength in community, and gain the spiritual nourishment needed to be of service in reducing suffering and promoting peace.

In The Five Mindfulness Trainings, I find the wisdom to engage with this issue in an ethical, heart-centric way. By sustaining reverence for all life, remembering the interconnectedness of happiness and sorrow, and practising deep listening and loving speech, I am better able to take in the experiences and suffering of others and respond in a spirit of inclusiveness and loving kindness.

I find powerful inspiration in Thầy’s refusal to take sides during the Vietnam War, instead taking the side of peace and the people. His actions are a powerful lesson for us all, and one I wish to apply more fully in my advocacy for positive social change.

The sign I carried that day at the protest, the Earth ensconced in a heart, is a symbol for my deepest *bodhisattva* aspiration: to foster a world where we recognize we are all on the same side, on each other’s side, on the planet’s side. A world where together we can mindfully transcend the divisive categories of identity and geography that feed our illusion of separateness, and allow the energy of love to remind us that we are one family with one common destiny.

Sharon Aschaiek, Compassionate Transformation of the Heart (pronouns she/her), has been a mindfulness practitioner in the Plum Village tradition since 2019. Living near Toronto, Canada, she is actively exploring ways to apply the Buddhist teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh to causes such as war, climate change, and ethnic discrimination.



Field Guide to the Chaparral

The fire beetle only mates
when the chaparral is burning,

and the water beetle
will only mate in the rain.

In the monastery's kitchen, the nuns
don't believe me

when I tell them how old I am,
that you were married before.

The woman you find attractive
does not believe me when I look at her kindly.

There are candescent people in the world.
It will only be love

that I love you with.
When we get home,

there will be our kitchen, the dishes undone.
There will be our bedroom.

What is it you eventually recognized
in my face that allowed you to believe me?

Beauty that did not come from you—
remember how it did not come from you?

As white sage does not come from the moon
but is found by it and lit.

The Buddhists say
that the front of the paper

cannot exist without the back.
Because there is a there,

there is a here. Chaparral,
the density of growth,

and the tattered chaps
the mappers wore through it because they had to,
to keep walking without

being hurt. It is OK if we hurt
one another.

Chaparral needs fire.
(The pinecones would not open

otherwise.) Love needs lover,
whose last lover was flood.

*Leah Naomi Green, "Field Guide to the Chaparral" from
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Above photo courtesy of monastic Sangha

Leah Naomi Green is the author of *The More Extravagant Feast* (Graywolf Press), selected by Li-Young Lee for the Walt Whitman Award of The Academy of American Poets. Green teaches English and environmental studies at Washington and Lee University. She lives in an ecological community in Rockbridge County, Virginia, US, where she and her family homestead and grow much of their food for the year. Their deep aspiration is to transform the ecological community into a Plum Village lay practitioners' community. Please reach out to Leah via her website if you are interested!
www.leahnaomigreen.com/contact





Love Meditation

Thích Nhất Hạnh's commentary on
the *Mettā Sutta* to expand our love
to be all-inclusive and all-embracing

The Buddha offered many meditations on love. When a group of monks told him that the spirits living near their forest monastery were causing others to suffer, the Buddha taught the *Mettā Sutta*, also known as the Discourse on Love:

He who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech. He will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones. And this is what he contemplates:

“May everyone be happy and safe, and may their hearts be filled with joy.

“May all living beings live in security and peace, beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, visible or not visible, near or far away, already born or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility.

“Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

“Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos.

“Let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. Our love will know no obstacles, our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

“Free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing perfect understanding, those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death.”

*After several months of reciting and practicing the *Mettā Sutta*, the monks came to understand the sufferings of the troubled spirits. As a result, the spirits began to practice, also. They became filled with the energy of love, and the whole forest was peaceful.¹*

• • • • •

The Buddha also offered many specific exercises to help his disciples practice and realize the Four Immeasurable Minds:

When your mind is filled with love, send it in one direction, then a second, a third, and a fourth, then above, and then below. Identify with everything, without hatred, resentment, anger, or enmity. This mind of love is very wide. It grows immeasurably and eventually is able to embrace the whole world. Practice the same way with your mind filled with compassion, then joy, then equanimity.²

With his mind filled with love, the monk permeates one direction, and then a second, a third, a fourth, above, below, and all around, everywhere identifying himself with all. He permeates the whole world with his mind filled with love, wide, far, developed, unbound, free from hatred and ill will. He does the same with his mind filled with compassion, joy, and equanimity.³

Practicing love meditation is like digging deep into the ground until we reach the purest water. We look deeply into ourselves until insight arises and our love flows to the surface.

When the energy of love is strong in us, we can send it to beings in all directions. We may imagine our love as being like waves of sound or light, or like a pure white cloud that forms slowly and gradually spreads out to envelop the whole world. But the love meditation is not only an act of imagination. A true cloud produces rain. Sound and light penetrate everywhere, and our love must do the same. We have to observe whether our mind of love is present in our actual contact with others. Practicing love meditation in the sitting position is only the beginning.

Love meditation is an important beginning. We sit quietly and look deeply into ourselves. With practice, our love will increase naturally, becoming all-inclusive and all-embracing. As we learn to see with the eyes of love, we empty our mind of anger and hatred. As long as these negative mental formations are present in us, our love is incomplete. We may think we understand and accept others, but we are not yet able to love them fully. Nāgārjuna says, “At the time you practice the Immeasurable Mind of Love, you must look deeply in order to face your anger and hatred.”⁴

In the introduction to Nāgārjuna’s Mahā-prajñāpāramitā Śāstra, Étienne Lamotte, the translator, wrote, “The Four Immeasurable Minds are just platonic ideals,” mere ideas, not something that can be realized. Although Professor Lamotte was an excellent translator, he was not actually familiar with Buddhist practice. The moment we give rise to the desire for all beings to be happy and at peace, the energy of love arises in our mind, and all our feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness are permeated by love; in fact, they become love. This is no mere “ideal.” Nāgārjuna addresses this directly:

When we want beings in all directions to be happy, there arises in us the intention to love. This desire to love enters our feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness; and it becomes manifested in all our actions, speech, and other mental activities. Events that are neither mental nor physical arising after that are

*in accord with love and can in themselves be called love, as love is their root. These events determine our future actions, and they are directed by our will, which is now suffused with love. Will is the energy that drives our actions and speech. The same is true with regard to the arising of compassion, joy, and equanimity.*⁵

Mindfulness is the energy that allows us to look deeply at our body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness and see clearly what our real needs are, so we will not drown in the sea of suffering. Eventually love fills our mind and our will, and all our actions from that time on manifest love. Speech and actions are the fruits of will, so when our will is permeated by love, our speech and actions are also suffused with love. We speak only loving and constructive words and act only in ways that bring happiness and relieve suffering.

Yet in another passage of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra, Nāgārjuna also says that the Four Immeasurable Minds are mere aspirations, that they exist only in our mind. This is much the same as Professor Lamotte's platonic ideals. It was Nāgārjuna who provided the words for Lamotte! It helps us understand if we remember that Nāgārjuna wanted to advance the views of the newly emerging Mahāyāna Buddhism, so he wrote, "Followers of Hīnayāna practice the Four Immeasurable Minds, but the Immeasurable Minds they practice are only in the form of aspirations. The Immeasurable Minds, when joined with the pāramitās of the Mahāyāna,⁶ are the Immeasurable Minds of the *bodhisattva* that can transform the world." In his efforts to promote the Mahāyāna, Nāgārjuna erred in saying that the Four Immeasurable Minds of the Hīnayāna are merely internal, without external manifestation. This contradicts his previous words, that when the mind of love arises, it manifests in our words and our actions. To say that love, compassion, joy, and equanimity are only aspirations that exist in the mind is not correct. We practice not only to give rise to the Four Immeasurables in our mind, but

also to bring them into the world through our words and actions. When we practice love meditation, we don't merely visualize our love spreading into space. We touch the deep sources of love that are already in us, and then, in the midst of our daily lives, in our actual contact with others, we express and share our love. We practice until we see the concrete effects of our love on others, until we are able to offer peace and happiness to everyone, even those who have acted toward us in ways that are most unlovable.

Buddhaghosa, author of The Path of Purification, tells us that when our meditation begins to bear fruit, we will recognize in ourselves these signs of a loving mind: (1) our sleep is more relaxed, (2) we do not have nightmares, (3) our waking state is more at ease, (4) we are not anxious or depressed, and (5) we are loved and protected by everyone and everything around us.⁷

In the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Buddha mentions eleven advantages of practicing love meditation. The Buddha speaks in these terms—of what is advantageous and what is disadvantageous—because doing so encourages people to practice.

We may imagine our love as being like waves of sound or light, or like a pure white cloud that forms slowly and gradually spreads out to envelop the whole world.

If you take good care of yourself, you help everyone. You stop being a source of suffering to the world, and you become a reservoir of joy and freshness.

1. The practitioner sleeps well.
2. Upon waking, she feels well and light in her heart.
3. He does not have unpleasant dreams.
4. She is well-liked by many people. She feels at ease with everyone. Others, especially children, like to be near her.
5. He is dear to the nonhuman species: birds, fish, elephants, squirrels. Species that are visible and invisible like to be near him.
6. She is supported and protected by gods and goddesses.
7. He is protected from fire, poison, and the sword. He does not need to make any special effort to avoid them.
8. She reaches meditative concentration easily.
9. His face is bright and clear.
10. At the time of death, her mind is clear.
11. He is reborn in the Brahma Heaven, where he can continue the practice, because there is already a Sangha of those practicing the Four Immeasurable Minds.⁸

In the Itivuttaka, the Buddha says if we gather together all the virtuous actions we have realized in this world, they are not equal to practicing love meditation. Building practice centers, making Buddha figures, casting bells, or doing social work cannot bring about one-sixteenth of the merit of practicing love meditation. If we collect together all the light from the stars, it will not be as bright as the light of the moon. In the same way, practicing love meditation is greater than all other virtuous actions combined.⁹

Practicing love meditation is like digging deep into the ground until we reach the purest water. We look deeply into ourselves until insight arises and our love flows to the surface. Joy and happiness radiate from our eyes, and everyone around us benefits from our smile and our presence.

If you take good care of yourself, you help everyone. You stop being a source of suffering to the world, and you become a reservoir of joy and freshness. Here and there are people who know how to take good care of themselves, who live joyfully and happily. They are our strongest support. Everything they do, they do for everyone. That is the meaning of Mahāyāna Buddhism. That is love meditation.

The Buddha said that if a monk practices love meditation, even if only for the length of time it takes to snap one's fingers, that monk is worthy of being a monk: "He will not fail in meditative concentration. He will realize the teachings given by teachers on the path. The food offered to him as alms will not be wasted. There is no greater virtue than practicing love meditation every day."¹⁰

¹ *Sutta Nipāta, Chapter 1, Sutta 8.*

² *Madhyama Āgama, Sutra 86.*

³ *Subha Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta 99.*

⁴ *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra.* A śāstra is a treatise or commentary on the Buddha's teachings, written by a great master after the lifetime of the Buddha. This text is available in Belgium as *Le Traité de La Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna*, translated by Étienne Lamotte (Louvain, Belgium: Institut Orientaliste, 1949).

⁵ *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra.* According to the Buddha, a human being is composed of five skandhas (elements, heaps, or aggregates): form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. For a full explanation of practicing love meditation within each of The Five Skandhas, see Chapter Three [of Teachings on Love by Thích Nhất Hạnh]. "Events" that are considered neither mental nor physical are related to our mind and objects of our mind. They are listed as gain, loss, birth, death, grammar, literature, time, space, union, separation, impermanence, quantity, seeing things as similar or dissimilar, etc. Will, volition, or intention is *chetana*.

⁶ The Ten Pāramitās of the Mahāyāna are: *dāna* (generosity), *śīla* (precepts), *kṣanti* (forbearance), *vīrya* (energy), *dhyāna* (meditation), *prajñā* (understanding), *upāya* (skillful means), *pranidhāna* (aspiration), *bala* (spiritual power), and *jñāna* (wisdom).

⁷ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga, The Classic Manual of Buddhist Doctrine & Meditation* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975).

⁸ *Mettā Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book 11, Sutta 15.*

⁹ *Mettābhāvanā Sutta, Itivuttaka, Sutta 27.*

¹⁰ *Apara-Accharasāṅghatavaggo, Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book 1, Sutta 31.*

This is an excerpt from *Teachings on Love* by Thích Nhất Hạnh, published by Parallax Press.

If we collect together
all the light from the
stars, it will not be
as bright as the light
of the moon. In the
same way, practicing
love meditation is
greater than all other
virtuous actions
combined.

Loving Kindness Meditation

Thích Nhất Hạnh offers this rare
guided mettā meditation.

May I be peaceful and light in my body and in my mind.

May I be safe and free from accidents.

May I be free from anger, unwholesome states of mind, fear,
and worries.

May I know how to look at myself with the eyes of
understanding and compassion.

May I be able to recognize and touch the seeds of joy and
happiness in myself.

May I learn how to nourish myself with joy each day.

May I be able to live fresh, solid, and free.

May I not fall into the state of indifference or be caught in the
extremes of attachment or aversion.

May you be peaceful and light in your body and in your mind.

May you be safe and free from accidents.

May you be free from anger, unwholesome states of mind,
fear, and worries.

May you know how to look at yourself with the eyes of understanding and compassion.

May you be able to recognize and touch the seeds of joy and happiness in yourself.

May you learn how to nourish yourself with joy each day.

May you be able to live fresh, solid, and free.

May you not fall into the state of indifference or be caught in the extremes of attachment or aversion.
(And I may help. Just as good as I can.)

May all beings be peaceful and light in their body and in their mind.

May all beings be safe and free from accidents.

May all beings be free from anger, unwholesome states of mind, fear, and worries.

May all beings know how to look at themselves with the eyes of understanding and compassion.

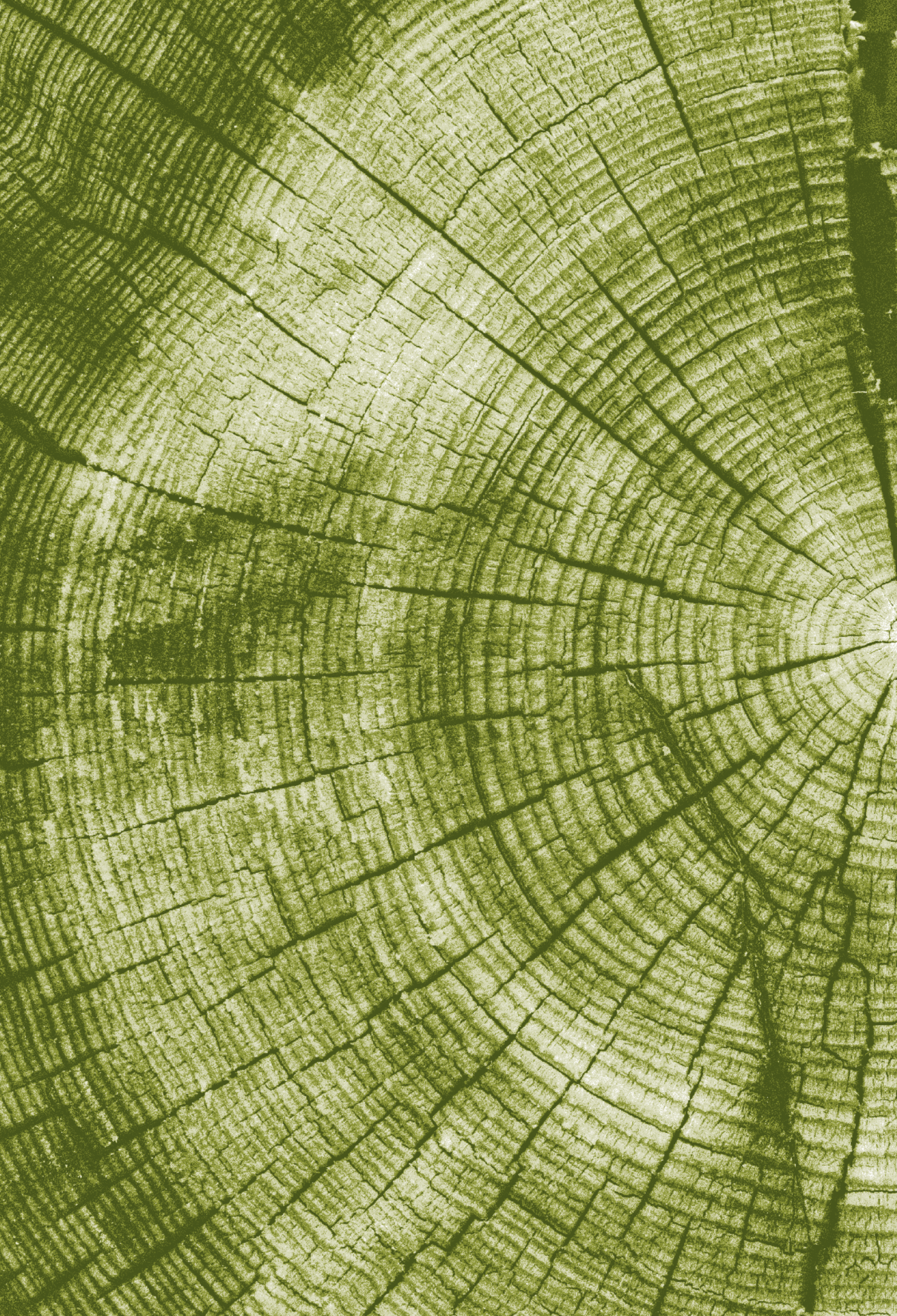
May all beings be able to recognize and touch the seeds of joy and happiness in themselves.

May all beings learn how to nourish themselves with joy each day.

May all beings be able to live fresh, solid, and free.

May all beings not fall into the state of indifference or be caught in the extremes of attachment or aversion.

On December 31, 2009, Thầy offered this meditation and taught the Mettā Sutra as part of a special Dharma talk for the New Year at Upper Hamlet, Plum Village, France. This meditation is available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=5luyQp--B8U>) and in the Plum Village App. The full original talk is available at <https://tnhaudio.org/2010/01/01/practices-for-the-new-year/>. Bio on page 7.





Interbeing and the Gift of Generosity



Monastics, aspirants, and lay friends help move a storage unit to make way for the construction of the new monks' residence in Solidity Hamlet of Deer Park Monastery in California, US

Thầy taught that when we injure our right hand, our left hand immediately moves to care for its sibling and offer support.

This teaching illustrates the practice of interbeing, in which we are intrinsically aware of our deep interconnectedness to all beings. We understand that because of interbeing, our fates are intimately bound together and when one of us suffers, we all suffer.

At the same time, when one of us responds selflessly to suffering, we all benefit from that act of kindness. From this place, compassion and generosity can flow effortlessly.

Some of our monasteries are struggling right now, especially Plum Village Monastery in France and Blue Cliff Monastery in New York, US. They're facing considerable challenges with aging infrastructure, inadequate housing, building code vio-

lations, and insufficient event space for monastics and guests, as well as other capital needs.

Because they vow to live simple, communal lives, our dear monks and nuns don't generally give voice to these needs, however urgent. They put deep trust in the practice and are happy to get by on the bare minimum. At this moment, however, they are hurting hands in need of our helping hands.

As an organization committed to supporting our monastics and Thầy's continuation, the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation is sharing this information with you.

It's helpful to remember two things as we sit together with the question of how best to respond to this situation.

The first, which we wrote about in the last issue of *The Mindfulness Bell*, is the ancient Buddhist practice of *dāna*, a Sanskrit word meaning

“generosity.” *Dāna*, the first of the Six *Pāramitās*, takes three forms: material gifts, the Dharma, and the gift of non-fear.

“These great givings are the practice of The Five Mindfulness Trainings,” Brother Pháp Hải said once in a Dharma talk. “By doing so one gives fearlessness, love, and kindness to all beings. If one human being can give security and freedom from fear to others by his behavior, that is the highest form of *dāna*, of generosity one can give.”

Our monastics share *dāna* with the lay community all year long through retreats and Days of Mindfulness, Dharma talks, and guided meditations. Many of these and other such offerings are available for free online.

For those fortunate to attend a monastery or off-site retreat in person, you’ll see that the monks and nuns also embody generosity of spirit in the way they engage with retreatants, move mindfully, invite the bell, eat their meals, and hold space for all the energies that can arise when retreatants gather to look deeply at their suffering.

The second thing to consider is that monasteries are not only retreat centers that provide a

service to guests. They are homes, academies, sanctuaries, and laboratories where both aspiring and senior monastics rest and renew themselves, study, and devise fresh ways to share the Dharma, whether through books, teaching tours, online courses, or other means.

In his book *Love Letter to the Earth*, Thầy writes: “When we are in love with someone or something, there is no separation between ourselves and the person or thing we love. We do whatever we can for them and this brings us great joy and nourishment.”

Many of you gave generously to help Deer Park Monastery in California, US add living quarters in Solidity Hamlet. This will not only create more space for our monks but also allow Deer Park to house the (happily) growing number of aspirants and novices devoting themselves to monastic life.

You see, *dāna* isn’t only an act of generosity. It’s an act of love.

If you feel moved to help our monks and nuns create monasteries that are more safe, spacious, and welcoming, we invite you to consider making a donation. Please visit tnhf.org/donate.

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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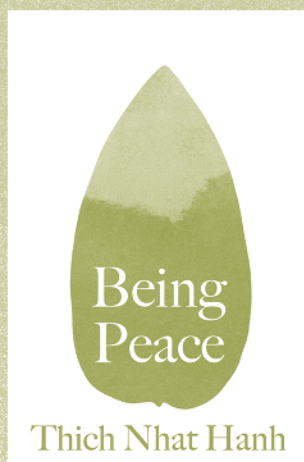
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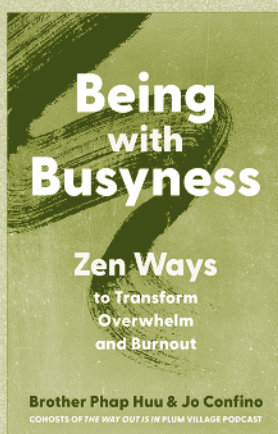
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New books in our Plum Village community

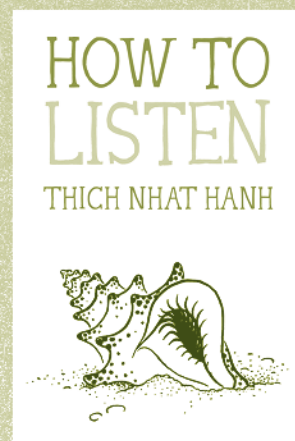
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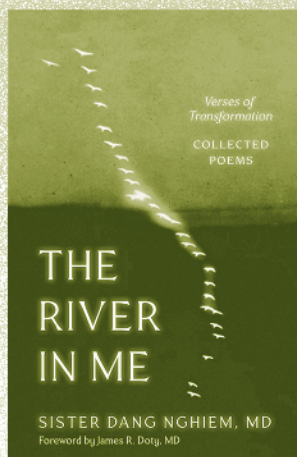
Being Peace



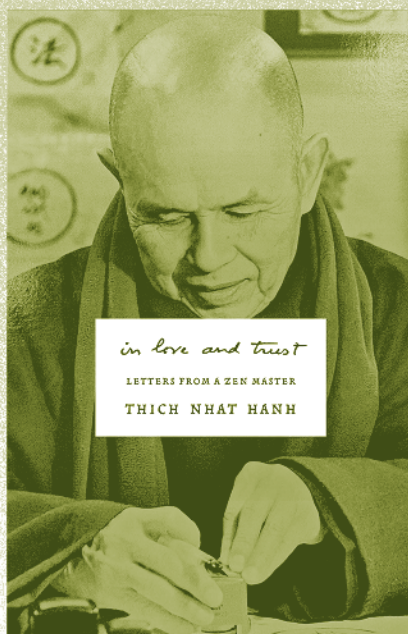
Being with Busyness



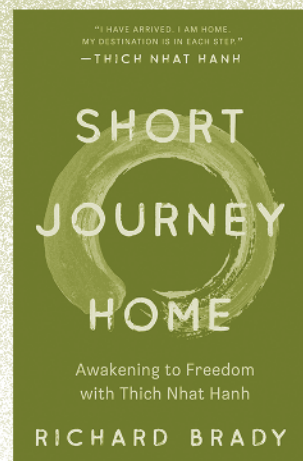
How to Listen



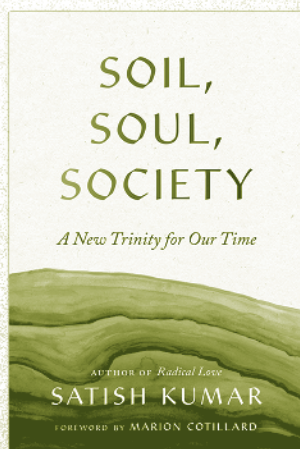
The River in Me



In Love and Trust



Short Journey Home



Soil, Soul, Society



Mixed Rice



The Sun My Heart



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Plum Village

Practice Centers & Resources

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

Blue Cliff Monastery, New York, US
bluecliffmonastery.org

Deer Park Monastery, California, US
deerparkmonastery.org

Magnolia Grove Monastery, Mississippi, US
magnoliagrovemonastery.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
thaipumvillage.org

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

The Mindfulness Bell
mindfulnessbell.org

Parallax Press
parallax.org

The Plum Village App
plumvillage.app

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

The Raft
thichnhathanhfoundation.org/the-raft

Thích Nhất Hạnh Dharma Talks
tnhaudio.org

ARISE Sangha
arisesangha.org

Happy Farm
thehappyfarm.org

Earth Holder Community
earthholder.training

Wake Up
wkup.org

Wake Up Schools
wakeupschools.org

Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation
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The Radiant Insight of Nonduality
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MindfulnessBell.org: Our website includes new and expanded digital content updated weekly, an archive with over thirty years of articles, a 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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