



A special edition in collaboration with
the Plum Village Newsletter
celebrating the 60th anniversary
of the Order of Interbeing

the
mindfulness
bell



The 60th Anniversary of the Order of Interbeing

A special edition in collaboration with the Plum Village Newsletter

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Welcome Letter

THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ORDER OF INTERBEING

Dear beloved community,

It is with great joy and deep gratitude that we offer you this special edition celebrating sixty years of the Order of Interbeing—a precious legacy of our beloved teacher, Thầy.

In a time of continuing wars, great violence, and deepening harm in families and society—and as climate change and the loss of biodiversity accelerate—we can see ever more clearly the urgent need for Thầy's engaged practice. In these pages, we celebrate the continuation of Thầy and our ancestral teachers in the living Dharma work of the Order of Interbeing.



Sister Tậi Nghiêm (Sister Presence)

was ordained in 2009 and received the Dharma Lamp Transmission in 2020. Born in central Vietnam, she worked closely with Thích Nhất Hạnh as an editor of Vietnamese books, articles, and *Lá thư Làng Mai*, the annual Plum Village newsletter. Sister Tậi Nghiêm loves being in nature and singing. She also enjoys drinking tea and reading a good book.

As we rediscover Thầy's vision of the Order as a living organism—ever growing and renewing itself—we are deeply nourished by the intimate and inspiring sharings from monastic and lay practitioners who are bringing Thầy's vision of Engaged Buddhism to life in every corner of society.

It is our honor to gather these flowers and fruits of practice from our OI members around the world, weaving them into a bouquet of love and gratitude to offer on this joyful occasion.

May this offering nourish our aspiration to walk together on this beautiful path.

Sister Tị Nghiê

Editor

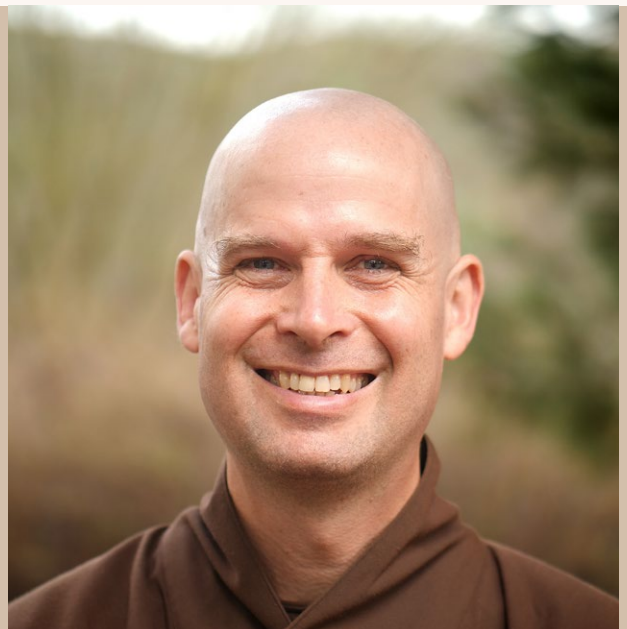
The Plum Village Newsletter

Brother Pháp Lưu

Advisor and Editor

The Mindfulness Bell

Ordained in 2003, **Brother Pháp Lưu (Brother Stream)** received Transmission of the Lamp in 2011. He helped start Wake Up and the Happy Farm, and works with Wake Up Schools. He has served as a monastic editor for several of Thích Nhất Hạnh's books and recently coauthored *Hiking Zen* with Brother Pháp Xả. Brother Pháp Lưu serves on the Advisory Board of the Thích Nhất Hạnh Center for Mindfulness in Public Health at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.





Go as a River, Not a Drop of Water: Taking Refuge in the Sangha

Thích Nhất Hạnh offers a powerful Dharma talk
on the essence of the sangha and the
Order of Interbeing as a living organism.

Taking refuge in sangha is a very deep practice. You trust the sangha. You become the sangha. If you are a drop of water, you might wonder whether you have the capacity to go to the ocean. But when you become a river, you are sure you don't have to worry. You will certainly come to the ocean. In Plum Village, we try to practice like that. We don't want to be a drop of water. We want to be a river. And by practicing becoming a river, we suffer much less. Individual suffering can be transformed very easily when we share the concern of the sangha, the happiness of the sangha, the dedication of the sangha.

And that is why when we come and sit together, when we come and walk together, when we come and eat together, and work together, there's a powerful energy in us. That energy is the energy of mindfulness. That energy is embracing the pain, looking deeply into the pain in order for us to understand the pain and to have the kind of insight that will lead to the transformation of the pain. On the individual level, your deepest concern becomes the object of your practice, of your mindfulness. In the Zen circle, there is a practice of kung-an 公案 [Chinese], in Japanese, kōan.

This is the deepest concern.

The kōan should be something that you are deeply interested in, your deepest concern.

THE PRACTICE OF KUNG-AN

You want to understand. You want to transform. It is like when you are struck by an arrow, and you carry with you the arrow in your flesh. Standing or sitting, being awake or sleeping, you still carry the arrow. The kōan, the kung-an, should be something like that. Your daily life is fully focused on that. And if you are, the kung-an should be something that can draw all your energy, your interest, your mindfulness, your concentration on it. And you are holding it day and night, embracing it, looking deeply into it. And one day, insight will come. You understand, and you will be liberated. So kung-an is something that should have the capacity of bringing all your concentration, all your energy into it. Because without that, there cannot be a breakthrough. The suffering in the Middle East, for instance, is a kung-an for the whole of humankind. Not only for the Israelis or the Palestinians. But as a human family, we are so busy. We are not a sangha. We don't have enough mindfulness, concentration. We cannot make it into a kung-an.

We pay some attention, and then we remove attention. We focus our attention on other matters. And that is why it is not a kung-an for the human family yet. When the teacher understands the difficulties and the suffering of the disciple, he or she will offer a kung-an. Like, "Tell me, dear one, what is the

It is by being there, producing the energy of mindfulness, concentration, and insight that we realize, we invent, we create the energy of harmony, of togetherness.

sound made by just one hand?" Usually we need two hands in order to make a sound. "Tell me. How can you produce sound with one hand?" So that is a kind of skillful device in order to help the disciple to find out, to understand his or her situation. And the disciple cannot just use his or her intellect in order to work on the kung-an, because the intellect is only part of us; underneath there is the whole subconsciousness, unconsciousness. Underneath there is your body, all the mental formations, your store consciousness. That is why the kung-an that has been offered by the teacher should not be entertained only by the intellect. It should be buried deeply in the soil, in the flesh of your being. And during your daily life, you have to carry the kung-an with you day and night. Eating, sleeping, doing things, you are embracing it. That is the full-time embrace.

THE SANGHA'S ROLE IN TRANSFORMATION

Whether your suffering or your situation is at an impasse, you are stuck, that is your kung-an. You should be able to mobilize all your strength, all your energy, all your mindfulness and concentration in order to embrace deeply that difficulty, that situation, that deep suffering. And day and night, at every moment, you only do that. Embracing deeply, tenderly. And with the support of the sangha, one day you will have a breakthrough. The insight can come from you. The insight can come from the sangha, your insight has been supported by the sangha, your insight may be an expression of the collective insight of the sangha, because you are practically living in the sangha and the sangha is practically working with you and supporting you in that attempt to understand your situation. And when the practice comes to the sangha level, it's very powerful. If the whole sangha embraces your pain, day and night, and looks deeply into your pain with

the energy of mindfulness and concentration, then there will be quick relief. And there will be insight that can help you overcome that suffering, can help you see the path, and can help you get the liberation, the transformation. That is the way it works with you and with your sangha.

FROM ORGANIZATION TO ORGANISM

I would like to offer an example. There is a community called Order of Interbeing, composed of many members. The Order of Interbeing was founded in Vietnam during the war around 1966. It's composed of monastics and laypeople. It's composed of two kinds of communities: those who have formally received The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings are called the core community; and there are those who have not formally received The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, but who participate in every activity of the sangha, who we call the extended community. And as a community, we need some kind of organization. We should organize. But we have learned that if you are too well organized, it's not too good. We have seen the difference between an organization and an organism.

Being an organism that functions well, naturally there is some organization in that, but it's not intended. If there is harmony, if there is understanding, then you don't need to organize, and yet it is very well organized. When you look at the community of bees, you don't see a leader giving orders: you do this, you do that, coordinating things, because the beehive is an organism. And the element of togetherness is there. The *raison d'être* of the community is to be together, to be wonderfully together. And when you come together as an organism, suddenly the insight comes and everyone knows what to do. And it becomes very well organized without your attempt to organize. Many of us are sangha builders. We have to focus our attention on this.

ao
ao
a
river



EMBODYING THE PRACTICE

Sometimes the more we organize, the more trouble the organization will become. It is our way of being that can bring about the well-being of the community. It is our practice of mindfulness, concentration, insight, loving-kindness that is doing the work of organizing. The Buddha, before his passing away, was asked whether he would like to appoint someone to continue to lead the sangha. He said, "No, we don't need a leader." And he was very aware that the sangha is an organism. If the sangha practices well, everything will be fine. We don't need a leader at all. The Buddha did not consider himself a leader. He did not consider himself a director. He did not consider himself the boss. He was very pleased to be a monk. He [held] his bowl, and he went begging for food like any other monk. He [sat] at the foot of a tree like any other monk.

But he is a great inspiration for the whole sangha. And that's what we should do. We should be an inspiration for the sangha by our way of acting in harmony, in compassion. When the sangha comes together as an organism, the sangha will know how to do it. Because the ground of to do is to be. If you know how to be, then naturally, you don't have to worry about to do. *To be* is the foundation of *to do*. So many of us have thought that we need to organize somehow because that is an order, the Order of Interbeing.

THE SANGHA'S NATURAL HARMONY

The Vatican is very well organized as a religion, but we don't want the Order of Interbeing to become something like that. We want the Order of Interbeing to be a living organism. We don't want any leader, any boss, any director; that is what we want, and some of us will say, "How can we survive without some organizing?" In the beginning, someone may have thought like that, but by this time she has awakened to the fact that

we need only to be, and that will take care of everything. When the sangha is together in harmony, that is all. You don't need to do anything more. You behave like the birds flying in formation. They don't fly as individuals. You know very well that they fly as a formation. It's very beautiful, very powerful. The sangha is like that. And the question is, how can we allow the Order of Interbeing to be an inspiration for society, to become a kung-an?

And that cannot be solved by the intellect alone. When you discuss organizing, you are using your intellect. But when you come together and practice sitting and breathing in and out, and become together, you become an organism. And the question, "How can the Order of Interbeing become an inspiration and a refuge for the world?" becomes the kung-an. You need only to be there as an organism and hold very tenderly that question, that kung-an in your mind, and then the insight will come. It's not by doing a lot of thinking, it's not by doing a lot of organizing that we can answer the question. It is by being there, producing the energy of mindfulness, concentration, and insight that we realize, we invent, we create the energy of harmony, of togetherness. And from that foundation will come the insight into how to be the inspiration as an organism. It's clear?

This way of being, this way of operating, is quite different. The sangha way. It is the energy of mindfulness and togetherness, and not some five-year plan, that will realize everything. The question is whether the sangha can come together and be together as an organism. The whole question is that—how to arrange so that the sangha can be together—a lot, a lot, a lot. That is the only concern, because the coming together of a sangha can bring a lot of happiness, can bring a lot of relief, a lot of transformation, a lot of confidence. Because the sangha always generates the energy of mindfulness and concentration and insight. And the sangha becomes holy because of its practice of mindfulness. It's

very beautiful to see a sangha silent, moving silently and in harmony. They organize, but they don't look as if they are organizing. They are moving very, very softly, very silently, like the bees. No one is giving orders to anyone. We look at each other, we are aware of each other, we are aware of the situation, and naturally the situation becomes as we wish.

LEARNING FROM NATURE

Do we have lessons to be given to the bees, to the termites, to the birds, to the fish? It seems that we can learn something from them. The scientists of our time begin to speak of animal culture. They do have their culture. They do have their wisdom, their way of life. And much of it we can learn from, because there is a lot of suffering in our human community. We suffer more than these societies of animals. Individualism prevails. We are deeply divided. We hate each other. We are afraid of

each other. And that is not the case for the bees. That is not the case for the fish. That is not the case for the birds. So we can learn many things from them. And this is in the line of sangha building, of becoming a river.

This is an excerpt from a Dharma talk given by Thích Nhất Hạnh during the 21 Day Retreat on June 8, 2002 in the Loving Kindness Temple, New Hamlet, Plum Village, France. It has been lightly edited for clarity.

Photo of Thích Nhất Hạnh leading walking meditation in Plum Village, France, 2014, courtesy of PVCEB

Calligraphy by Thích Nhất Hạnh



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.

Just Love

A conversation with Anh Hương, the first member
of the Order of Interbeing in the West



THE BEGINNING OF CONTINUATION

Sister Tại Nghiêm: You were the first person to whom Thầy transmitted The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings in the West since he left Vietnam in 1966. Could you share the circumstances and how you felt?

Anh Hương: In 1981, my younger brother, Đức, and I visited Thầy in France. Thầy is my father's younger brother. After spending a few days at Phương Vân (Fragrant Cloud) Hermitage, cô Phương (later Sister Chân Không) drove us to Sơn Cốc, the hermitage where Thầy lived. I feel such gratitude for cô Phương. It was a long drive, and she was the only one who could drive. Whenever she got sleepy, she sang to keep herself awake.

Every morning, we went to the backyard to garden—such happiness! Thầy planted vegetables, watered flowers, cut grass, chopped wood, dried firewood, and stacked the wood near the kitchen stove for cold mornings and evenings. Thầy also wrote, printed, and bound books there—including his own—by hand.

About a week before we were to return to America, after Thầy's midday rest, Thầy called me to sit beside him, handed me some printed papers, and said, "Read this, my dear." I read them from beginning to end. They were the text of The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. Thầy sat still, solid as a mountain, while I read.

A few minutes later, Thầy asked, "What do you think, my dear?" "It's wonderful, Thầy," I answered. Thầy had touched my *bodhicitta*, opening the path for me to step forward in service within the Order of Interbeing (OI). Something entirely new and fresh was unfolding within me.

After a few moments of silence, Thầy briefly recounted the history of the Order. Then, we went out for a walk. The next morning, while the mist lingered, Thầy went outside with a pair of scissors. I followed to see what Thầy was doing. Thầy cut a rose

and placed it in a vase on the altar. Then Thầy called cô Phương and said, "Today, Anh Hương will receive The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings." After reading each training, Thầy asked, "Do you vow to receive, study, and practice this training?" "Yes, I do," I replied. That was August 20, 1981. When Thầy had an intention, Thầy acted on it right away.

As soon as the ceremony was over, Thầy asked cô Phương to cook something to celebrate. Cô Phương was a quick cook, so in no time it was ready. We had a breakfast of freshly made *xôi bắp* (sticky rice with corn) sprinkled with fragrant fried shallots. Thầy finished his bowl, then served us a little more, leaving a tiny bit for himself. After eating, Thầy smiled and said, "So wonderful!" The atmosphere at Sơn Cốc was as joyful as during Tết!

After resting for a while, Đức followed Thầy with a wheelbarrow to carry firewood and stack it beside the kitchen stove. After so many decades away from his homeland, Thầy was happy to once again immerse himself in the warmth and simplicity of a family atmosphere.

THE GENTLE PUSH OF A TEACHER

TN: The story behind your OI transmission is so fascinating. What other interesting lessons have you received from Thầy?

AH: I first came to Plum Village in July 1984 and met many young people, including Brother Thư (Brother Chân Trí). During that Summer Retreat, there was a ceremony to recite The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings at the Yên Tử Meditation Hall in Upper Hamlet. Everything was prepared and the lay practitioners had gathered, yet Thầy had not come. I felt obliged to go and invite Thầy.

When I entered the room, Thầy lay on his mattress on the wooden floor with his eyes closed. Thầy opened his eyes. I said, "Dear Thầy, there is a precept recitation ceremony this morning, and everyone is waiting for

Thầy." Thầy said simply, "You lead it." I thought, "Dear Thầy, you have never taught me how—how can you tell me to do this?" I just stood there like a statue, unable to speak. Thầy turned toward the wall and added gently, "Go ahead, my dear. Go on." I guessed Thầy had a stomachache and hadn't slept well. On one hand, I felt tender concern for Thầy, knowing Thầy needed to rest. On the other hand, I had no idea what to do!

I had never guided a precept recitation ceremony—let alone in English. But Thầy had said, "Go ahead," so I went. Once I entered the meditation hall, though, I thought, "Now what?" I felt very small in the solemn atmosphere of a ceremony Thầy had always led. I had never even offered incense before the sangha!

Looking around, I saw no one who could help. So I had to sit in Thầy's place. And somehow, the ceremony was completed. My heart felt light and joyful. Thầy saw me clearly and "pushed" me forward. Thầy never "pushed" me in a way that made me fall. The question was always whether I was willing to move forward or not. Each time Thầy "pushed" me, I felt I had truly grown—not in age or years of practice, but beyond my small self, beyond what I thought I was.

One afternoon during the 1991 Summer Retreat at Plum Village, Brother Thứ and I went to visit Thầy in Lower Hamlet. Thầy was resting in a hammock, and we were joyfully chatting together when, quite suddenly, Thầy said, "Next year, you two will receive the Lamp Transmission."

We were startled and fell silent. "No, please, Thầy. We're not ready." I thought to myself that receiving the Lamp meant having to teach—and how could I teach when I knew so little? Thầy smiled, his eyes radiant and gentle, filled with love. Then he asked:

"Are you happy?"

"Yes, of course, dear Thầy."

"Being here, do you have joy?"

"Yes, a lot of joy."

"Then you just receive the Lamp."

"But ... I don't know how to teach."

"No need to teach. You have joy—just share your happiness."

I wanted to reason a little more, but I knew that when Thầy "pushed," it was time to "go."

The following summer, Brother Thứ and I returned to Plum Village to receive the Lamp Transmission from Thầy.

Here is my transmission gatha by Thầy:

Chân tâm ươm hạt quý
Ý vun bón vườn nhà
Thanh thảo cùng năm tháng
Lòng đất tự đơm hoa.

Translated into English:

It is in the true Store that the precious
seeds are entrusted
and it is the Mind that takes care of the
ancestral garden.

Enjoy deeply the months and years that are
offered to you

and the flowers of wisdom and love will
naturally spring forth from the heart of the
Earth.

A few days later, I was having tea with Thầy at Sitting Still Hut (*Cốc Ngồi Yên*), along with Arnie Kotler (*Chân Đắc*) from Parallax Press. Thầy began to draft a flyer with us for a retreat I would be leading. He folded the paper and handed it to Arnie to finish the rest. Thầy had just given me the Lamp Transmission and immediately "put me to work" leading a retreat!

The retreat took place in December 1992 in West Virginia, with the theme *Touching Peace*. Thứ and I looked at the freshly printed flyers on colored paper, and joy filled our hearts. We knew we could continue Thầy's work on the path of practice and helping others.

The retreat began Friday afternoon. From the upstairs bedroom, I watched retreatants pulling their suitcases toward registration. Some looked like football players, while others were old enough to be my uncles, aunts, or even grandparents. I felt very small

and began to tremble: "Oh no, I'm riding on a tiger's back!"

The more I watched, the more nervous I became—yet curiosity kept me looking. I paced mindfully back and forth in my room until it was time for orientation. Walking down the stairs into the meditation hall, I held Thầy's hand on one side and the Buddha's hand on the other. Step by step, I asked the Buddha and Thầy within me to guide my footsteps. Just walking—without thinking, without striving, with nothing to do. I let the Buddha and Thầy carry everything for me. A gentle sense of lightness, ease, and happiness began to arise. In the meditation hall, everyone sat quietly and solemnly. I walked to the seat that

had been prepared and sat down—together with the Buddha and Thầy.

In 1980, Thầy had first visited our home in New Jersey, six months after our family arrived in the US. One day, Thầy called, "Anh-Hương, come lie down here. Place your hands on your abdomen. Breathe. Do you feel your belly rise and fall?" Then Thầy quietly stepped out of the room. Just a few simple words, yet that lesson carried me through the retreat. Ever since, whenever I give a Dharma talk, I feel the Buddha and Thầy sitting beside me—one on each side.

TN: Did you share this with him?



AH: Yes. Thầy smiled and let out a small chuckle as he said, “I’ve been a bit naughty!” [Thầy was acknowledging that he put Anh Hường in a difficult situation, but he trusted that she would be able to handle it.]

“JUST LOVE!”—A MANTRA FOR THE PATH

TN: Practicing for more than forty years, what is your reflection about the Order of Interbeing and Engaged Buddhism? What do you think Thầy wants us to continue?

AH: The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings are the concrete expression of our bodhicitta—the deep aspiration to dedicate our energy to practice and to help others. Sangha is the soil that nourishes and protects this aspiration. Engaged Buddhism, as embodied in the Order of Interbeing, is the path of deep understanding and fierce compassion. This bodhisattva path is sustained by the energy cultivated through the practice of precepts, mindfulness, concentration, and insight.

Since Plum Village’s first Summer Opening in 1982, Thầy consistently emphasized the practice of mindfulness in everyday life and in sangha building. Thầy called the sangha a “community of resistance” that resists the collective momentum of greed,

anger, and ignorance.

Through investigation and deep looking, we recognize that what is happening in the world and within the sangha is also happening within ourselves. Non-blaming is the secret to maintaining genuine compassion. When our inner suffering is not yet cared for, we often project and vent it into our relationships with family, sangha, and our activism.

We stand now at a crossroads of how Buddhism will evolve in this country and on this planet. As members of the Order of Interbeing, our challenge is to live our daily lives so that the bodhisattva ideal is truly embedded in the fabric of our existence. How do we find peace, stillness, nourishment, and healing while still engaging deeply with social, political, and environmental issues?

Seeing the danger of activists burning out due to a lack of deep spiritual training, Thầy shifted the emphasis from “Engaged Buddhism” toward “Applied Buddhism” and sangha building. Thầy’s calligraphies—such as “I have arrived, I am home,” “Peace in oneself, peace in the world,” and “The way out is in”—serve as essential reminders of the importance of individual practice as the foundation for collective awakening. This is the essence of Applied Buddhism.

I can still hear Thầy saying, “This is a happy moment!” If we are not peaceful and

Each time Thầy “pushed” me,
I felt I had truly grown—
not in age or years of practice,
but beyond my small self,
beyond what I thought I was.

happy right now, how can we truly be present for our loved ones, much less those who are suffering and crying for help?

Thầy is happy to see his students practicing wholeheartedly—healing wounds, nurturing siblinghood, and building sangha everywhere. As Thầy once said, “You are all Thầy’s continuation. You are bringing Thầy into the future; in whatever you do, Thầy is always there beside you, walking with you.” Wherever there is a Sangha, there is the Buddha, the Dharma, and Thầy.

These days, our local sangha practices the mantra, “Just love!” We don’t need to strain or try hard to love—because understanding is love.

TN: Have you ever found practicing “Just love!” difficult? Were there times it felt impossible to love, yet you found a way?

AH: As Thầy’s student, I have vowed to learn to understand and to love, knowing love is the miraculous medicine that heals the suffering of all beings. Yet there are moments when I encounter someone simply too difficult to love—and sometimes that “someone” is myself. I make an effort and learn to be patient, but when the situation remains unchanged, my strength to love wanes. At times, the thought surfaces: “Everyone has their place in the universe—why bother?” What I thought of as “contemplating suffering” might be more or less an intellectual reflection, a tiny corner of reality. The insight I had felt limited; love arising from such a shallow well cannot embrace truly difficult situations.

I ask myself, how long must I contemplate this suffering before I can understand it deeply enough to give rise to great, unconditional love? How long before the spring of love within my own heart can truly begin to flow?

When the well of effort runs dry, when I no longer know what to do, “Just love!” becomes the ultimate practice. It is not an idea, but a

surrender. Once the sword of intellect is laid down, and the agonizing illusion of a separate self evaporates, this mantra can carry us directly into the ultimate dimension, even as our feet still tread the muddy ground of the historical dimension.

Practicing mindfulness is like digging a well. The mantra “Just love!” can help us reach the water and draw it up. When that spring of loving-kindness flows forth, we become the hands, eyes, and heart of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. When the self is fully released, selfless wisdom guides our steps, and love becomes boundless.

OASES IN THE DESERT

TN: Do you have a wish for the OI family on its sixtieth anniversary?

AH: Order of Interbeing sanghas are like oases in a scorching desert—a vital place for us to return to for refuge and renewal.

Recently, I shared this with our young OI members: building sangha and walking the bodhisattva path is deeply engaged spiritual practice. The sangha door is wide open to all; it excludes no one and makes no distinction based on background, identity, or political orientation. A true sangha cultivates loving speech and deep listening, creating a safe space for everyone to share their views—even when they differ from our own.

Where I live, one of my neighbors has a sign on their front lawn: “Hate doesn’t have a home here.” I tell my friends that even the mind of hatred can have a place to rest in the sangha. The collective energy of mindfulness and all-embracing love is what makes the sangha a safe place for those who come.

We must continually renew the sangha. No matter how healthy the seed of bodhicitta may be, if the soil is not fertile and nourishing, the seed cannot sprout—it will wither away.

The very heart of The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings is understanding and

Thầy told us many times that siblinghood is the most precious of all. It is the loving threads that weave our sangha blanket, keeping us safe and warm during the acute weather of global challenges.

love. When our collective mindfulness is fragile, small frustrations can unfortunately spiral into cycles of justification and conflict, sometimes even leading to the weaponizing of precepts to assign blame. Suffering is not a problem to be solved; it is a wound to be tended with the medicine of understanding and love. Thầy often reminded his students, “You have the right to suffer. You do not have the right not to practice!”

Thầy’s simple yet profound calligraphy, “The way out is in,” calls us to turn inward, recognizing that the root of our distress always lies within. Our practice is to listen deeply and care for the pain we find inside. This internal work is mirrored in the community practice of Beginning Anew, which is vital for the well-being of our sangha. By renewing ourselves, we naturally renew our bonds with our siblings. Our ability to live harmoniously and lovingly with one another—especially those we find challenging—is the measure of our practice’s success.

Throughout Thầy’s life—even after his stroke, until his final days at the root temple—Thầy never stopped nurturing the bonds of

teacher and students, of brotherhood and sisterhood. Thầy reassured us, “Each of you is a continuation of Thầy. When you care for, love, and support one another, you are nourishing Thầy.”

In the midst of an increasingly complex and challenging world, my deep wish is for us to prioritize coming together, nurturing siblinghood, and caring for our OI family.

With every moment, every day, we dedicate ourselves to spiritual growth, moving forward as a sangha—a beloved community, a peace movement where healing, happiness, and compassion are palpable in the light of interbeing. Our local sanghas are like creeks, sustaining life wherever they flow.

Thầy told us many times that siblinghood is the most precious of all. It is the loving threads that weave our sangha blanket, keeping us safe and warm during the acute weather of global challenges. As this blanket expands, it offers comfort and relief to those in desperate situations.

Thầy is still walking in front of us and with us always. Who is walking behind us? What legacy are we leaving for the next generation?

The younger generations, our children and grandchildren, are watching how we live and how we treat one another. As their blood and spiritual ancestors, we must live in a way that can help them discover the true meaning of their existence and move forward on the path of love and beauty as a beloved community.

To truly be Thầy's continuation means keeping the stream of love flowing. The powerful energy of Thầy's compassion once touched our hearts so deeply; now, it is our turn to practice in a way that the younger generations can feel closer to us—and touch that same love within themselves. True transmission is only possible through true continuation.

This interview was held in Plum Village, France, during a May 2025 retreat for Order of Interbeing members. Originally in Vietnamese, it was translated by Sister Trầg Mai Thôn.

Photo of Anh Hươg, Thầy, and her younger brother Đức in summer 1981, courtesy of Anh Hươg

Photo of Anh Hươg receiving Lamp Transmission from Thầy, courtesy of Anh Hươg

Photo below: Order of Interbeing retreat, Plum Village, May 2025, courtesy of the monastic sangha. Anh Hươg is in top row, fourth from left.



Becoming a member of the Order of Interbeing in 1981 and receiving the Lamp Transmission from Thầy in 1992, **Sister Chôn Ý (Anh Hươg, Thầy's niece)** has always carried within her the flame of service and the aspiration of sangha building. Together with her husband, Brother Chôn Trĩ, she founded the Fairfax Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax in Virginia, US in 1998 and has guided numerous retreats for both Vietnamese and international practitioners.

Walking Joyfully Together

**Sister Chân Đức (Sister True Virtue) shares a message
for young members of the Order of Interbeing.**

Dear Wake Up Order of Interbeing members,

We, the older members of the Order of Interbeing (OI), know that you are there and we are very happy. We need you. If we can support you in any way, please let us know. Why are we happy to know you are there? It is because of your youthful energy of creativity and putting compassion into action. Some of you in the US were prepared to help Dharma teachers Larry Ward (Brother True Great Voice) and Peggy Rowe Ward (Sister True Original Vow) come to the June 2026 gathering in Plum Village. Now Brother True Great Voice is physically no longer with us, but that does not mean you will not bring him to the gathering. Your deep aspiration for inclusiveness and nondiscrimination is the continuation of his aspiration. In Europe and Asia, those of you who worked alongside Dharma teacher Hà Vĩnh Thọ (Brother True

Great Understanding) will also keep his deep aspiration alive, and if you come to the June 2026 gathering you will bring it with you. It is the aspiration for Gross National Happiness to be our measuring rod in what we do and for happy teachers to change the world.

Dear young OI, what are the principles that guide us in our service, our studies, our practice, and our times of relaxation? They are: nonattachment to views (破執), appropriateness (契機), direct experience of the truth (實證), and skilful means (方便). Nonattachment to views means we break through a veil of attachment to our own way of seeing things and our beliefs. It means we are always ready and open to learn something new. To do this we train ourselves in the habit of deep listening, especially listening to those we do not agree with. We do not argue about small things. For instance, someone says, “Sư Cô Hội Nghiêm gave the talk last

**We accept there is a difference in our perceptions.
Why waste time and energy arguing
about insignificant things?**



Sunday," and we say, "I thought it was Sư Cô Lăng Nghiêm." We stop there. We do not continue to prove our point. We accept there is a difference in our perceptions. Why waste time and energy arguing about insignificant things? We just say out loud or to ourselves, "Oh, I am probably wrong." Of course if it is a matter of life and death we have to try and show the other why we have such a perception through compassionate dialogue.

Compassionate dialogue is linked to appropriateness. Appropriateness means how we share the teachings of the Buddha and our teacher with others. We ask ourselves, "Is the time appropriate to share the teachings, is the place appropriate, and do the teachings fit the needs and aspirations of the people we teach?" Before sharing, we should enquire about the audience. What is the suffering of people in this country at this time?

Direct experience of the truth means we have to realise for ourselves the truth of the teachings. In praising the Dharma, we say it is *ehipassiko*. It means that we come and see directly for ourselves the veracity and the effectiveness of the teaching. Others can point to the moon, but we need to see the moon for ourselves and not be caught in the finger that is pointing. We rely on the Three Trainings of mindfulness, concentration, and insight to realise this truth. It means the necessity to practise diligently mindful breathing, walking, and other actions throughout the day.

Skilful means comes from our aspiration to relieve suffering and bring more happiness into the world. We act not just from our intellect but from our heart and our intuition. To test our intuition, we always need good spiritual friends who can help us discover whether the means we are using to spread the Dharma are skilful or not.

There are times when you will want to practise with us, the middle-aged and elderly OI members, and there will be times when

you need to be on your own to talk about the particular needs of your age group. Ideally, the OI has a Council of Youth as well as a Council of Older Members. We hope some of you will be ready to stand on this Council of Youth in order to work alongside more senior members. In this way there will be creativity in the policies of the Order.

In Vietnamese, the OI is called Tiếp Hiện (接現). The word Tiếp (接) means to receive, connect, continue. You receive the transmission from your blood and spiritual ancestors. You belong to the Linji (臨濟) school, the Liễu Quán line. You are a continuation of that school and that line. Liễu Quán made Linji teachings appropriate to his own time in central Vietnam. You want to make the Linji teachings appropriate to the time and the place where you are living. Master Linji was not caught in the outer form of the practice. Instead of our depending on a buddha outside of us, he wants us to depend upon our own awakened nature by living deeply in the present moment in all that we do. Thầy reminded us many times of Master Linji's teaching that the miracle is to walk on the earth.

The word Hiện (現) means to bring into the present moment and to realise the truth for ourselves. We continue the transmission and bring it into the present moment, making it suitable for our times.

The English name Order of Interbeing is not the same as the Vietnamese name and that is why it is necessary for us to understand the Vietnamese. It is not possible to make a succinct translation of Tiếp Hiện into English such that it could become the name of the Order. Thầy coined the word "interbeing" in 1983 in a retreat he led in Tassajara Zen Center in California, US. Thầy explained that interbeing means we cannot possibly be on our own or make something be on its own. Interbeing, the Middle Way between being and nonbeing, has become one of the pillars of Thầy's teaching. When we become a

member of the OI, we commit to understand interbeing not as a theory but as a realisation in our daily life, in our relationships with each other, and with the world.

We hope to see many of you in June 2026 to celebrate sixty years of the Order of Interbeing.

Photos courtesy of the Plum Village monastic sangha



Sister Annabel Laity (Chân Đức, True Virtue) was born in England and studied Classics and Sanskrit before going to India to study and practice with Tibetan nuns. She has been a disciple of Thích Nhất Hạnh since 1986. In 1988, in India, she became the first Western European woman to be ordained as a nun by Thích Nhất Hạnh. Sister Annabel was director of practice at Plum Village for many years. She travels widely, leading meditation retreats and inspiring many with her unique teaching style throughout the world. In 2000, she became the first Western European nun to teach Buddhist Dharma in Thailand, and she was appointed Dean of Practice by Thầy at the European Institute of Applied Buddhism in Germany in 2008.

Living Deeply, Serving Joyfully

This conversation with Sister Giác Nghiêm,
originally conducted in French by Sister Tại Nghiêm,
offers a glimpse into her journey of faith,
transformation, and deep joy in service.

Sister Tại Nghiêm: Dear sister, next year we will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Order of Interbeing. After so many years of practice and commitment, what does Engaged Buddhism mean to you?

Sister Giác Nghiêm: It is precisely that which brought me to Thầy. I could have chosen a contemplative religious path, but the life of Thầy and Sister Chân Không, whom I met in 1985, led me to choose this way. Thầy was giving his first teaching in French in Lyon. When I encountered Thầy's Dharma, I said to myself, "I have to apply it right away—not just for myself." That's what "engaged" means to me.

At that time, I was working in a hospital as a physiotherapist with elderly and terminally ill people. I saw them suffer, not knowing how to handle their emotions and their pain, how to keep going. And I delighted in bringing the Dharma, the practice, straight into the hospital without ever saying that it

was Zen. I practiced walking meditation for myself in the corridors—it calmed me. I would leave one patient's room and go to the next, breathing mindfully. Standing before the new patient's door, I would leave behind what the previous one had said, keeping only what was essential to convey to the medical staff. Thầy had taught me that.

Entering a room, I would look with fresh eyes—like a flash—quickly seeing what was important and what was not. Without saying anything, I brought meditation to the patient's bedside—the meditation of interbeing. Some people were deeply lonely. For me, the Dharma is joyful, so I would show the patients the cotton sheet—how it was planted in Africa, the tiny seeds watered, then the people who had transported the cotton. It was a deep looking. I saw that it relieved them greatly; they no longer felt alone. I spoke to them about all the people who had worked to make the sheet for them—even the little butterflies, the earthworms—everything



was there: the rain, the sun. Without saying it directly, I showed them that they were not alone.

For patients suffering from hemiplegia or Parkinson's disease, I taught walking meditation in the corridors—without ever mentioning the word “meditation.” We walked slowly, in silence. Whenever they had difficulty moving forward—especially those with Parkinson's—we stopped, and I would ask, “What is your favorite tree?” (They wanted to keep trying to move, but I told them, “No, no—we must practice stopping.”) If they said, “The cherry tree,” then I would say, “Okay, let's become cherry trees in bloom, right here in the hospital corridor.” That released the feeling of helplessness. It was a creative kind of stopping—beauty was there inside it—and they loved it.

There are synapses in the brain—the tiny spaces between nerves. For those with Parkinson's, even for young people, dopamine doesn't flow easily; it becomes depleted.

When we practiced stopping, something changed—we were no longer straining the neurons, and the synaptic space could refill until they were ready to walk again.

I didn't do anything—I just helped. I transmitted bedside meditation, which was very helpful during the changing of dressings for bedsores—often a painful moment—and for people losing their memory or no longer fully aware of the world. I would visit them, ask about the beautiful things in their lives, and use that to counterbalance the pain.

I helped them practice stopping—seeing and recognizing reality as it is—and then gently “changing the record” as Thầy used to say. Before the dressing change, when they heard the cart approaching, they would sigh, “Ah!” And I would say, “Yes, that's the dressing cart. Tell me about the flute your son plays.” By the time they were lying down, we could begin.

I never denied the truth. When the dressing was removed and the pain was intense,

I would say, “Yes, it hurts a lot. Come back to your breathing and gently say, ‘It hurts a lot,’ while breathing calmly.” Then I might add, “There are also other places in your body—if I place my hand here, is it cool or warm?”

I helped them shift their attention. And if the pain was still too strong, mindful breathing and presence made it bearable. The person no longer screamed. I shared this with the nursing staff—“You can do this, together, as a team.” Otherwise, the person would struggle terribly.

I also helped to “bring back to life” the bodies of patients—the untouched parts that had been completely forgotten. I taught caregivers how to wash their patients with

mindfulness—to always announce what they were doing: “Now I’m dipping the washcloth in warm water” so the patient could smell the soap and recognize the scent first, or “I’m going to touch your arm, or your face. Can you feel my hand? It’s soft.” Washing the body in this way helped reawaken the body’s image in the brain—stimulating forgotten areas that had not been touched for a long time.

One day, the head of the department called me in and said, “Madame, you’ve been working this way for several months. I don’t know exactly what it is you’re doing, but thank you—it’s working. You have carte blanche to continue.” (Of course, the results didn’t come from me—they came from the practice!)



Look into my eyes—
they're overflowing with love—
you have chosen the most beautiful path.

I explained to the department head why I was working in this way, and that I belonged to a meditation community. I told him that walking like this is also meditating—that when I enter a patient's room and try to see what they need, what's right and what's not, it's only possible with a completely empty and clear mind.

For me, Buddhism is engaged in life itself. Whatever our profession, we can always find meditations that bring relief.

TN: Did you share with Thầy what you applied in the hospital?

GN: Whenever I began a new kind of meditation practice, I would write to Thầy: "Dear Thầy, this is what I did today..." —though I never received a reply.

One day, during a stay at Plum Village, I skipped walking meditation. Sitting under the linden tree in Upper Hamlet, I wrote to Thầy about what I had been doing with my patients. Thầy came by, very gently, and said, "So, Sister Élisabeth." He always called me Sister Élisabeth. He didn't say, "You didn't

come to walking meditation." No, he simply asked what I was doing.

"Dear Thầy," I said, "I've put your teachings into practice at the hospital, and they're bringing good results. I'm writing everything down."

He just said softly, "Each time you find a new way to practice, send it to me." So that's what I did. I used walking meditation a lot—that's important to emphasize. The results of this Engaged Buddhism were so clear that I began to have physiotherapy students ask me to give classes at their school. Nurses and caregivers also invited me to speak at the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine.

They were so amazed by the results. Not because of me, of course—once again, it was the practice.

TN: After your experience sharing mindfulness in the hospital, how did Engaged Buddhism continue to manifest in your daily life?

GN: In my own family, I never imposed silent sitting or stopping with the bell; I simply

continued my life as before, but with more and more awareness and presence. That, too, was Engaged Buddhism.

I used to write little stories and read them to my children—stories that carried the teaching of non-fear and many other seeds of understanding. When they asked questions, I always answered in natural, simple ways, to help them touch the deep teachings that Thầy had given us. That's something very important to me.

Engaged Buddhism also means daring to pick up a pen—to write to heads of state and say, "This isn't right," but always with gentleness. During the war between Russia and Ukraine, I wrote a kind letter to Mr. Putin, telling him that he was sending his own children to die—that there was no difference between the Ukrainian children, the young soldiers, and his own Russian sons. These were poor young men who would die, be mutilated, or carry deep wounds in their hearts.

I told him that I knew he loved his family, that he cherished his children. I wrote, "If you want your name to be remembered with beauty, you can stop the war now. You just need to say, 'That's enough—we stop,' and withdraw your troops. You could become

famous for this beautiful act." I sent the letter in Russian, directly to the Kremlin—without my address, out of respect for my sisters... you never know.

I was also part of Amnesty International—first writing letters, and later as a medical secretary. For me, that too is Engaged Buddhism: receiving a letter from Amnesty International and responding, "Dear Mr. President..." and signing my name with mindfulness. Always polite, respectful, and courteous, but clear and direct—leaving no room to hide. I did that for years. We can be engaged in so many ways.

In our sangha in Saint-Étienne, we also cared for people experiencing homelessness. Many came to us; we offered clothes, a place to wash, haircuts if they wished, and beard trims for the men. We prepared meals and created joyful little moments. We listened deeply and spoke with them with warmth and understanding. Thầy knew about it; he and Sister Chân Không protected us.

That continued for ten years while I was there—and after I left, the others carried it on for almost ten more.

There you are—very simple things.

... nothing can be done except together.
Together, we can do everything.
Together, we can rise above every difficulty.

TN: How do you and the community at Maison de l'Inspir continue to share the practice with families and young people?

GN: We are deeply engaged and continue to welcome many young people, including those from Wake Up. For many years, we offered a half-day every other Saturday afternoon at Maison de l'Inspir to receive families.

We guided parents to learn how to trust their children—even the very young ones—who would lead walking meditation or the tea ceremony, and invite the bell. During walking meditation, the parents would close their eyes and allow themselves to be guided by a small child. Everyone was so present, so full of mindfulness.

This, to me, is Engaged Buddhism in action—transforming the lives of families. Once a year, the parents would organize a retreat of three to five days, where parents and children practiced together.

TN: On the path of service, what were the greatest challenges for you, dear sister? And how did you overcome them?

GN: I think the greatest obstacle I encountered was wondering how others would perceive what I was doing—it was so original! That was my challenge: the fear that others wouldn't understand.

At that time, Buddhism was not well known. Thầy's first teaching in French was in 1984 or 1985, just before Christmas, I think. So my fear was that this kind of engagement would be misunderstood—seen as belonging to a sect—and that I might be forbidden to continue my work in the hospital—even when I could see the positive results. But when the head of the department said, "Madame, you have carte blanche," all my fears disappeared. My obstacles came from within me, not from the outside.

TN: You are a *bodhisattva* of deep listening, a beautiful continuation of the Bodhisattva

Avalokita. Could you tell us what inspired you to offer deep listening to friends at the Maison de l'Inspir?

GN: It's hereditary. My mother listened to people a lot. Sometimes she would bring unhoused people home—they could sleep, wash, and rest before going on their way. That was part of our home: listening. My grandfather did the same, and my grandmother too. So, it's in our family—in our genes. There's no need for me to take credit for listening that way.

But I can tell you how the sangha's deep listening once transformed someone. Would you like to hear a beautiful story?

TN: Of course!

GN: One day, at the Maison de l'Inspir in Noisy-le-Grand, a man arrived on his motorbike, with tattoos, wild hair, and a black leather jacket—a true old-school rocker. At that time, not everyone had tattoos yet! He said, "My name is François." He's happy for me to share his story—just François, no last name.

He listened to the teachings, joined the walking meditation, and shared during Dharma discussion. I welcomed him as I would any person without housing—that was familiar to me. It didn't scare me or impress me; I had already spent time among people living on the streets.

During the sharing, he told us his story—abandoned as a child, living on the streets, drinking by the age of ten or twelve, then taking drugs. Even though he was still young, his body was already badly damaged. You could see he had lived too much—and lived badly.

All of us—monastics and lay friends—simply listened. We didn't interrupt, we didn't comment, we just listened deeply. He said, "I came to you today because I almost killed my wife's lover. I had a knife in my hand, ready

to kill him—but I didn't. I remembered seeing a book with an address—Noisy-le-Grand, the Maison de l'Inspir—so here I am."

From that day on, every Thursday, he came to our Day of Mindfulness—learning to live, to be loved, to be recognized, to be listened to, no matter what he said.

One day, he arrived and said, "This is my daughter. I asked her to give me the most beautiful gift possible for my birthday. She asked, 'What would make you happy, Dad?' and I said, 'Give me a day.' She asked, 'Which day?' and I said, 'Thursday.' So here we are—I came to spend this day with her."

Together, surrounded by the sangha, he made a confession and asked his daughter for forgiveness. Everyone was in tears. It was deeply moving—especially knowing the life he had lived. Later, he did the same with his son, bringing him to the Maison so his son could see the place where his father had found refuge. Again, he made a confession before his son—a young man of seventeen. He changed completely.

One day, we were a very small group—just five people—including a police officer who came to learn about nonviolence and calm. We never spoke of our professions, just our names. When it was François' turn to share, he looked at me with sparkling eyes:

"You know what?"

"No," I said, smiling, to encourage him.

"I looked for all the weapons I had in my house."

Right away, the police officer turned pale—thinking, "Oh dear, where have I ended up?"

François continued, "I took all my weapons and piled them in the middle of my living room—a great mountain." You could imagine how much fear he had been carrying!

"So, what are you going to do with them, François?" I asked.

"I have an idea, Sister Élisabeth. I have a friend who's a blacksmith. I'll give them all to him—he'll make a statue of liberty. Not the

one over there, but the one we feel inside when we're truly free."

He had stopped drinking, stopped taking drugs, stopped stimulants. He was living peacefully. He had melted down his weapons to create a statue of inner freedom.

"Excellent idea, François! You must do that!" I said. Meanwhile, the police officer looked even paler!

Then he looked at me seriously and said, "I kept something."

I smiled and said, "It's already wonderful that you could let go of all the rest. What did you keep?"

"A hammer—with a long handle—for when I'm on my motorbike, in case he comes close." You could see the old fear still there.

I said gently, "You've already made a great sacrifice. If you still need that one for now, keep it." He was amazed.

The following Christmas, I was just about to leave to visit my mother when I saw him arrive. "Oh, how wonderful! If you'd come five minutes later, you'd have missed me!" I said. "Sister Élisabeth," he said, "I have a gift for you."

He handed me something wrapped in a red-and-white checkered napkin. It was the hammer. He had given up his last weapon—thanks to the sangha.

I told him, "You'll wrap it again and place it on the Buddha altar for five days, to purify it. You'll offer it yourself, saying, 'This is my last weapon, Lord Buddha.'"

I had told him the story of Aṅgulimāla—and that's what he did. Later, he became a filmmaker. He made a film in which his son played his younger self—and it was a success. He was so happy. Such a transformation—such a beautiful story.

There are so many like that: reconciliations between couples, between parents and children, between human beings and life itself.

It is truly the hand of Thầy reaching out to those in need.

TN: What would you like to say to the young members of the Order of Interbeing, to inspire them?

GN: First thing: life is beautiful. For me, it truly is.

Second thing: you have chosen the most beautiful path. Look into my eyes—they're overflowing with love—you have chosen the most beautiful path.

In the year 2000, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) invited Thầy to propose something to change the world. Thầy presented The Five Mindfulness Trainings and said, "Here—with this, we can change the world."

UNESCO included six points in the final manifesto, but the spirit of The Five Trainings was completely within it. I heard that sixty million people signed that manifesto.

Real change is possible. If we change our attitude, everything will change.

And lastly, nothing can be done except together. Together, we can do everything. Together, we can rise above every difficulty.

Photos of Sister Giác Nghiêm with Sister Trắng Mai Phương by Sister Chuẩn Nghiêm

Photo on page 30-31 courtesy of Rob Walsh Media

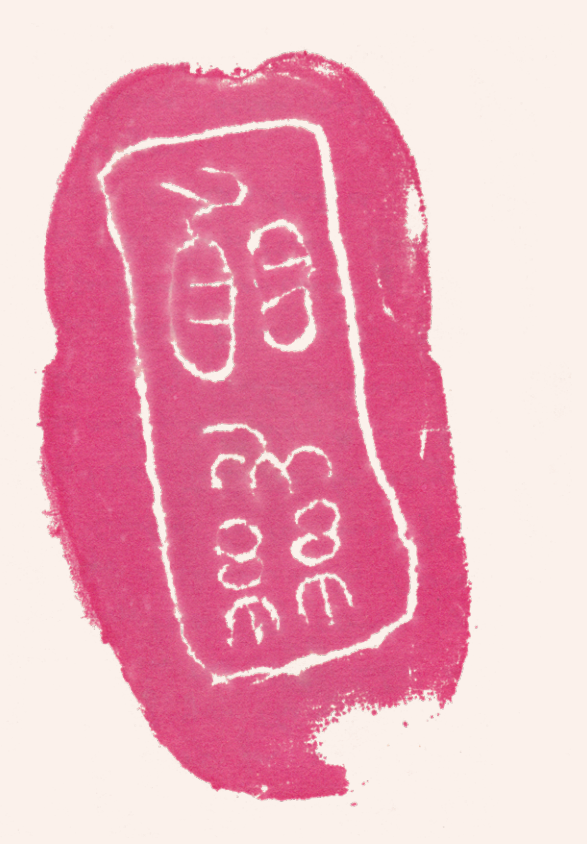
Sister Chân Giác Nghiêm (True Adornment with Awakening) is a dearly beloved elder sister in the Plum Village community. She first met Thầy in 1985, and his teachings soon became a guiding light in her life. In 1999, at the age of fifty-six—after years of marriage and a career as a physiotherapist—she chose to follow the monastic path. Thầy later entrusted her with the role of abbess of Maison de l'Inspiration, a Plum Village practice center nestled in the peaceful countryside near Paris, in Villeneuve-sur-Bellot.







The Cauldron of American Buddhism



**Dharma teachers Fred Eppsteiner and Brother Pháp Lưu
enjoy a candid conversation on the past, present, and
future of the Order of Interbeing, Fred's early days
with Thầy, and the role of Dharma teachers and
monastics in the community.**

Brother Pháp Lưu: You were integral in working with Thầy to formulate the Order of Interbeing (OI) charter, to envision what the OI could be, and how it would work.

Fred Eppsteiner: When I met him in 1975 and he first started telling me about the OI, being both young and impetuous, I said, "Please ordain me right now!" [Laughter] But he was very reluctant because he was in this transition phase in his life and he didn't know whether the OI had any life after Vietnam. He had not yet taken it beyond the context of Vietnam and the original six members [the Six Cedars]. He clearly indicated "Not yet," because he didn't know the future.

But when I saw him again in the early '80s, he said, "It's time." Right before that, he had ordained Anh Hường. He came to [Mount] Tremper [at Zen Mountain Monastery] in 1983 to lead a retreat and he ordained me there. I think out of that came his willingness to publish and thereby make public The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and his commentary.¹

Truth is, he really didn't need me for content and any heavy editing of his text. He only needed me to help him adapt his language to how American Buddhists say things. He had a good grasp of English; it was simply that he didn't know the lexicon of American Buddhism.

PL: What challenges do you find to be Thầy's continuation as a teacher, especially in the US—or just generally?

FE: Right from the beginning of our relationship, Thầy was very clear with me: American Buddhism has to be American. He said that wherever Buddhism went, it always adapted itself and expressed itself in and through the culture. American Buddhism has to be expressed in the idiom of the American language. It has to be expressed in the idiom of American arts and American music. He also strongly emphasized the importance of

experimentation: don't think you know the right way, always experiment, and always be open. It was wonderful to work with him on the translation of the [OI] charter. It is one of the great documents he wrote when he was more non-denominational in his approach. He guided us to be open to see the wisdom in all the schools of Buddhism and that Buddhism always has to be renewing itself at the source. I have done my best to be very experimental. The OI is not just a transmission of the teachings and the practices, but goes deeper and is much more personal because it is founded on living community relationships.

PL: One young OI, who just ordained this year, read the charter and noticed that we're supposed to get together every twenty years and update the precepts. What do you think about that?

FE: I think we're supposed to get together every three years.

PL: Was it every three years? [Laughter]

FE: Originally Plum Village was supposed to be the home of the OI. The OI was going to be Thầy's legacy: he was creating this order in which monks, nuns, and laypeople would all be equal and share the same principles. It was a radical vision, especially if you know about Vietnamese Buddhism or traditional Asian Buddhism.

But once his books started getting published and he began to give retreats and workshops and became more in demand, he was "discovered." The number of people going to retreats with Thầy increased in the '80s to the hundreds, when before there'd be maybe thirty or forty people there. [Laughter] The loss of intimacy with Thầy was painful for some people, but his influence just grew so quickly, almost exponentially year by year, and there was great demand for his personal presence and teaching.

Padmapani

mười bông hoa trên trời
mười bông hoa dưới đất
hoa nở dưới chân Phật
hoa nở trong tim người

Bồ tát cầm đóa sen
đang nghiêng trời nghệ thuật
trên cánh đồng sao mọc
mặt cười trắng mọi lên

tàu lá dừa màu ngọc
vất ngang lưng trời khuya
tâm đi trong tĩnh mặc
bắt gặp chân như về

26

Dear Fred,

Thank you for your letter of
November 12, 1974, inquiring about
Tiếp Hiện.

Tiếp (接) means being in touch,

During this rapid growth period, some of the original OI community of laypeople in Plum Village would leave after being there for a few years. Being laypeople, their lives pulled them in varied directions and I think Thầy needed people he could count on year after year. He began to look more and more to the monastic community for this stability and put more of his energy into nurturing it as his continuation. Much of the charter—the Council of Elders and how it's supposed to meet every three years—just never happened.

PL: There's a question that came to me just as you were talking. Thầy had said early on in his peace activism in the US that we should try to figure out where the violence was coming from and how to transform the situation. Now when I ask myself, "What are we doing as a

monastic community or as a larger Plum Village international community?" I see that we're transforming collective consciousness. We're not here to promote Buddhism. It's not even necessarily about promoting mindfulness—although that's a very helpful way to transform collective consciousness. Retreats are a way of transforming collective consciousness because you get people to come on retreat and then you all practice together. We all practice and then the collective consciousness is changed by that. That's an effective way, but retreats aren't necessarily the only way. The real question is, how do we facilitate transformation in the collective consciousness and grow awakened people? This speaks to what you shared about Thầy's emphasis on experimentation. I'm seeing that in the monastic communities we can get caught in doing things by rote: we do these retreats every year and that's our schedule and we forget about the larger

being in contact, receiving. Being in contact with the reality of one's self and with the reality of the world. Receiving the teaching of the Enlightened. Tiếp (Hiện) means the realization of Awakening and of the efforts of moving living beings to the other shore.

These are attempts to explain these two words. You may like to reexplain it the way to see it.

The order was founded about 12 years ago. It was an attempt to set up a branch of the sangha that would fit more to the mind, the aspiration and the life of modern men and women. Although there are less than 10 members at the moment inside Vietnam there are several dozen who are practicing Tiếp Hiện

as apprentices. We do not want to open the order to many yet, because we are ^{still} in a period of experimentation. The order is for monks and non-monks both. If you think that there are people in the US who are interested in Tiep Hien, of course you could set up a community there and set up links with our friends in VN. Tiep Hien tries to be very open and tolerant, as we have been so much victim of intolerance already.

There are documents, concerning and suggestions concerning the setting up the Tiep Hien life. When we have it translated, we shall send it to you.

We have been refraining ^{the} publicizing of Tiep Hien in Vietnam, just

because we want to wait until a strong ~~the~~ spiritual base is established and enough solid people are there to prevent the order to be flooded by the people.

I hope we could discuss more about these things when we meet sometimes in the future.

What Sang

vision. I respect that you're one of the lay Dharma teachers who is actually building community and teaching actively. When I hear from someone in your community, I think, "Fred's right on. He's got it."

FE: Well, you see people from your side, right? They come to Deer Park on retreat, and in that controlled environment, they get solid pieces of Thay's Dharma, or they stop long enough that they can get in touch with buried parts of themselves. That's what you see. What I see, living in Florida, is when they come back, the forces of our materialistic and consumer culture are strong. If you read *Zen Keys*, written in the early days when Thầy had a more radical critique of materialism and consumerism, he was clear that unless human minds are changed, you can advocate for protecting the planet from climate change and all the good things forever. Materialism, consumerism, climate change: they're all symptoms of how human beings have lost

touch with who we are.

This is a sadness of mine: you can go to any urban area in America and you'll find a Zen center, you'll find a Tibetan center, you'll find an Insight meditation center, and you won't find a Thích Nhất Hạnh center. They'll be meeting in some little church basement.

If you're asking me about the big picture, that's what's missing. The energy went into the monastic community and the residential centers, which is wonderful. But like Thầy said, people can't practice by themselves. Going to Plum Village or Deer Park once or twice a year can't offset these other delusive forces that are in American culture and in their own storehouse consciousness.

You get people in ideal conditions when they're on retreat. They're away from their daily life, and they're away from their responsibilities. You incubate them for five or seven days, or two or three weeks. And they change, right? Because those negative, afflictive, or delusive seeds within them aren't being

watered—only positive seeds are watered. The monastic community is wonderful at watering positive seeds, and so people thrive. And then when they come back home, unless there's something to hold them and continue to support them, it's very difficult for them to really maintain that transformation. So you get a kind of a syndrome where people think, "I gotta get back to Deer Park" or "I gotta get back to Plum Village" to get this sort of a fix. It's a good fix.

PL: It makes me think of how we're trying our best here to create more extensive training programs in house. So instead of just having retreats, we proposed a program here at Deer Park for staying here to train for fifteen months. This would be mainly for young people at the moment, maybe coming out of college, where they do two back-to-back Rains Retreats and in between, live in a community near the monastery doing some service connecting with the local community, but also practicing or possibly even working. I know Thầy started the movements of mindfulness practice centers, and there have been Wake Up houses, but they last for a couple of years and then they disappear. This new program would try to seed long-term lay communities in the Plum Village tradition in urban centers.

FE: In his early writings about the OI, Thầy said there has to be one person to hold it, to be at the core of each lay sangha. One person dedicated to practice, somewhat charismatic. Brother, this whole society is falling apart so quickly. Now, everywhere you look, the suffering and the delusion are increasing. The greed, the anger, the fear.... These are difficult times, when all hands have to be on deck. If you ask me, seasoned monastics could move out part of the year into the broader community and be in residence at these various sanghas to provide those seeds and that training in the communities where these people live. Having spent the

last fifteen to twenty years doing that, I know if we could build a community like we've built here in Tampa, Florida, you can build them anywhere.

PL: Fred, how do you nourish your spiritual practice day in and day out? Because I think the main issue with monastics is that we feel nourished every day living as a community with the other monastics, in terms of our precepts body, in terms of our daily practice. You really have to have internal discipline if you're going to go out even just as a small group of monastics to a center in an urban area. That's the main reason why we don't do it. It's not because we don't feel inspired. We just have to learn how to nourish our daily practice when there are fewer conditions around us to support it.

FE: [Laughter] Do you want me to give you the simple answer?

PL: [Laughter] Okay!

FE: *Bodhicitta*.

PL: Yeah.

FE: What has nourished me for the last fifty years? *Bodhicitta*. The desire to wake up, to be free, to benefit people.

I think once you have an inner connection, an inner refuge, where the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and Thầy live in your heart, that always nourishes you. That's what always nourishes me. But again, I'm not alone; I am very fortunate that I've been able to inspire others and we have a large OI community. I have a community; you have a community. It's wonderful to build things with people. I just love to practice the Dharma. When I received the Lamp Transmission from Thầy, I thought, "Since Thầy has ordained me as a Dharma teacher then, I need to start teaching." I began in my home living room

in the mid-nineties, and all of a sudden here I am, thirty years later with a community of over three hundred. I am much more than a Dharma teacher these days. I'm more like a village priest. I have a congregation that experiences birth, sickness, old age, and death, has all types of issues, and all along I share the Dharma to nourish and support them. It's wonderful.

Thầy was a monk, true to his vows. But again, when I first encountered him, he was living with laypeople. Plum Village in the early years was primarily a lay community. Thay was wonderful, he was seamless.

PL: Thank you so much, Fred, for your time. It's very lovely to connect with you.

FE: Thầy has passed. So, the future direction of the community is being created now. This creates that. I see great thirst. I see great yearning. I think there's a need for Dharma. It doesn't have to be packaged with capital Ds, or capital Bs. The Buddhist teachings are priceless and really speak to people's suffering. Thầy empowered us as Dharma teachers, and he wants us to teach the Dharma to people in creative ways, experimental ways, but always preserving its spirit.

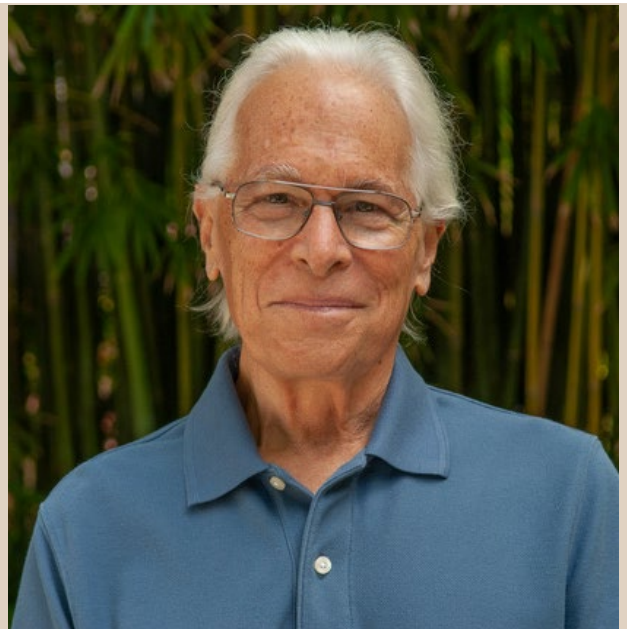
This is an excerpt from an online interview with Fred Eppsteiner in September 2024. It has been edited for length and clarity. An extended version is available at mindfulnessbell.org.

¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing: The 14 Mindfulness Trainings of Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987).

Pages 32, 34-35: a letter from Thầy to Fred in 1974

Brother Pháp Lưu's bio can be found on page 3

Fred Eppsteiner, a Dharma teacher in the lineage of Thích Nhất Hạnh, has been a student of Buddhism and a practitioner of meditation for over fifty years and has devoted himself to teaching the Dharma since 1996. Although Fred has practiced primarily in the Zen and Tibetan Buddhist lineages, he bases his teachings on the full breadth of Buddhist philosophical, psychological, and meditative traditions. For more information, visit floridamindfulness.org



Bridging East and West, Contemplation and Action

An interview with Brother Pháp Lưu by Sister Tại Nghiêm
on the spirit of the Order of Interbeing
and Engaged Buddhism



Sister Tại Nghiêm: What first inspired you to connect deeply with the spirit of the Order of Interbeing? How did your understanding of the Order of Interbeing evolve after you became a monk?

Brother Pháp Lưu: I got invited to an Order of Interbeing (OI) retreat at Green Mountain Dharma Center in the spring of 2003. I wasn't an OI member or even an OI aspirant, but I was very enthusiastic about the practice. The retreat was very peaceful. Some of the most senior members of the community on the East Coast, including Joanne Friday, Sue Bridge, as well as Sister Chân Đức, the Abbess, were there, which gave me a feeling of the gravitas of the OI and of how particular it is to our tradition.

I was especially impressed by Joanne Friday as a Dharma teacher. She had gone through so much suffering, and yet she radiated joy and spontaneity. She never complained. She has been a kind of underground mentor for me. Even since becoming a monastic, I still consider her my teacher. My associations with The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings are very much connected to her spirit.

These Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, more than anything, define the Plum Village tradition of Engaged Buddhism. The First and the Second Mindfulness Trainings especially struck me.

In the Buddhist tradition, we are reminded not to get caught in dogmatic thinking and ideology. The First Mindfulness Training of the Order of Interbeing includes this kind of self-reflection—a lion's roar, really—on the Buddhist tradition. It helps us remember that

we don't need to carry the raft around after we cross the river.

TN: The Order of Interbeing has often been described as integrating Buddhist ethics into daily life through mindful social engagement, community care, and sustainable projects. From your own practice and community life, what is your perspective on contemplative practice and social action?

PL: Thầy created The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings to help people train their mind to speak and act free from dogmas. Then Thầy wrote *The Miracle of Mindfulness* as a letter to his students, so they can train themselves with mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful washing.... I hadn't learned of any of this yet when I went to Madrid, Spain to teach English after university in 1997. I immersed myself in a movement—the Okupa Movement—with other young people who were trying to challenge the status quo of society with their own bodies. They were living in abandoned buildings in the city and trying to engage in social action in the streets to address the situation of undocumented immigrants; other communities were doing resistance work. Within those communities, I was close to a lot of anger and blame toward authority. In those movements for almost two years, I didn't understand why I kept getting more and more angry. I didn't have any way to take care of my mind.

Now I understand that I was in an environment that did not help me take care of this anger. It got overwhelming for me. When I came back to the US in 2000, I went into a depression. That's when I discovered mindfulness meditation.

I said, “Okay, at least I can sit here on this cushion and embrace this anger inside of me.” So I trained myself in meditation, which gave me relief; I was able to touch joy again.

When I read Thầy’s story—the journal being shut down when he lost funding in the late ’50s, feeling undermined by elders in the Buddhist community—I asked myself, “What must have been going through Thầy’s body and mind?” He was in New York City, at Union Theological Seminary, hearing about protests at home against the banning of flags for Vesak, the collapse of the Ngô Đình Diệm regime, and eventually Diệm’s assassination. What could Thầy do? He fasted, sought connection with the United Nations, and then returned to Vietnam, knowing he might be betrayed again. He wrote a heartbreaking but beautiful poem about his two hands being crushed.¹

When I have challenges in my practice, I imagine myself as Thầy in New York. Getting in touch with what Thầy went through makes it easier for me to deal with my own anger. I think of Thầy rolling up his sleeves, starting experimental villages, learning how to raise chickens, and working with Cô Phương Thảo and other medical students to bring basic hygiene to villages. He didn’t sit on the sidelines; he went out and helped people.

Taking care of our minds while doing this work takes discipline and training. Having studied, gained knowledge, gone out to do activist work, and seen the dangers of not taking care of my mind, I felt deeply drawn to The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings.

In 2006, Brother Pháp Hộ and I were asked to come to Deer Park to train and help build the sangha. We went to the hermitage to meet with Thầy before we left Plum Village. One thing Thầy shared with us that I always remember is to avoid getting caught thinking that there is a separation between the contemplative life and the engaged life. “Don’t see them as two separate things,” he said. “They’re not two, they’re one.”

Dualistic thinking makes us go back and forth between extremes—first you think you’re too contemplative, you have to be more engaged, but then you change to be more engaged, and then you’re too engaged, and you need to be more contemplative. It can go on and on.

TN: That is Thầy’s vision for us. How do you apply that in your daily life? How do you keep from being burned out?

PL: I don’t have trouble being burned out, because I always return to the sangha. With the sangha, you can do so many things. But if you try to do it all by yourself, then you burn out and you get stressed. Even if it looks like I’m doing a lot, it’s actually the sangha. If the conditions are there in the sangha, then boom—it becomes very easy to do things.

That’s how Thầy was able to write so many books. I just observed how Thầy did it. When I was a novice in Hanoi on Thầy’s return trip to Vietnam in 2005, people were getting sick, it was cold and wet. We didn’t know every day what was going to happen next and one of my elder brothers, Brother Pháp Trú, told me: “Just focus on Thầy. Look at Thầy. Do what Thầy is doing.” The whole tour, I did that. I didn’t get distracted by what my brothers and sisters were doing. I just looked at Thầy. What is Thầy doing? How is Thầy guarding his energy? When is Thầy resting? When is Thầy teaching?

One good thing as a monk is it’s very difficult to fire you. If you make a mistake or you don’t do something so well, it’s okay. If you succeed at something, you may not learn much. But when you fail, you learn a lot. I fail a lot in the sangha. I have learned to enjoy failing. If you see failure as a joyful thing, you don’t get stressed.

TN: The Order of Interbeing was born in a time of war in Vietnam. Sixty years later, what challenge does the Order of Interbeing need to respond to most urgently?

If you succeed at something,
 you may not learn much.
 But when you fail, you learn a lot.
 I fail a lot in the sangha.
 I have learned to enjoy failing.
 If you see failure as a joyful thing,
 you don't get stressed.

PL: I think we need to learn to be nimble and flexible, to respond dynamically to ever-changing situations. The biggest difficulty OI has now is that, like any institution, as it becomes larger it starts to take on unwieldy structures—structures that are there for good reasons, but that sacrifice nimbleness and responsiveness.

You can see this with the horrors going on in Gaza right now, or the rise of fascism in the United States: we struggle, as such a large organization, to respond effectively. It's not because of any one person; it's just difficult to work at scale with the structures we've put in place.

When Thầy started the OI, there were only six members and he was very clearly the one leading the way. The Six Cedars—the first six members of the Order—were very happy to follow Thầy's direction. Now, we don't have one leader everybody follows. So, we have to work together. We have to have good communication.

For me, the teaching on keeping communication open is critical. I see we are siblings, lay and monastic. Where we fail is where we cut off communication. All my monastic brothers know: whoever reaches out to me, I

always respond. I really admire my elder and younger brothers and sisters who do that, who have that spirit. Thầy did that, too; he always kept communication open.

I remember one brother who, in 2004 at Deer Park, declared that he no longer needed to go to Thầy's Dharma talk because he already understood everything Thầy had to teach. He said he would enjoy his practice and not attend the talk. Most of us felt incredulous and angry when we heard him say such things—that's where we were in our practice.

Later, during a monastic day, Thầy invited that very brother to sit right next to him. I was upset—how could someone say such things about Thầy? But Thầy embraced him. That was a great teaching. I will never forget how Thầy embraced him right there, inviting him to sit beside him, and spoke with the sangha as one.

That spirit—always keeping communication open—was transmitted to me by Thầy.

TN: When you think of how the Order of Interbeing has grown across so many countries and cultures, what do you feel are the most precious strands?

PL: I think the ethical response to violence is fundamental. If we lose our ethical integrity, then we lose everything, and it just becomes tit for tat—they against us. Right now, international politics have descended into that kind of zero-sum thinking. What The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings offer is this ethical core. It is not an ethics that sits on a shelf; it must be applied. How do you live your daily life? How do you respond, how do you practice listening deeply, responding with loving speech, acting with nonviolence—not only in bodily action, but also in speech and thought?

You need mindfulness to do this. You need to practice being mindful of your thinking, your speech, and your actions if you want to transform them. The teaching of Plum Village is that the means and the end are not separate: there is no way to Nirvana, Nirvana is the way. That is what we have to offer—in politics, economics, or spirituality.

TN: When you think of the sixtieth anniversary of the Order of Interbeing, what brings you the most gratitude?

PL: The brotherhood and sisterhood, the siblinghood. Everywhere we go on the Earth, we have family, created by our practice of the trainings. That fills me with gratitude, to know we have the sangha everywhere.

I see it concretely with projects we are starting here at Deer Park: the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing, the new Deer Park Happy Farm, and the Thích Nhất Hạnh Museum in Los Angeles. None of these can be done alone; they depend on the Sangha in the Ten Directions. We look deeply to see what nourishes the sangha best in this moment.

At Deer Park, we keep nimbleness and the ability to respond as a monastery. This is thanks to the decision-making structure Thầy transmitted—the sanghakarman procedure, the *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī* councils as the priority. I hope we never lose that. In any organization, there is a danger of becoming more

hierarchical, with an elite making decisions. Thầy taught consensus-based decision-making, democracy and seniority. He trained us well in this, and it allows Deer Park to be nimble in responding to situations.

Consensus decision-making has no merit without brotherhood and sisterhood. What allows our *bhikṣu* meetings to be harmonious is the brotherhood. I am grateful for the international siblinghood The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings create—not only in the monastic sangha, but also among lay sangha members. We flow together like milk and water, very harmoniously.

TN: What is your deepest aspiration for the future of the Order of Interbeing?

PL: My aspiration is that The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings can come to the UN and the International Criminal Court and actually help those bodies to be really effective moral forces for the world. I personally feel these two bodies really try to represent a universal kind of justice, a universal kind of democracy on our planet. But because the main powers in the world don't respect these bodies or give them authority, they are not yet as effective as they could be, for example in responding to the climate crisis or increasing lawlessness and violence on the planet. The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings have something to offer to those bodies and others who are doing great work, like Greenpeace, Human Rights Watch, Extinction Rebellion, and groups which at their core really uphold a profound humanity.

I remember being on a call six or seven years ago with a member of Extinction Rebellion. They were struggling with how to relate to each other within the organization, because it's a decentralized organization. How do you make decisions? I shared a lot of what I'm sharing right now: you have to train yourself. You can't start with the action and then work backward to the training. You

have to train yourself to be able to act in a way which is truly humane and ethical.

TN: If you could transmit one insight from your journey to the younger generation of the Order of Interbeing aspirants, what would it be?

PL: Live your dreams. It's not enough just to have a dream; you have to live it. That's how you learn. And you have to have patience, a lot of patience—lifetime after lifetime of patience.

When you practice to live your dream, you'll get criticized, you'll get judged, people will blame you, they'll make you into the enemy. You practice like Thầy to walk without conflict. That way you can bridge East and West. That was how Thầy did it. He didn't criticize or judge others. He just walked his path.

This is the translation I like of Thầy's transmission gatha, which he received from our grandfather teacher. Thầy wholeheartedly put it into practice throughout his life:



Going to meet the spring one finds the
strength to walk,
Walk without thought or contention,
When the lamp of the mind shines on
the original nature,
The wondrous Dharma of East and West
will naturally manifest.

So I think what Thầy would wish for the
sangha is that the sangha comes together as
one big family.

TN: Is it the inspiration for the idea of fire
building? Can you share more about that?

PL: We have these sessions of visioning
about the OI charter and council. We will be
reading the charter with some elders, both
monastic and lay. We remember that Thầy al-
ways wished for us to learn to come together,
drink tea, and share our ideas before we
come to the meeting where we have to make
a decision.

Thầy's niece Anh Hương suggested the
image of building a fire to prepare for the
gathering in June 2026. That image really
resonated with all of us. We knew it would
be difficult for every OI member around the
world to come to Plum Village. How do we
host everybody? So we thought, let's gather
people whether or not they are coming to
Plum Village. Let's get them to come together
in person in their local regional groups so they
can play together, have a chance to practice
together as OI members and aspirants, and
then share about it, so that in the build-up to
the larger gathering in Plum Village we can
have these smaller regional sessions.

These regional sessions are also a
chance to come together in that spirit of one
family—brothers, sisters, siblings on one path.

TN: It's very beautiful. If Thầy were here with
us to celebrate sixty years of the Order of
Interbeing, what do you think he would most
want us to remember?

PL: Thầy would just want us to be able to
come together as brothers and sisters, as
siblings. Thầy loved when the sangha would
come together and play! I see the upcoming
OI retreat in June in that spirit. I remember in
2014, Thầy called all the Dharma teachers and
said, "Mindfulness is a path, not a tool." Maybe
Thầy already had that idea, but I feel you don't
know until the sangha gets together.

Nowadays, we really have to physically
come together more often; we see that virtual
is not enough. When you recite the precepts,
you have to be able to reach and touch the
monk or the nun next to you. In that spirit, the
Buddha already had that wisdom. Now we
say, "Science says oxytocin is released when
you are physically together with people and
you feel happier." The Buddha didn't have that
language, but he knew you have to be within
arm's reach of your sangha.

You practice like Thầy to walk without conflict.
That way you can bridge East and West.
That was how Thầy did it.
He didn't criticize or judge others.
He just walked his path.



Through the organism of the sangha body, we can start to hear what is coming up for people in different areas so when we come together in June, we can do our best to address what is arising and look deeply.

TN: Thank you, brother, for what you shared. For me, it is really inspiring. It refreshed my *bodhicitta*. Listening to your sharing, I can really feel the fire is still alive in your heart, and this nourishes me.

¹ *Thích Nhất Hạnh, "Here Are My Hands," Call Me By My True Names: The Collected Poems of Thích Nhất Hạnh (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1999), 59-61.*

Sister Tại Nghiêm and Brother Pháp Lưu's bios can be found on pages 2-3.

Photo of Brother Pháp Lưu with Brother Pháp Dung and young OI members courtesy of Rob Walsh Media

Photo of Sister Tại Nghiêm courtesy of the Plum Village monastic sangha

Photo of Brother Pháp Lưu by Tony Lulek

A photograph of two people sitting outdoors at night around a large, bright campfire. The person on the left is wearing a purple vest over a light blue shirt, light blue pants, and a patterned headscarf. They are sitting on a low stone wall and gesturing with their hands. The person on the right is wearing a dark blue sweater and light-colored pants, sitting cross-legged. The campfire is made of large logs and is burning brightly, illuminating the scene. The background is dark, suggesting a night setting.

Sangha Fire-Building Sessions Around the World

A historic moment is approaching for our global spiritual family.

Dear sangha builders, OI members, and dedicated Plum Village practitioners around the world,

In June 2026, our worldwide Plum Village community is gathering for a retreat in Plum Village, France, which will be followed by an Order of Interbeing Council, the first in three decades. This is our chance to collectively envision and shape the future of our beloved spiritual community—a moment that will ripple through generations to come.

You have a vital role to play in this transformative process. In the spirit of Thầy's wisdom to drink tea together before we meet to decide on anything, the Lay-Monastic OI Charter and Council Team for 2026 encourages you to organize local and regional "fire-building sessions" that will kindle the energy we need to shape our collective future.

PURPOSE: BUILDING SIBLINGHOOD AND TOGETHERNESS

These fire-building sessions will support a global process of connection and community building. We want to bring sangha members together *in person, face-to-face*, creating harmony through shared activities, before we meet to engage in discussions about our collective future. These sessions will focus primarily on strengthening the bonds within our spiritual family and deepening our mutual understanding and aspirations.

HOW IT WORKS

We propose fire-building sessions to be organized in person in each region across the coming year, leading up to the OI retreat and council at Plum Village in June 2026. Any committed sangha member should feel empowered to organize a fire-building session. Gatherings should be organized in a way that fosters connections across different age and affinity groups in the Plum Village

community, and should be inclusive of committed practitioners who are not formally OI members or aspirants.

Each session should be at least 2.5 hours and should include walking meditation, sitting and/or tea meditation, and Dharma sharing. The session may be integrated into a Day of Mindfulness or combined with a pre-existing retreat or gathering. We offer these broad reflections for Dharma sharing:



- ◆ What has the Order of Interbeing and the global Plum Village sangha offered to my life?
- ◆ How can we both nourish our global sangha body and refresh and reinvigorate the Order of Interbeing?



- ◆ How can we as the Order of Interbeing and the Plum Village global family ensure we are a refuge for future generations? What is already here and what is missing?
- ◆ What are your aspirations for our global spiritual family?

Please designate one person at each gathering to share with the 2026 Lay-Monastic OI Fire-Building Team via firebuilding@plumvillage.org:

- ◆ Basic fire-building session information (where, when, how many attended)
- ◆ Group photo of those at the gathering
- ◆ Brief sharing about the experience

Wishing you a positive fire-building experience.
With gratitude,

The Fire-Building Team:

Kai Romhardt, Brother Pháp Lưu, Minh-Châu Lê, Chris Phạm

The OI Charter and Council Team:

Anh Hương, Sister Chân Đức, Shantum Seth, Mitchell Ratner,
Kai Romhardt, Brother Pháp Lưu

Photos of fire-building sessions:

Bonfire and circle in India courtesy of Shantum Seth;

Lake Merritt in Oakland, CA, US courtesy of Minh-Châu (Adrienne) Lê;

Hanoi, Vietnam courtesy of Xóm Trăng - Moon Hamlet;

Casa Sumapaz, Colombia courtesy of Maíra Fernandes de Melo;

Thai Plum Village, Bangkok, Thailand courtesy of Wake Up Thailand



Not a Choice, a Current: A Homecoming to Deer Park



One of our newest Dharma teachers, Meena Srinivasan, shares her journey of practice that has led to moving into a lay community and helping to found the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing.

MOVING TO SIMPLICITY HAMLET

The air in Simplicity Hamlet feels softer, as if carrying a quiet blessing. From our back windows I see the foothills cradling Deer Park Monastery, afternoon light shimmering all around. Solidity Hamlet is home to the brothers, Clarity Hamlet to the sisters, and now our family has arrived in Simplicity Hamlet, a lay community forming in the monastery's embrace under the gentle, steady leadership of Thầy Pháp Dung and Thầy Pháp Lưu.

We haven't come here to run from anything; we've come to move closer to what matters most. This moment—boxes still unopened, my seven-year-old son's soccer ball skimming across the dirt backyard (soil I already imagine becoming a meditation garden beside a little play field for children), the kitchen filling with birdsong—feels like a threshold. A space between the life we've known and the one we're cocreating: a village where children, parents, and monastics live in rhythm with the land, nourished by practice, presence, and belonging.

As the mother of a young boy, Kailash, I feel the rare gift of raising him in a place where compassionate, mindful masculinity is alive in daily life. In a world that often asks boys to harden, he's surrounded by monks who embody another way, strength grounded in gentleness, leadership rooted in listening, and care held with equanimity. The men of Deer Park model a solidity that has nothing to do with domination, and everything to do with presence, playfulness, and joy.

As a tenderness researcher, I see how culture trains boys to armor up. Here, we're writing a different story: tenderness as the truest strength, compassion as real courage. I return often to an insight attributed to Ilya Prigogine: *When a complex system is far from equilibrium, small islands of coherence in a sea of chaos can shift the whole to a higher order.* Deer Park, with monastics and lay friends tending gardens and hearts with equal care, is such an island. In this field, our family is learning that gentleness and strength belong together, seeds that can travel outward into a culture longing for balance.

AN INTUITIVE MOVE

This threshold didn't appear overnight. In 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, my husband, Chihiro, and I moved from the San Francisco Bay Area to San Diego with our two-year-old, not for a job, but because of a quiet, insistent intuition. It felt like stepping into the dark with trust as our lamp. Senior Dharma teachers Peggy Ward and her husband Larry, now a beloved ancestor, were in San Diego then; their presence helped us say yes.

We didn't fully know why we were being guided south, only that the felt sense was unmistakable. Looking back, it's clear the universe had plans wiser than our own. That intuitive move became part of a karmic unfolding: we would become the first family to live in Simplicity Hamlet, and our son will

be among the first students at the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing. It is a story of taking refuge in the mahasangha and discovering that when we step toward community, community steps toward us.

NOT A SCHOOL WITH A MISSION, BUT A MISSION WITH A SCHOOL

Our move is intertwined with the birth of the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing, a K–8 learning village opening in August 2026, just across from Happy Farm at the entrance to Deer Park Monastery, nestled in Escondido's "Great Hidden Mountain." The seed was planted decades ago and germinated anew as Thầy Pháp Dung and Thầy Pháp Lưu invited a small circle of educators to radically imagine a school not as a program, but as a living expression of mindful education and interbeing.

This school isn't separate from Deer Park; it is the monastery's heart shaped for children. Learning moves with the land and seasons, in relationship with monastics who anchor our Plum Village practice, within a community that cultivates wisdom and compassion as living relationships with people, place, and all beings. Its touchstone is The Five Mindfulness Trainings, a shared ethical root orienting us toward reverence for life, true happiness, loving speech and deep listening, mindful consumption, and collective flourishing.

For me, the school feels like the flowering of a path that began twenty-one years ago in Oakland, when I first touched the Plum Village tradition as a young teacher attending an educators' sangha led by Dharma teacher Lyn Fine.

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FIRST SEEDS: TEACHING AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

I grew up the daughter of Indian immigrants, my childhood shaped by both Hindu ritual and the quiet urgency of the immigrant dream. As an adult I was given a glimpse of something beyond myself: the thin film of separation dissolved, and the world shimmered with aliveness.

At the time, my path seemed set: I had a position at ABC News and professional experiences at Reuters, NBC, UNESCO, and the Woodrow Wilson Center behind me. Yet the glimpse of the ultimate dimension called me elsewhere. I deferred my start date at ABC and accepted a teaching position in São Paulo, Brazil. There, Parker Palmer's words in *The Courage to Teach*, "we teach who we are," struck me deeply. I began to see teaching as a way to align my inner life with my outer work and to keep touching that wholeness I had briefly glimpsed.

While pursuing graduate studies in education at UC Berkeley, I studied with a spiritual teacher who often spoke of Thích Nhất Hạnh as one of the only living enlightened masters. Then came the call to move to India, less a choice than a current carrying me forward. My parents were bewildered; they had left India, but I was choosing to return. Yet something in me knew this move was karmic. At my interview for a position at the American Embassy School in New Delhi, I spoke of teaching as a sacred task; the superintendent mentioned an educators' sangha founded by Dharma teacher Shantum Seth.

Soon after arriving in India, the ground kept preparing itself. I was blessed to study with Professor Ramchandra Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and student of Ramana Maharshi; his quiet gaze carried the stillness of the sky. "Your breath is your best friend," he told me. "It is always with you, the last to leave you. You cannot breathe in the future or the past, only now." Then I met

Satish Kumar, who modeled sacred activism and simplicity. These encounters prepared the ground for the moment I met Thầy and the mahasangha at Gandhi Darshan.

To step into Thầy's presence was to be washed over by boundless love. When he invited Shantum to sing one of my beloved *bhajans*, it felt like a blessing weaving my Hindu bhakti roots with Plum Village Zen. At an educators' retreat in Dehradun, I took refuge in The Five Mindfulness Trainings and received the Dharma name Pure Confidence of the Heart. Soon after, under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, I touched the magnitude of my vow to dedicate my life to this path.

In the years that followed, I shared mindfulness with children and educators across South Asia. In 2010, I was ordained into the Order of Interbeing in Delhi, receiving the name True Seal of Peace.

In 2011, my mother became gravely ill and needed a double lung transplant. I returned to the US, practicing seeing my breath as her breath, each in-breath a quiet offering for her healing. She survived, a walking miracle of medicine, and I emerged with a deeper intimacy with impermanence.

Back in Oakland, I taught at Park Day School where Mindful Schools was founded. What I shared with students became my first book, *Teach, Breathe, Learn*.

Even as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) transformed classrooms, I saw how often leaders, those carrying the heaviest burdens, were running on empty. That realization became the seed for Transformative Educational Leadership (TEL), a fellowship where diverse leaders integrate mindfulness, SEL, and equity. TEL lives the truth that transformation begins within but must ripple outward into Beloved Community.

THE LAMP BEFORE THE MOVE: A COMMUNITY LIGHT

Just months before our move to Deer Park, I returned to Plum Village. Sixteen years earlier I had come as a young educator, learning to bridge inner life and outer work. This time I returned older, tenderized by life—a mother, a wife, a daughter caring for aging parents, and a leader in heavy times.

I was invited to receive the Lamp Transmission, a sacred ceremony honoring commitment to mindfulness, service, and transformation. During the ceremony I received a transmission gatha, and one line in particular, a nod to Gandhi's teachings, pierced straight through: "Your everyday life becomes your message." As I received the

Lamp Transmission, a radiant beam of light poured through the stained glass Buddha above Thầy Pháp Dung and me, and the small oil lamp I received burned for over thirty hours before quietly dimming. A teaching: tend, release, begin again.

Afterward I wept surrenderful tears of gratitude as I prostrated before Thầy's picture. I've never really made big decisions; they've made me. India called me at twenty-six. Now, at forty-five, Deer Park is calling with the same clarity. There is no deliberation, only surrender.



MEETINGS THAT MADE THE PATH VISIBLE

Over several months, and many cups of tea, in early 2025, Chihiro and I sat with Thầy Pháp Dung and Thầy Pháp Lưu to make our family's move concrete: listening for their vision of Simplicity Hamlet and reflecting on how we might serve the sangha. I wrote after one of our many meetings, "Dearest Brothers, there are no words to express what I feel." I thanked them for seeing me—my spirit, gifts, and challenges—with such tenderness, and I shared our longing to live differently: not inside the isolating grind of nuclear-family striving, but inside a village shaped by practice.

In one meeting, tears came, not from fear, but recognition. I said I knew this move was also about my own evolution and the polishing of my practice and path as a lay leader in the mahasangha. I confessed the quiet question that sometimes visits me: *Am I worthy of this?* Thầy Pháp Dung smiled and, with so much love, shut that story down: *You are worthy by nature of who you are. Come back to the wisdom of your ancestors. Don't get caught in the American paradigm of feeling you need to prove your worth.* Ground returned beneath my feet along with a deep sense of belonging.

Together we named our family's role as an anchor family for Simplicity Hamlet, here to do whatever is necessary to help the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing manifest and to midwife a healthy lay community of families and children in harmony with the monastic rhythm. In my Hindu ancestral tradition, there is a word for how we hold this: *seva*, selfless service given from the heart, measured not by logged hours but by love and presence. Underneath is another word I cherish: *svadharma*, one's sacred calling. My mentor Linda Lantieri's teaching echoes here: "Talents are things others can do. Gifts are assignments from the universe. If you don't say yes, they may not happen in the world."

When our family offered a firm yes,

something in the field shifted. Momentum gathered like a tide, as if the school project had been waiting for a family to jump in with both feet. In any beginning, someone often has to go first, not for credit, but to spark the catalyst energy that helps the unseen organize into form.

A SUMMER OF CONTRAST: WHY DEEP COMMUNITY MATTERS

The summer before our move, we joined an overseas program hoping for spaciousness, rest, and reflection as a family, so we could arrive more attuned to the monastery's frequency. The people were warm and sincerely aiming to give their children a cross-cultural experience. The cohort leaned largely US-based tech founders, thoughtful parents comparing notes on screen time, networking, and "scaling impact." I noticed I was the only dark-skinned person, and we were the only vegetarian family; seemingly small details, but they revealed the center of gravity. With our son in a Waldorf school (until the School of Interbeing opens) and our family's device values already clear, we realized we'd arrived with a different baseline. No one was unkind; the frequency was simply tuned to a channel our hearts no longer recognized.

The experience became a mirror: while the wider current moved toward "wellness" and "optimization," we longed for deeper waters, conversations about power and privilege, the unseen labor that sustains certain lifestyles, and the Earth that holds it all. What we touched was a friendly togetherness organized around individual families maximizing opportunities, beautiful in many ways, and less oriented toward examining dominant-culture patterns and equity. It's a version of surface community many of us know, carried by a broader current of individualized striving.

What our spirits were craving, and what Deer Park embodies, is deep community:

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not just proximity or affinity, but values alignment held by explicit vows. In our tradition, those vows are The Five (and for many, The Fourteen) Mindfulness Trainings. They aren't rules to perform; they're living commitments that shape how we spend money and time, what we eat and consume, how we speak and listen, how we relate to power, and how we care for the Earth. In deep community, the unspoken questions shift from "Are you worth my time?" or "What can I get from this?" to "How can I be of service?" "What can we steward together?" "Who is missing, and how do we make room?"

ENOUGH, TOGETHER

Sixteen years ago, on my first visit to Plum Village, I bought the only piece of Thây's calligraphy I have: *Samtusta, You have enough*. My friend, psychologist Daniel Cordaro, calls contentment "the knowledge of enough," and Lynne Twist speaks of sufficiency as releasing the drive for more of what we don't need so our energy can serve life. This move, this school, and this community are not about chasing happiness; they're about listening to what is quietly, clearly true, becoming a small

island of coherence together, a sangha for children and adults in a burning world.

I see it already. When I watch Kailash play ping-pong with the monks and basketball with lay friends, I see a boy learning to listen to the land, to people, to himself. I think of monastics whose footsteps serve as mindfulness bells. I think of lay friends choosing this with us, imperfect and practicing, all wanting something deeper than what we left behind.

Community isn't the absence of friction. It's the willingness to be present through the small rubs and big storms, to stay, repair, and recommit. TEL taught me that leaders need communities of practice to sustain courage. Deer Park is teaching me that families do, too. The school reminds me that the seeds of community live in all of us, waiting to be nurtured. And the Lamp keeps whispering that a life's message is written in ordinary hours: the point isn't to shine endlessly, but to tend the flame, noticing when it flares too hot or dims too low, asking for help, and sheltering it so it can keep giving light. In the end, we are the ones we've been waiting for.

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

Photo of Meena and her family by Caroline White

Photo of Meena with other new Dharma teachers by Rob Walsh

Photo of Meena receiving Lamp Transmission courtesy of the Plum Village monastic sangha

Page 60: photo by Samuel Lu



Meena Srinivasan/True Seal of Peace (she/her) is a lay Dharma teacher in the Plum Village tradition of Engaged Buddhism. She serves on the Board of the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation, is a founding Board member of the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing, and is a resident of Simplicity Hamlet at Deer Park Monastery. Meena is the author of *Teach, Breathe, Learn: Mindfulness In and Out of the Classroom* and *SEL Every Day: Integrating Social and Emotional Learning with Instruction in Secondary Classrooms*. Learn more at meenasrinivasan.com.





The Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing is launching a one-million-dollar Planting Seeds campaign to support the school's founding (giving.tnhf.org/page/schoolofinterbeing). Whether you offer \$50, \$500, or more, every gift matters. Money, given to make a difference, does. It is blessed money. Your generosity will help build classrooms that feel like living rooms, gardens that feel like teachers, and a daily schedule that flows like a song we love to keep singing together. It will honor the labor that makes a village possible.

Thank you for walking with us, for believing in slowness, simplicity, and shared belonging, and for holding the truth that we have enough: enough to tend a flame, to be an island of coherence, to begin again. May we keep choosing community and tenderness, letting our lives be our message, and trust that the lamp we carry, lit by many hands, will shine brighter with your support.

Looking with the Eyes of Continuation

**Elli Weisbaum and Như-Mai Nguyễn
share about nurturing the next generation of
Order of Interbeing members and aspirants.**

Even though we were supposed to have our eyes closed, I kept mine open. The sound of the bell was just fading, and a cooling breeze rustled the leaves of the olive tree overhead, offering comfort. I looked around, appreciating the people I was with.

We were a group of eleven Wake Up Order of Interbeing (OI) members from all over North America, along with a few of the young monastics, sitting in a Dharma sharing circle in Solidity Hamlet of Deer Park Monastery. We had just spoken about the joys of the practice, but also shed tears over the burdens of being a minority demographic within sangha spaces (e.g., sexual, racial, or age minority), being a sangha organizer, and the overload of juggling adult responsibilities with sangha building.

From a clearing nearby came the laughter of another Dharma sharing group—our Wake Up OI aspirants—reminding us of the larger energy of young practitioners filling the monastery grounds. Never before had such a diverse group of young adults with shared aspirations to walk the OI path gathered here. It felt like a moment for the Plum Village history books.

–Như-Mai



ENCOUNTERING YOUNG BODHISATTVAS

Originally our Wake Up OI study group started as a small idea, which has now grown beyond anything we ever imagined! The idea started when some practitioners from Wake Up Toronto and the online Chrysanthemum Rainbow Sangha requested OI member Pablo Seto and Dharma Teacher Elli Weisbaum, members of the Wake Up Toronto Sangha and North American Wake Up Care-Taking Council (CTC), for OI mentorship. We have had a few successful online Wake Up OI mentorship groups before, so we decided to try this model out again and combine these two groups of aspirants. When the other members of our CTC heard about our plan, they expressed knowledge of other Wake Up-age, long-term practitioners who were ripe for, and interested in, OI aspirancy/mentorship. From this, we decided to offer a survey to our North American Wake Up listserv to discover who in our community might want to be part of an OI study

group. The response was overwhelming! Over fifty practitioners under forty-five, many of whom were BIPOC and/or queer, responded saying they would like to study with us.

Meeting each one of these incredible *bodhisattvas* who wishes to walk the path of The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings—to study, learn, practice, and play together—has been the deepest gift for our organizing team. Our own *bodhicitta* has been deeply watered. It has also been a beautiful opportunity to connect with our wider intergenerational mahasangha. We are deeply grateful for the monastic and lay Dharma teachers who have supported us all along this journey, giving their guidance. In this article, we humbly present the steps and practical approaches to building a study group, in the hope that this will be of service to our wider sangha as we consider how to expand our trainings and make them accessible and inclusive. In this article, we have aimed to navigate with love and equanimity both the joys of the study group and the challenges



and barriers that young people can face when aspiring to join the OI.

Our deepest aspiration is to collectively continue to nourish our joy and togetherness, and to listen and respond to the needs of our next generation, making these teachings accessible, available, and meaningful. We do this in the spirit of Thầy, who wanted to renew Buddhism and always be in the vanguard—innovating, cultivating, and iterating.

Thank you, Thầy, and thank you, sangha, for your love and trust. We hope we are worthy to receive it.

CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG OI ASPIRANTS

We learned about some key barriers preventing young people from starting their OI aspirancy, including:

- ◆ Not having access to a local sangha to practice with
- ◆ Trouble finding an OI mentor
- ◆ Trouble finding a Dharma teacher
- ◆ Not enough time
- ◆ Not having spiritual friends on the path

◆ Not seeing themselves reflected in already-established members of the OI (e.g., BIPOC, queer, young)

◆ Not feeling “worthy” or “good enough” to belong to the OI

These barriers illustrate some key challenges faced by practitioners under forty-five who wish to learn, study, and practice The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings: juggling early-mid life responsibilities with time to practice (e.g., work and family obligations such as caring for children and elderly parents); monetary limitations that prevent them from taking time off work, traveling, and paying for retreats; and not feeling a sense of belonging in all-age sanghas, which in North America are often predominantly white and older.

GATHERING AT DEER PARK

Brother Pháp Dung, senior monastic Dharma teacher at Deer Park Monastery, has been a mentor and supporter of our study group since its inception. He encouraged us to include an in-person gathering at Deer Park with our mentors and mentees during our study period. This gathering manifested in



May 2025, with forty members of the study group in attendance. The gathering was a beautiful opportunity to cultivate love and understanding, not only amidst our study group members, but also with the monastic and lay community at Deer Park. As a key facet of our study group, we value learning how we can build safe, inclusive bridges between our lay and monastic communities. This includes looking into how we as lay practitioners can show up at a monastic practice center in a way that allows us to take refuge and also is supportive of our monastic siblings, who care for and live full-time in that space. We invited everyone in our study group to be respectful and mindful that Deer Park Monastery is the monastics' home, and that we are guests being graciously hosted. In this spirit, we joined the center's daily working meditation, morning/evening sitting, and walking meditation—while also having our own activities such as Dharma talks with senior monastics and Dharma sharing. We invited the monastics to join our activities if they were interested. Flowing with the center's schedule, as we engaged in our own activities, fostered a sense of mutual respect and care with the monastic community—resulting in many shared

moments of joy, practice, and an invitation/intention to return for another gathering!

REVERENCE FOR PRACTICE, MIXED WITH WAKE UP VIBES!

During our gathering at Deer Park Monastery, we shared the practices typical of an OI retreat: sitting in silence with the rising sun, listening to Dharma talks offered by the monastics, and reflecting on the history of The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and the Order of Interbeing. There was a clear earnestness to practice deeply, honor our tradition, and offer goodness to the world.

And yet, this gathering was also uniquely Wake Up. We howled with the coyotes, baked pizzas with monastic brothers for the sangha, and enjoyed a beach outing on "lazy day." We sang Disney songs with abandon, played volleyball during downtime, and let crayons and construction paper reveal our deepest aspirations. In these moments of play, we touched the lightness of our inner child, reminding one another that joy, too, is a form of practice.

On the final morning, we stood hand in hand beneath the oak grove of Clarity Hamlet. One by one, we offered our collective



aspiration—to transform our personal suffering and the suffering of the world. Nearby, a sign read, “I know you are there and I am very happy.” As we looked into each other’s bright eyes, the truth of those words came alive. Love, support, and a fierce tenderness moved between us, sealing our intention forevermore.

INTERGENERATIONAL NOURISHMENT: SHARING WITH SISTER CHÂN KHÔNG

In June 2025, about a month after our Deer Park gathering, Elli and her husband Rob (OI member, Wake Up facilitator, and study group pod leader) travelled to Plum Village, France, where she helped organize a science retreat with the brothers and sisters in Upper and Lower Hamlets. We printed photos from our Deer Park Wake Up OI study group gathering to share with Sister Chân Không and Sister Chân Đức (Sister Annabel).

A few days after the retreat, Elli and Rob were invited to visit with Sister Chân Không in New Hamlet. They sat with her, along with fellow Wake Uppers Nho (former monastic, current PhD candidate at Harvard University) and Suzzane (OI aspirant, medical student

at University of Oslo Faculty of Medicine, Norway), Sister Định Nghiêm, and Sister Trai Nghiêm, for over forty-five minutes as she slowly and lovingly flipped through the photo album. As Sister Chân Không looked through the photos, a smile bloomed on her face. She gently pointed to each young person, asking to be told their story. Quietly and peacefully Elli and Rob shared about their lives and deep commitment to study and practice The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. They told her about Arvind, an amazing young PhD candidate in artificial intelligence in New York City, New York, and about the sangha house in Los Angeles, California where many young, queer, fabulous practitioners are harmoniously living together. Over and over, Sister Chân Không said how happy she was that all these young people were diligently practicing. She shared that hearing about them made her touch the impact of her life’s work. Toward the end of the visit, she asked if the organizers would bring all of the young ones to come play with her. We have planted the seeds for our study group mentors and mentees to attend the sixtieth anniversary of the Order of Interbeing in Plum Village in June 2026. What a beautiful, inter-generational family gathering that will be!

As I reflect on this precious moment with Sister Chân Không, I feel both the joy and tears that filled me. Sitting with our beloved eldest sister, along with Sister Dien Nghiêm, Rob, and two other beloved Wake Uppers, Nho Anh Nguyen and Suzzane from Wake Up Netherlands, I felt Thầy's presence and also missed him dearly.

—Elli

REQUEST FOR SUPPORT, GRATITUDE, LOVE, AND TRUST

One of the challenges of being a Wake Up member is that we are not always taken seriously for our capacity to practice deeply. At times, older sangha members have questioned whether we truly hold the sangha's best interests at heart—perhaps because of our youth, our fewer years of practice, or our tendency to creatively challenge familiar

ways of doing things. This caution comes from a desire to protect the sangha, and it is completely understandable.

We hope that the greater community can come to know our generation and learn to trust us, just as Thầy placed his trust in the young ones. The very first members of the Order of Interbeing were in their early twenties, and Thầy entrusted them to challenge the status quo and carry the light of the Dharma in the midst of the war in Vietnam. In some ways, while we find ourselves with different kinds of crisis and war today—we are still at our core faced with addressing hatred, anger, ignorance, and fear.

We humbly wish to recognize that we are in the initial phase of exploring what it means to mentor young aspirants at this moment in space and time—with its own unique challenges/suffering, new technologies, and ways of seeing and looking at the world. Our deep aspiration is to walk the OI path, continuing to look with openness, to transform our own



suffering and misperceptions, to listen deeply and be responsive to the next generation's suffering and aspirations, to learn, to (un)learn, and to grow together as one cell in our mahasangha body so we can be of service to ourselves and to the world—including our ancestral, blood, spiritual, and land communities.

One of the most beautiful manifestations of organizing this study group has been experiencing precious moments of connection across generations of practitioners in our lineage. It is a true happiness and a gift to touch the love, support, and care of everyone flowing in this river of the Plum Village tradition. To the Dharma teachers, Wake Up OI members and aspirants, the wider mahasangha of monastic and lay practitioners: we know you are all there, and this makes us so happy.

Please support us in carrying this flame forward so that it may continue to bring understanding, compassion, and healing to all beings in the world.

With love and trust,

Elli Weisbaum and Như-Mai Nguyễn

Written with the support and sangha eyes of Pablo Seto (he/him), Logan Mitchel (they/them), Elle King (she/her), Rob Walsh (he/him), and Nho Anh Tran (she/her).

With thanks to all our OI study group mentors, mentees, and Dharma teachers—lay and monastic—who have shown up and supported us across this Wake OI Study Group adventure thus far.

And an additional shout-out to our amazing siblings organizing the next International Wake Up OI study group, which launched in Fall 2025, with ninety respondents to the initial invitation survey!

We are so grateful for the mutual support, love, and trust we are cultivating globally to continue to walk this path together.

For an expanded version of this article, including a table of Wake Up OI study group's approach to mentoring and a syllabus, visit mindfulnessbell.org

Photo of oak grove sign by Như-Mai Nguyễn

Photo of Sister Chân Không and Wake Up friends courtesy of the Plum Village monastic sangha

All other photos courtesy of Rob Walsh Media

Wake Up is an active global community, an initiative started by Thích Nhất Hạnh and the monastics of Plum Village, of young mindfulness practitioners (in their twenties and thirties) who practice in the tradition of Plum Village. We come together to practice mindfulness in order to take care of ourselves, nourish happiness, and contribute to building a healthier and more compassionate society. For more information visit: wkup.org

Như-Mai Nguyễn/True Garden of Practice (Chân Hành Uyển) (she/her) (pictured with Aaron Solomon) was introduced to the Plum Village tradition in 2009 and has since co-organized Wake Up Austin, completed a year-long residency at Blue Cliff Monastery, and served as digital coordinator for the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation, and is a contributing artist to the Plum Village App. Currently, Như-Mai works as a licensed clinical social worker providing psychotherapy to students at Rice University, and she also supports her local all-ages sangha.



Elli Weisbaum/True Blue Stream (Chân Bích Lưu), PhD (she/her) attended her first retreat with Thầy just after her tenth birthday. Since 2015, she has served on the North American Wake Up Care-Taking Council. In 2025, she received the Lamp Transmission and became a Dharma teacher. She is based at the University of Toronto as an Assistant Professor in the Buddhism, Psychology, and Mental Health Program, with a joint appointment to the Department of Psychiatry in the Temerty Faculty of Medicine. She is cross-appointed to the Dalla Lana School of Public Health in their Institute of Health Policy, Management, and Evaluation.





Bridging Generations, Living the Dharma

**Minh-Châu Lê shares how her ancestral heritage
is woven into her work as a historian and her journey
as a member of the Order of Interbeing.**

What does it mean to be the Order of Interbeing in 2026? I believe it means being willing to evolve while staying rooted in timeless principles. It means creating sanghas that welcome people of all backgrounds while honoring the depth of Buddhist tradition.

I learned to read Vietnamese as a child by sitting next to my mother and following along as she chanted sutras in the evenings. We would sit on the floor of our altar room with a book open in front of us, surrounded by dancing shadows and the smell of incense, under the gaze of smiling Buddhas and stern-faced portraits of grandparents I had never met. I didn't know it then, but those evenings were my first steps toward mindfulness practice and the Order of Interbeing.

My ancestral heritage entered my life through Buddhism. In my childhood, the small yet vibrant Vietnamese temple community in Raleigh, North Carolina, US was like my extended family, with whom I spent every Sunday and celebrated every Vietnamese holiday. In the summers, as a teen, I would fly off to Deer Park Monastery in southern California where I would work, play, study, and meditate with monks and nuns who shared my heritage. These communities taught me how to embrace the things that made me different; they showed me true happiness and helped me to understand my place and purpose in the world.

I am among the first generation of my family to be born in the United States after my parents' uprooting from Vietnam. As the daughter of war refugees, my very existence

is made possible by fraught histories of violence and oppression—and also by the miracle of survival, resettlement, and new beginnings. The more I consider the turbulent history that brought my family—and this practice—to US soil, the more I appreciate how miraculous it is that I am here, continuing this spiritual tradition on the opposite side of the planet. For me, the practice has always been a channel through which I can connect with my ancestors, drawing on their centuries of experience and wisdom as I find my way through life.

I felt the full weight of this ancestral connection on the day I was ordained into the Order of Interbeing in the fall of 2017. After the early morning ceremony at Blue Cliff Monastery, I was given a brown jacket—hand-sewn by an elder OI auntie—along with little gifts from Dharma teachers expressing their love and support: a white seashell shaped like a heart, a bead bracelet made of pink stones, and a small notebook with an image of the Buddha. We walked in meditation together through the forest, enjoying the fresh autumn air. Walking on that path, holding my parents' hands on either side of me, I felt more connected to the universe than ever before. Looking at the ferns covering the forest floor, I thought, *These ferns are my*

ancestors, and tears of happiness welled up in my eyes. Now, every time I see a fern plant, I feel the echoes of that precious moment and I smile to my ancestors.

My aspiration in this life is to be a healing connection between the past and the future. I see myself as a bridge between countless past generations of Buddhists rooted in Vietnam, and countless future generations of spiritual seekers taking root in other parts of the world. As a historian specializing in modern Buddhism and the Vietnam War, my work is to research and hold what has come before us, and to write about it in a way that helps us heal. I want my telling of history to deepen our understanding of ourselves and our connection to the wider world.

This calling to serve as a bridge between history and possibility is inspired by Buddhist practitioners of earlier generations who have carried the Dharma through times of upheaval. Our spiritual ancestors held onto the Dharma as they found their way through colonialism, war, and the building of a new nation. They resisted the division and violence that dominated society, running toward the places where people suffered most and offering aid and compassion without regard to political affiliation. As one Buddhist social worker wrote from the field in 1972, their calling was simply “to be with human beings facing this huge war machine.” That presence in itself was a radical act of defiance; it was the living Dharma. It was in this spirit that Thầy founded the Order of Interbeing in 1966, creating a formal structure for practitioners to embody these values in community.

As I reflect on the sixtieth anniversary of the Order of Interbeing, I see both continuity and transformation. Thầy founded the Order during the Vietnam War with fourteen trainings that called for practitioners to engage with the suffering of their time while maintaining deep spiritual roots. Sixty years later, we face different challenges, but the same fundamental call remains: to be present

with suffering and to respond with wisdom and compassion.

The Order has grown from a small group of young Vietnamese social workers to a global community spanning continents and cultures. Despite our diverse backgrounds, we are united by our commitment to The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and our aspiration to create a more compassionate world. Some of us, as I do, carry the practice through our ancestral heritage; others have found it while seeking relief or meaning in life. What does it mean to be the Order of Interbeing in 2026? I believe it means being willing to evolve while staying rooted in timeless principles. It means creating sanghas that welcome people of all backgrounds while honoring the depth of Buddhist tradition. It means using both ancient practices and modern means to address today’s challenges. Most importantly, it means embodying the teaching that we are here not just for our own liberation, but for the liberation of all beings.

As we look toward the future, my hope is that the Order of Interbeing will continue to be what it has always been: a community that demonstrates another way of being in the world. In a time of unprecedented global challenges, we have the opportunity—and responsibility—to show that cultivating wisdom, compassion, joy, and interconnection is not just a beautiful ideal but also a practical response to the crises of our time. May we be ancestors that future generations will be grateful for, carrying the Dharma with the same courage and dedication as those who came before us.

Photos courtesy of the Plum Village monastic sangha

Photo on pages 74-75 courtesy of the Plum Village monastic sangha



Adrienne Minh-Châu Lê/True Manifestation of Goodness (she/her) is a writer and historian based in San Francisco, California, US. Her original research focuses on twentieth century Vietnamese Buddhism and social movements during the Vietnam War, including efforts that gave rise to the Order of Interbeing and the Plum Village community. Her scholarship has appeared in publications including the Cambridge History of the Vietnam War and the Journal of Vietnamese Studies. Learn more and follow her work at adriennemle.com.









Heart on Fire

Order of Interbeing member Stephen Pradarelli shares how a weekend retreat launched his OI journey.

People embark on the Buddhist path for many reasons: the desire to learn practices to calm the monkey mind, inspiration from a book, curiosity about Eastern wisdom traditions.

Heartbreak led me to the trailhead a decade ago, and I took my first tentative steps on the path at an autumn retreat in the Driftless region of Wisconsin, US.

I was still mourning the end of a long-term relationship two years earlier and feeling

considerable tenderness around challenges my son was navigating at the time. I had read a few books by Thầy, but I needed more—something *embodied*. The retreat, organized by the Snowflower Sangha of Madison on the edge of Governor Dodge State Park, seemed promising.

Driving up the winding road to Bethel Horizons retreat center, I encountered my first Dharma talk in the form of hundreds of

acres of sprawling woodland, rolling hills, and sandstone bluffs. The late afternoon sun ignited the sourwood, sugar maples, and ginkgo, their canopies a shimmer of crimson, apricot, and saffron.

"To live in the present moment is a miracle," Thầy writes in *Touching Peace: Practicing the Art of Mindful Living*. "The miracle is to walk on the green Earth in the present moment, to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now."

Walking into the main building to register and get my room assignment, I was self-conscious and shy. As a newcomer, I knew virtually nothing about the practices and protocols of Buddhism in general and the Plum Village tradition specifically. What if I got something wrong—didn't bow at the right times, didn't sit properly, didn't know where to look or where to place my hands in meditation?

But I was immediately put at ease by how casual, welcoming, and familiar everyone seemed to me. The other retreatants—Midwesterners like myself—reminded me of aunts, uncles, and cousins back in Milwaukee where I grew up: plain-dressed (there were *lots* of blue jeans and flannel shirts), soft-spoken, sincere to a fault.

Whatever I pictured Buddhism to look like, this wasn't it. This looked more like the crowd at a Catholic church potluck, which made me feel entirely at home.

After a light snack and some social time, we gathered for orientation in the large room that would serve as our zendo for the weekend. It had a vaulted timber ceiling, vintage 1970s macrame art, and large windows that looked out onto forested hills, now dark as plums against the night sky.

The retreat was co-taught by lay Dharma teachers Jack Lawlor, a Chicago attorney from a family of firefighters, and Cheri Maples. Cheri was a diminutive woman with a close-shaved head and monastic demeanor who, I was surprised to learn later, was a police officer in Madison.

Jack, in a brown fleece jacket and brown pants, shared his thoughts on the weekend's topic, "Social Engagement, Transformation and Healing." He spoke about Thầy's development of Engaged Buddhism and said that in the Mahayana tradition, of which Plum Village is a part, meditation and mindfulness practices aren't solely for our own benefit, but are for the benefit of all beings.

Whatever we gain from our time in meditation, that's only the beginning of a committed practice; the next step is to take our mindfulness out into the world to help ease the suffering of others. Simply by walking mindfully, speaking thoughtfully, and listening deeply, we can heal the people around us.

Then Jack said that those who were interested in receiving The Five Mindfulness Trainings that weekend should come forward after the welcome session. I had only a vague understanding of the precepts, but I was among the first in line after most everyone else stood and headed to bed in noble silence.

"You need to write a letter to Cheri and me expressing your aspiration to receive the trainings," Jack instructed our small group. "On Sunday, we'll have a short ceremony and present you with a booklet and a Dharma named based on that aspiration."

I didn't keep a copy of the letter, but I remember writing about my longtime wish to live a life of integration and integrity. Growing up the eldest son in an alcoholic single-parent home, I'd learned how to be a chimera, always adapting who I was to suit the ever-shifting circumstances of home life. This meant knowing to be quiet and invisible when things became volatile, or funny and irreverent when my mother was "happy drunk" so I could garner rare positive attention from her.

As a result, it's taken me years to figure out who Stephen actually is apart from my performances and longing for approval. After the failure of my own long marriage—the only

intact family life I'd experienced up to that point—I questioned everything: who I was, how I was living my life, what came next.

There wasn't a road map for where I found myself at that moment. All I knew was that I wanted to be a good person, certainly, but also a *true* person: to know, embrace, and weave fully together all my messy and beautiful parts. I wanted writer Walt Whitman's courage to embrace all my contradictions. ("I am large," Whitman writes, "I contain multitudes.")

Buddhism, as I was learning that weekend, is a big tent, both as a philosophy and as a community. People are still people, with all their wild inconsistencies and quirks. But during our sunrise sits, or walking meditation to a bluff overlooking a quilted rainbow valley, or Dharma sharing, I noticed something: what really matters is showing up.

If you can be fully present to each moment, everything else will take care of itself. "There is only one moment for you to be alive, and that is the present moment," Thầy said in a *Lion's Roar* article in 2021. "Go back to the present moment and live this moment deeply, and you'll be free."

At the ceremony Sunday morning, I received The Five Mindfulness Trainings and my little booklet with the Dharma name Deep Integration of the Source. A sense of being deeply seen, heard, and known washed over me for the first time in my life.

I left the retreat nearly levitating in my car on the drive back to Iowa City, Iowa, fired up with the zeal of the newly converted. I wanted to keep the momentum of this transformative weekend going. Within weeks, I started Winding Path Sangha in Iowa City, hoping to share the "good news" of mindfulness with whoever came to the small room I'd reserved at the public library: three people the first week, eleven the next, and to my astonishment twenty-five soon after.

I signed up for more retreats, including the next summer retreat at Plum Village

Monastery. I bought lots of books. And just four months after the Wisconsin retreat, I emailed Cheri asking how I might join the Order of Interbeing.

In my hunger for the Dharma, I was falling into the trap of thinking more was necessarily better (the notions of grasping and aversion were still too subtle for my baby Buddha brain to grasp).

Cheri was kind but clear in her response. "I think if you read the entire application carefully, you will see that you are not eligible yet to become a member of the Order of Interbeing," she wrote back. "It requires practicing for a couple years after receiving The Five Mindfulness Trainings. It's important not to be in too much of a hurry and I think you should practice for a while before deciding."

I took a breath. I was disappointed but also grateful for the invitation to slow down and savor the journey. A year later, I submitted my OI aspirancy application, and Jack agreed to serve as my mentor.

"Mindfulness has helped me recognize the importance of living a life that permeates the boundaries and breaks out of the boxes I had previously used to define different aspects of my life: work, home, community, etc.," I wrote in my OI application. "And it's helped tremendously with past issues around anger and reactivity, calming and cooling and creating space for me to reflect before responding."

This time, as I began the OI journey in earnest, there was no hurrying; in fact, there were times over the next six years when I almost forgot I was an aspirant with an objective. Instead, I just showed up: with my mentor, with my sangha, in my home practice, for myself, and in my relationships.

In 2023, I received The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings at an OI retreat at Magnolia Grove Monastery, along with my OI Dharma name: True Earth of Joy.

First integration, then joy. Both because I took a chance ten years ago and walked into

a retreat with a broken heart and beginner's mind.

"The present moment is filled with joy and happiness," Thầy reminds us in *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in*

Everyday Life. "If you are attentive, you will see it."

Photos of OI ordination at Magnolia Grove in 2023 courtesy of Stephen Pradarelli



Stephen Pradarelli/True Earth of Joy (he/him) is the communications director for the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation and a member of the Order of Interbeing who loves communing with nature, reading, flying, and writing haiku. Stephen founded and co-facilitates the Winding Path Sangha where he lives in Iowa City, Iowa, US.



"I may be found in your way of breathing and walking."

THICH NHAT HANH

As Thich Nhat Hanh's spiritual offspring, we're invited to live a life of compassion and generosity; to commit ourselves to the daily practice of meditation and mindfulness; and to share the Dharma through our words and actions.

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Embodying Mindfulness-Based Resilience

Dharma teacher Jo-ann Rosen guides us through exercises to help us regulate through unrelenting stresses and shares teachings from her engaging book, *Unshakeable: Trauma-Informed Mindfulness for Collective Awakening*

I'd like to begin with the EMBRACE Land Acknowledgment:

In acknowledgment of the land and the land ancestors. I welcome each of us to bring our awareness to the storiedness of the earth under our bodies. May we listen deeply to understand the stories, the causes, and the conditions that got us here.

In reverence and with wholehearted gratitude, we honor the ancestral stream, our known and unknown land ancestors, our spiritual and familial ancestors. May we contemplate the challenges, the gifts, and the responsibilities that have been transmitted to us by all the land ancestors, the spiritual and the familial. May our learnings together on this path grow our ability to be mindfully present, to support our curiosity, and to feel truth so that we may transform what needs to be transformed for a just and equitable future.



I come to you with my own roots, my own biases, my own identities—I identify as a working-class woman with Jewish roots, who has lived rurally for many decades.

I didn't have the ability myself today to do the exercise we're about to explore together—I felt way too dysregulated by an ongoing heat wave, an upcoming election, and the humanitarian crises of Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. I've been having trouble sitting; even in our lovely morning sangha, I can't stand sitting meditation. I feel like I need to be yelling or running or breaking things. Today, I had to stick to very, very simple mindfulness practices: watching my steps; feeling the texture under my feet; going outside and feeling the sun scorching my skin; drinking a whole bunch of water. Those were the kinds of very simple regulating systems for this body.

I haven't been able to adapt to unrelenting

stress and perhaps neither have you; in fact, we don't have a nervous system that deals with unrelenting stress. It takes tens of thousands of years for our hunter-gatherer nervous system to even do a little adapting, so we're walking around with a nervous system meant for a lifestyle that doesn't match with what we're living.

If anything we do together doesn't feel right to you, know that you are in choice—being in choice in and of itself can help regulate your nervous system. If you need to lie down, lie down. If you need to stand and move around, do. If you need to sit still or rock, try it out. You might want to look around and make sure your surroundings are good enough so if you feel like closing your eyes at any point, you'll feel safe.

Our challenge is to figure out how to regulate our nervous system. When our nervous system is dysregulated, we're in automatic

threat mode—our life feels threatened, even when it's not. In this mode, even getting stopped by a red light at the wrong moment can feel life-threatening in our bodies, which respond as if we're in existential danger. And when we're in danger, our brilliantly evolved nervous system immediately tells us to either go really fast, to fight, or to run away. You can feel that urge to fight or run away in your body as your arms and legs get more charged, your heart beats fast, and your breath speeds up.

Where we put our attention becomes our reality, so if we learn how to put our attention on the wholesome, safe islands all around us, we can calm our body and fool our nervous system into thinking everything is fine so we're no longer in a fight-or-flight mode. When that happens, the cognitive, the receptive, the creative, the problem solving, and the interpersonal, social self can come online.

I'm guessing many of you have a concern for the state of our Earth and our human civilization and want to help heal the world. That has certainly been a strong call in my life, but following it hasn't always been an intelligent way for me to show up. When I was in my early thirties, I got smitten with the idea of getting arrested trying to stop nuclear power plants. I have to say, there was a part of me that was truly worried, but there was also a part of me that found it kind of romantic to get arrested and go to jail with a bunch of people. It seemed like we were being very effective, but I also noticed that there was a lot of ego showing up in the variety of leaders—I wouldn't call everything that happened during those days skillful.

I might not want to participate in those activities anymore, even though what drew me to them still feels alive in me, but I notice that when we're all riled up, we don't use our wisdom to create wise action. We're easily manipulated by chaos, by other people yelling or things going too fast, by someone taking over a meeting, and we don't know how to stop when we get nervous. The very first thing

we need to know if we want to be activists is that our action comes from a wise, broad view.

When human beings first roamed the Earth as hunter-gatherers, we were able to hunt our food supply almost to extinction. We were so clever, though, that when our animal food supply began to dwindle, we figured out how to make plants more productive. We were clever in the short run, but we didn't see the big picture of what we were doing. This applies to much of what human beings have done: our shortsightedness helps us survive because we can mobilize to danger very quickly, but it also clouds our ability to see the big picture. When we're dysregulated and highly activated, we're focused very much on whatever that dysregulator is.

So as activists, how do we see a big picture? How do we see the interbeing nature of what we're doing? We must have this cognitive perspective rather than acting out of being all riled up. Our cognitive part allows us to be mindful, to be curious, to see things as they are. We need to know when we're dysregulated and feel that in our bodies. This is challenging because it's so embedded in our lifestyle and culture not to be in touch with our bodies and the subtle and not-so-subtle signals that tell us, "Hey, hold on a minute, you need to settle yourself down." So the first step toward mindfulness and seeing the big picture is to regulate ourselves.

AN EXERCISE TO INHABIT A SENSE OF WELL-BEING

I'd like to pause to take a sip of water, because that helps me regulate. I'd like us to all have an experience of regulation, so you might want to try a drink of water yourself—be present for it; notice what happens before you drink and as you're drinking.

Now we'll explore a mindfulness practice together. Get comfortable; we're going for the optimal balance between alertness

Where we put our attention becomes our reality, so if we learn how to put our attention on the wholesome, safe islands all around us, we can calm our body and fool our nervous system into thinking everything is fine so we're no longer in a fight-or-flight mode.



and relaxation. There's no right or wrong way to do this; we're just going to spend time noticing. We're going for a sense of well-being or good-enoughness: good enough not to be on high alert. You can say hello to your body—you might not have said hello yet today. You might enjoy taking a deep breath. If you feel a little drowsy, you might hold a big breath in; if you feel like you need to regulate down, you might want to focus your attention on a long, slow out-breath. Just notice the impact of the breath on your body.

Just notice, just scan your body for some part that feels good enough, relaxed enough, or maybe even pleasant. It might just be a slight breeze going across your cheek, or it might be that your knee doesn't hurt quite as much as it did this morning. See if you notice a place where you can rest your attention at ease.

When your mind wanders—because that's the nature of the mind, it's always on

alert for safety—just bring it back to curiosity about anywhere inside that's good enough right now. Maybe it's the sensation of weight or solidness where your bottom is being supported, or your feet, or your knees, or your hands. Weight can feel really good. Maybe you can feel your heartbeat in various parts of your body: in your throat, your chest, or even your arms or your fingers. Notice how observing our bodies affects how we feel inside.

If you feel like venturing into a different kind of well-being, bring to mind something that is almost always guaranteed to feel good—it might be the image of a dear one, a place you enjoy, an animal companion, or a piece of music. Well-being comes in so many different shapes and sizes, so bring to mind just one thing that has the quality of well-being without any bittersweetness. Bring it to mind in detail. What sounds might be there? What thoughts? What are the very best parts? Notice your body: is there anywhere

you feel a sense of well-being, even just a little bit, just one breath's worth?

Rising from this sense of remembering, you might consider putting a hand on the part of you that is responding to your images and holding your attention there as you water these seeds of well-being. This strengthens the neural pathway to this particular flavor of well-being; the longer and more frequently you visit this very place inside, the easier it will be to access this sense of well-being to help regulate your nervous system when you need it. Maybe as you do this, you notice a word or a body movement that feels like it encapsulates the feeling, or maybe it's just one little image that helps you remember it. Perhaps taking a deep breath in and knowing that remembering this can remind you to revisit it at another time.

Just as you have savored this experience, so too can you create a lifestyle where you

watch for these moments and slow down enough to savor them when they happen, knowing you can continue to savor them even when that time has passed. Watering wholesome seeds in this way is foundational to our practice of Right Effort.

Take one or two more breaths to accompany a sense of well-being.

OUR IMPACT ON OTHERS

I would encourage you to share your experience doing this exercise with someone, because chances are that when you share your story of well-being, the person who is listening will light up as well. It's important to realize that we are built to mimic each other's emotional states. When somebody in our company is agitated, we can either become agitated ourselves (if we're not aware

**So as activists,
how do we see a
big picture?**

**How do we see the
interbeing nature
of what we're
doing?**



that they are bringing us into their emotional state) or we can do things to self-regulate, which helps them to come into our sense of well-being.

Sister Chân Không has shared her insight that when she was rescuing Vietnamese refugees by boat and could hold a calm presence for them, the whole boat began to co-regulate with her solidity, her calm. This is something you can take into a meeting. When things get stirred up, you can be aware: “Ah, my body is being stirred up.” This is the practice of knowing your body and staying in touch with it so well that when you become dysregulated, you recognize it. We can make a big difference in a meeting—whether we speak or not, how regulated we are will impact others. This is already activism: to be in community, to be at work, to be in a movement, and to be solid, kind, and compassionate.

Each of our states of well-being can be

developed by sitting with them, watching for them, practicing them when we go to sleep, when we wake up, and when we sit on the cushion. *Metta* is bringing up these wholesome states of well-being and sending them out to others. We can do this in our meetings and with our families. Sometimes, we care so much and things around us are so painful, ugly, or disruptive that we can’t handle our feelings.

HANDLING OUR PAIN

After the foundation of watering wholesome seeds and inhabiting a sense of well-being, the next step is handling our pain for our world. We learn to be skillful in bringing up difficulties and wrapping our mindfulness around them. It’s important for us to practice knowing when we are grounded and when we are not, when it is time to begin han-

dling difficult feelings and to put ourselves in difficult situations, and when we have the capacity not to be carried away. This comes and goes. We need to guard our senses so we're not overworked, not overwrought, and then we will have the resilience to take on and work with the right amount of pain.

I liken it to roasting a marshmallow: sometimes, you put the marshmallow on a stick, put it in the fire, and it turns to flame. What you have left is a yucky, black, ashy mess that nobody wants to eat. But if you take the marshmallow, hold it close to the fire so it just begins to brown a little bit, then pull it away, maybe turn it over before reaching it back toward the flames, the marshmallow will melt more gently and become something delicious.

It is the same with difficult feelings: if we notice that there's a difficult feeling arising, we don't have to just focus on the whole thing and become overwhelmed. We can take a little bit of it at a time. We can notice where it affects our body and then pull back if, for example, our heart starts to beat even harder. We don't have to do it all at once. We can take a difficult body sensation, thought, or image in mind and just stay with it with curiosity for long enough to learn something. As soon as we notice we can't maintain that curiosity, we go back to that sense of well-being, whatever it is. We need to practice this when we know we have the capacity not to be carried away.

AN EXERCISE TO BE WITH A CONCERN

Now I want to invite you, if you feel like you have the capacity, to bring to mind something or someone that you have a sense of concern about. Start by remembering the exercise we did a few minutes ago where you had a sense of well-being. Get comfortable and start with a sense of well-being in your body and/or mind.

Allowing your sense of concern to arise

now, tell yourself what you're concerned about. Bring it to mind in much the same way as the sense of well-being: see it in your mind's eye. Bring it to life in as much detail as possible, noticing what you tell yourself and what's happening in your mind and body. Give it some time to become alive.

Notice if something happens in your body when you bring this concern to mind. Just be curious: when you're in touch with your concern, what happens in your body? Then go back to that sense of well-being you played with in the first exercise, and just be curious: maybe nothing happens, or maybe something surprising happens. Then go back to your original sense of concern, again noticing what happens in your body.

Do this in your own rhythm, going back and forth, stretching yourself a little bit to notice what your concern is made of and what it is like to experience it. You might notice anger or fear or grief. Continue to come back to the refuge of your sense of well-being as you increase your ability to be with your concern, to be with your fear, to be with your grief, to really see what it's made of. This is developing fearlessness and courage, little by little, depending upon your own capacity.

Always end by sitting with a sense of well-being: take some cleansing breaths, let out whatever needs to be let out, maybe hug yourself or put a hand on your heart and take two more breaths.

You may choose to take several visits to this difficulty, each time finding that new bits of insight might reveal themselves. Go at the speed of maintaining curiosity.

CREATING WISE ACTION

In order to see clearly and accurately, we need to be able to handle difficult feelings. We need to become intimate with the things we care about. Often we run away, distance ourselves, or jump to action because it's so painful, but none of this actually produces the kinds of

results we hope for. We need to be able to look at a situation and feel fear or sadness or anger in a way that does not carry us away so we do not act impulsively out of fear, anger, or grief. Instead, we will be able to collaborate with each other and share our knowledge in a way that creates wise action.

The first step is being in tune with our body and knowing how to regulate it. The second step is knowing how to handle pain so we can see what it is made of and move toward intelligent action.

Once we're ready for intelligent action, we need to have some guidance—not only collective wisdom, but an ethical compass. In our tradition, we're incredibly blessed to have The Five Mindfulness Trainings and The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings as real guidance for how to incorporate the biggest perspective possible in our actions. We train ourselves to have the insight of interbeing, which means incorporating many, many perspectives. Perhaps we can't get all the perspectives, but we can certainly get more if we can come from a place of curiosity and mindfulness rather than reactivity. Sangha is a living laboratory for how to practice with kindred spirits to get the kinds of skills that we need, and then we

can go out into the world and be in relation to others perhaps who are not on this path but who have similar concerns, similar commitments to the environment, to social justice, and to supporting others. It is important for us to be able to relax, to not be swept away by our difficult feelings, but to be motivated by our caring. Being able to handle our caring in a regulated, mindful way is a gift that, along with the Mindfulness Trainings, will guide us into wise action.

This is an excerpt from "Activism as a Vehicle for Awakening," a Dharma talk given by Jo-Ann Rosen on July 19, 2024. It has been edited for length and clarity. You can view the full talk on Deer Park Monastery's YouTube channel.

Photos courtesy of the Plum Village monastic sangha

Jo-ann Rosen/True River of Understanding (Chân Tuê Hà) (she/her) received the Lamp in 2012, practices with the EMBRACE and Victoria Sanghas, and is a licensed marriage and family therapist. She teaches and lectures internationally, focusing on inner stability and community resiliency. Jo-ann Rosen's writings center on a neuroscience-informed and trauma-sensitive approach to individual practice and collective awakening. She lives with her partner of forty years in the oak woodlands of Northern California, US.

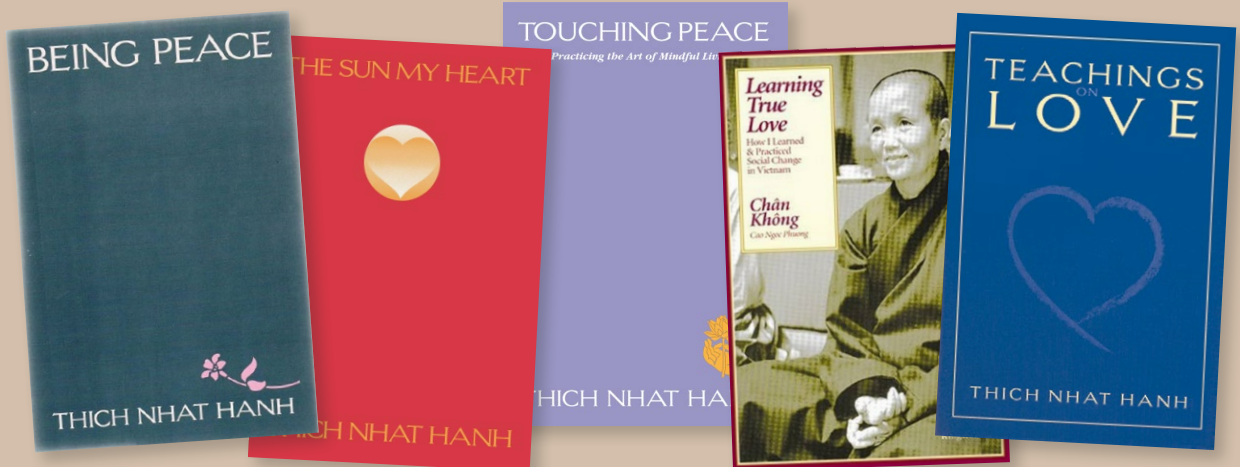


Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of

Parallax Press

This affectionate trip down memory lane by outgoing publisher Hisae Matsuda shares the backstory behind Parallax's publications, celebrating the people who made the books possible and the team of practitioner-publishing professionals guiding the journey of tomorrow.

In 2026, Parallax Press, our community's publishing company, reaches the grand age of forty. Since launching in 1986, a small group of book lovers have brought out four hundred titles on the art of mindful living and Engaged Buddhism. While connected directly to our community of readers through mindfulness practice, Parallax Press has become a stable presence in the American



publishing landscape, with books distributed by Penguin Random House and available in bookstores and libraries worldwide.

In the past four decades, as Thích Nhất Hạnh became one of the most revered and influential spiritual leaders of our time, not surprisingly, his books became bestsellers, estimated to have sold more than four million copies. Thầy's passing in 2022 completed only his physical lifespan; his *bodhisattva* qualities continue to resonate through his teachings and the teachings of his students, some of whom are now authoring books themselves.

Through changing and challenging times, the Parallax family has also grown and transformed. From the beginning, editors at Parallax have been instrumental in producing many of Thầy's bestsellers released by the major international publishers, such as *Peace Is Every Step* and *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, as well as providing books for practitioners with a focus on deep practice and Engaged Buddhism.

PUBLISHING FROM THE HEART

In the early 1990s in London, I picked up a book that would change my life. The cover had a vibrant abstract painting, a splash of color on a white background, and the title was *Being Peace*. Turning to the first page, I read the famous opening words:

Life is filled with suffering, but it is also filled with many wonders, like the blue sky, the sunshine, and the eyes of a baby. To suffer is not enough. We must also be in touch with the wonders of life. They are within us and all around us, everywhere, any time.

I was smitten. In his gentle voice, Thầy had a way of making the world's sorrows recede just enough to allow joy to shine through my melancholic mind. "Do we need to make a special effort to enjoy the beauty of the blue sky?" Thầy asks. At the time, I was finding life quite heavy, a weight to be lifted rather than a joy. Thầy's words illuminated a new way of living. Many years later, after moving to the United States and entering publishing myself, I had lunch with Parallax's founding publisher, Arnie Kotler, who started Parallax over the proverbial kitchen table with his wife, Therese Fitzgerald, and I had the opportunity to thank him for his work. Together, Arnie and Therese shepherded the manuscript of *Being Peace* and more than thirty other books by Thích Nhất Hạnh through the publication process and out into the world, where they would touch the lives of millions of readers, including me.

I also got to know Travis Masch, Arnie's successor, through being neighbors; eventually Rachel Neumann, Parallax's third publisher, invited me to join the Parallax family. Although as a young person I'd taken



a retreat with Thầy, it wasn't until I'd hit middle age and Thầy was no longer actively teaching that I began to practice mindfulness in earnest. At my first work retreat, I met Thầy's monastic students, inspiring teachers in their own right. Until then, I'd largely worked in a way that kept my "inner" spiritual life and my "outer" professional life separate. Coming in contact with people who prioritized mindfulness in daily life like the monastic Dharma teachers of the Plum Village Editorial Team—the sisters and brothers with whom Parallax works most closely—I came to see it was possible to live and work in a more holistic way. Acting from this unbroken wholeness (to borrow our author John Bell's book title) is key to publishing the books that our culture needs to transform and heal.

THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL FLOATING SANGHA

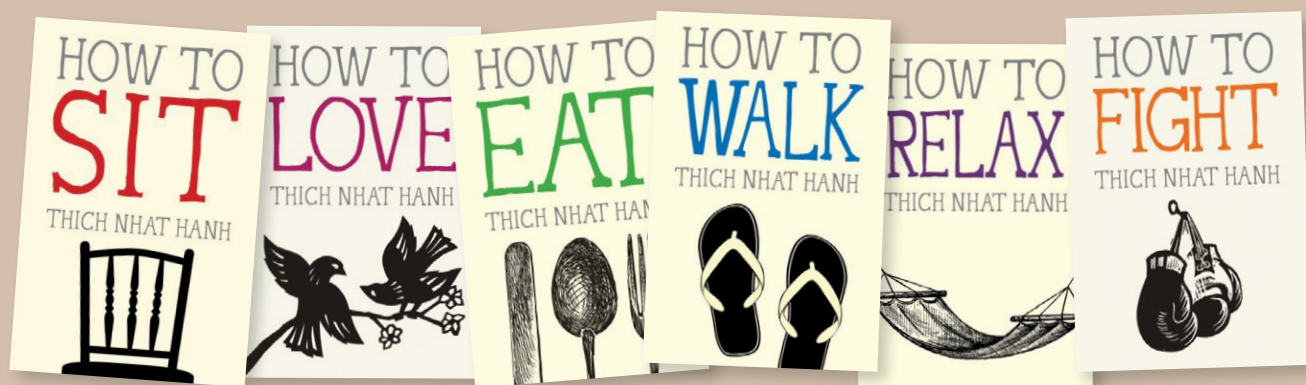
On the origins of Parallax, Arnie writes:

In 1985, I accompanied Thích Nhất Hạnh on his teaching tour across the United States. Sitting in a small room at the Providence Zen Center with about twelve retreatants, Thầy (meaning "teacher," the name his students call him) held my hand tenderly as he spoke, and I felt seen, loved, and appreciated. Here was

the loving father—and mother—I longed for. When he suggested we start a publishing company together, I enthusiastically agreed.

For the next eighteen months, I established Parallax Press's infrastructure while also transcribing tapes of Thích Nhất Hạnh's lectures and editing them into the book Being Peace. When the first 5,000 copies were delivered, it felt like giving birth. I kept the trunk of my car filled with books and felt joy and gratitude as Bookpeople agreed to distribute copies, Black Oak Books put them on a front table, and retreatants in Santa Barbara and other cities where Thích Nhất Hạnh taught purchased copies directly from the publisher. Parallax Press was up and running.

Thích Nhất Hạnh, his senior assistants, and I worked closely together for fourteen years. I edited transcriptions of his talks and translations of his Vietnamese writings, and Parallax published sixty books and tapes, more than half by him. His books sold in the tens of thousands and were translated into nearly thirty languages.... Hundreds of people were now participating in each of his retreats, and thousands were attending his lectures. These dynamic, creative individuals formed what poet Deena Metzger called "the



interdenominational floating sangha." And each summer, people gathered at Plum Village for what felt like an international Dharma festival.... As we worked together creating books and producing retreats and lectures, Thích Nhất Hạnh offered me encouragement and sincere appreciation.¹

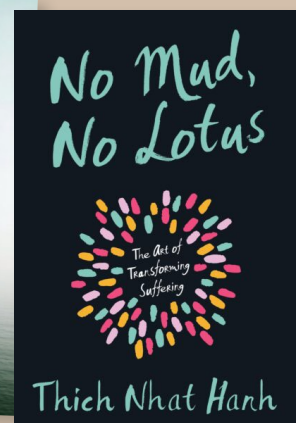
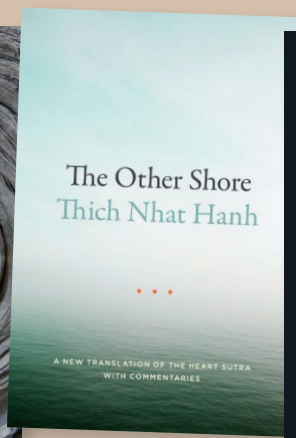
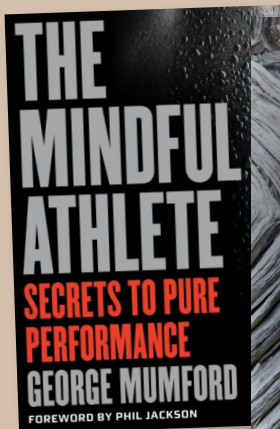


Early days of Plum Village with Thầy, Arnie, and Sister Chan Khong. Photo by Jim Forest, courtesy of plumvillage.org

*

Arnie's successor, Travis Masch, a kindly Order of Interbeing member from Germany, initially joined Parallax to help run the business side of the operation. After six years, the board of directors invited him to serve as the publisher, a position he then held for thirteen years. Prior to stepping into the publisher role myself, I was fortunate to sit down with Travis and ask for his advice about how best to work in a spiritual community. Here's a condensed version of the wisdom he shared:

- ◆ Don't rush. Take the long view.
- ◆ For a mission-driven press like Parallax, it's important for those who work there to be practitioners. Always take the practice into account in your interactions. It is invaluable to rest in practice as a common basis.
- ◆ Hold regular staff retreats at a practice center. Retreats are an opportunity to remind Parallax staff where we're coming from and going to. Try to see yourselves not only as a publishing company but as a sangha so actions can flow from that space.
- ◆ Be a mediator. See the priorities of the community and the business, and try to balance needs. Remember you are there to be of service.
- ◆ When you're upset with someone, light the candle of compassion. Remember, they are struggling. If someone had a certain difficult character trait before entering the practice, this can lead to being unchecked on the playing field of a spiritual community. Remember that community practice is not always enough as a skill set to deal with difficult feelings, and the needed skills to solve interpersonal issues may not be present. You can be sure that if someone is difficult for you, that experience is shared by others.
- ◆ It's good to remember everyone is human and carries their childhood heritage with them.



- ◆ Whether in the monastery or in the world, the energy of intense (egoic) aspiration can't be sustained. There has to be an equal amount of letting go, letting be, gentleness toward self and others, and true maturity.
- ◆ Develop a sense of safety and security within yourself. Be kind. Be compassionate, no matter what, to everyone, including yourself. There are so many resources for spiritual growth—Plum Village is a good practice country!



Thầy with Parallax Press staff in the 2000s. Left to right, back row: Sister Lăng Nghiêm, Sister Hương Nghiêm, Kenley Neufeld, Sister Chân Không. Front row: Sister Pine, Rachel B. Neumann, Thầy, Leslie Schneider, Travis Masch, Heather Harrison, Terri Saul, Terry Barber, Sophie Marchant. Photo by Brother Pháp Nguyễn, courtesy of *Buddhadharma* magazine

The books from Travis' time reflect his interest in mindfulness as a transformative practice for healing relationships and building community.

*

Travis was aided during his tenure by editor Rachel B. Neumann, who would become the dynamic third publisher of Parallax. Prior to being hired at Parallax as Thầy's editor, Rachel had been a fast-talking *Village Voice* journalist in New York. Absorbing the Dharma through reading and editing Thầy's books and in the swirl of life with her family, Rachel specialized in applying mindfulness to everyday situations. As she writes in her humorous memoir, *Not Quite Nirvana: A Skeptic's Journey to Mindfulness*, "Every mindfulness teaching should come with a big warning on it: Try this at home."

One of the things that attracted me to Parallax when Rachel invited me to join was the emphasis on mindfulness practice at work. As Rachel describes in her book, every day at the office begins with a sitting meditation.

When I started working for Thầy, [I] was told that part of the office culture was to sit for fifteen minutes most mornings. Fifteen minutes seemed like an excruciatingly long time to sit still without anything to read, but I was willing to try it. After all, I was pregnant and tired and sitting down with my eyes closed, even if I had to sit up straight while I did it, seemed like it might actually be a nice rest.

For the last ten years, I have begun most workday mornings like this: My



coworkers and I sit in a circle with our eyes closed. We begin the sitting with the ringing of the meditation bell.... One person invites the bell, the rest of us just sit with our eyes closed. We just sit. Sometimes the phone rings. Sometimes someone coughs or shifts. I hear it ... just as it is, a cough or a shift....

The practice of daily sitting continues at Parallax to this day (though it has morphed into a Zoom session as we now work remotely). With the help of senior editor Terry Barber, who had a deep experiential knowledge of Thầy's teachings from having lived in Plum Village centers for ten years, an introductory book on sitting meditation was formed from transcripts of Thầy's teachings. This would become the first book in the best-selling Mindfulness Essentials series, *How to Sit*. Illustrated by Rachel's husband, artist Jason DeAntonis, and designed by book design maestra Debbie Berne, these cute, pocket-sized, beginner-friendly books began a new era of Parallax's publishing program. The books took off and became a familiar sight in bookstores all over America.

FREEDOM AS A PUBLISHING SANGHA

Rachel went on to become an agent, and I became publisher in 2019, paying attention not only to our books but also to how we operate as a company. While Parallax is a small

indie press, it is also part of a vast organism—the international Plum Village community. And in addition to Plum Village folks, many non-practitioners would join the staff just to work in publishing and lend a hand in ways large and small. This retrospective would be incomplete without mentioning the many talented staff, interns, and volunteers who passed through the doors of Parallax, some of whom stayed for years and became practitioners in the process.

During my six years as publisher, I worked with stellar people, first and foremost the Plum Village editorial team, who somehow manage to find the time to help Parallax in the midst of their busy monastic duties: Brother Pháp Dung, Sister Lăng Nghiêm, Brother Pháp Lưu, Brother Pháp Linh, Sister Hiến Nghiêm, Sister Trì Nghiêm, and Sister Trai Nghiêm. Through them, I learned what publishing (and living) from the heart looks like. I'm deeply grateful for board members Jo Confino and Judith Kendra, my mentors and guiding lights, and our entire working board and colleagues at the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation. Thank you for lending me an ear (and sometimes a shoulder to cry on). Our current staff of publishing professionals is composed of sincere Plum Village practitioners, including Order of Interbeing members and aspirants. I would also like to mention former board members Chau Yoder and Kenley Neufeld for their decades of service to Parallax; past staffers Heather



Harrison, a former Lonely Planet sales director, who joined after reading Thầy's book *Anger*, for her willingness to muck in and do whatever was needed to help; and Jacob Surpin, who brought a fresh eye to Parallax and edited with flair and sensitivity.

In particular, I'd like to honor the memory of Dharmacharya Terry Barber (1946–2024), our longest-serving member of staff, who joined in 2005 and eventually became the editorial director of our Palm Leaves imprint of scholarly books. Frequently self-effacing and placing herself in the background, yet undeniably carrying the spirit of the Dharma with her warm heart and discerning mind, she was instrumental in editing all of Thầy's books for Parallax with great patience, love, and dedication. As a publisher and as a practitioner, whenever I'm in a quandary, I think to myself, "What would Terry do?" and in every case, this question helps me choose the better and kinder option.

The past six years, as our global society has struggled with existential threats from the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise of fascism, wars, genocide, the unprecedented number of people without a safe home, and our leaders' failure to respond to the climate crisis underlying it all, our community continues to grow and thrive, and so does our publishing program. Perhaps the need for teachings that help us liberate ourselves from ignorance and suffering is at an all-time high. It's incredibly exciting to see books by the next generation

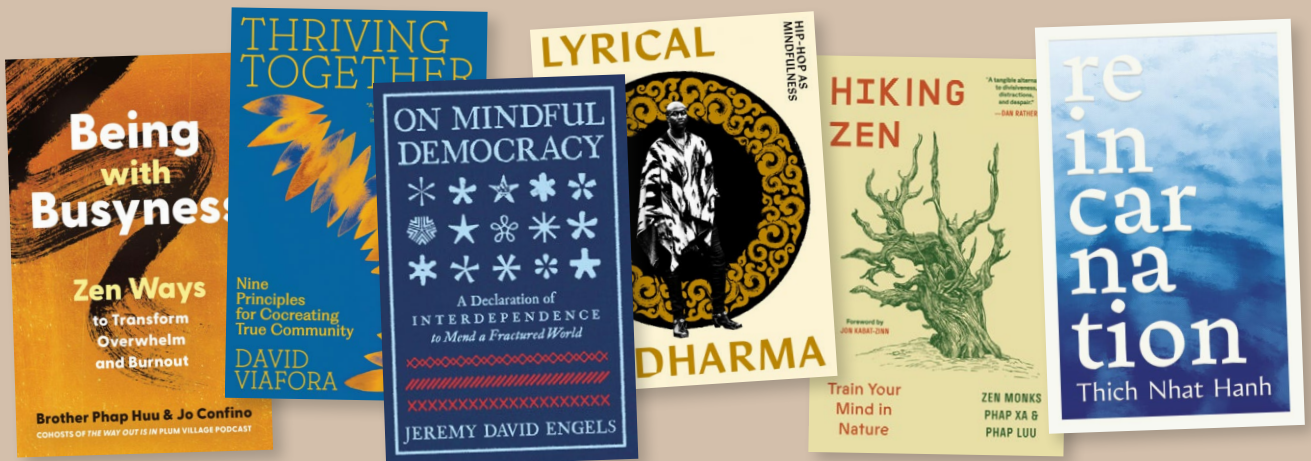


Terry Barber and Hisae Matsuda in 2019 with Sister Chân Đức's memoir, *True Virtue*.

of Dharma teachers who were trained by Thầy—both lay and monastic—take wing and bring transformative insights and practices to readers worldwide, applying the timeless teachings of Buddhism to our very present joys and sorrows.

A NEW ERA: AT HOME IN THE MONASTERY

I'm delighted to introduce our new publisher, Matthew Friberg, to lead Parallax in the next era. Matt ordained in the Order of Interbeing just before joining Parallax Press as our dedicated Plum Village senior editor four years ago, taking the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings with his mentor, Dharma teacher and Parallax author Richard Brady. With a professional background in academic publishing, Matt brings an insightful presence to



the role of publisher. I can't wait to see the beautiful books that will emerge with his guidance and support. In an increasingly polarized landscape for the exchange of ideas, books and reading culture have become a refuge for people wishing to share deep aspirations and nuanced storytelling, those wishing to turn off the domination of the screen and the algorithm, especially among young people of Matt's generation.

As we complete the first quarter of the twenty-first century, we are halfway to the top of the hill of the century that Thay envisioned. Climbing this hill together already brings great joy. As a microcosm of our society, Parallax has collectively gone through so much since we began in 1986, and the times we're living in call for a new way of living and working, centered in our values of peace and collective awakening. During the global pandemic, when the whole world went quiet, we began working from home, and we decided to have a 100 percent remote office. Unlike many other workplaces, we aren't going back to how things were, with punishing commutes and the pressure of fitting life in around one's work. Instead, we're coming full circle and moving forward at once. We'll continue to work from our kitchen tables (or home offices as the case may be) *and* also take refuge in the sangha and build more time together in person. This year, our ruby anniversary, with the monastics' blessing, we plan to build a mobile "tiny office" at Deer Park Monastery

in a hidden valley in the mountains near San Diego, so staff can spend significant time in the community and go deeper into publishing from the heart, with all the opportunities to practice that arise when living in a monastery. For our golden anniversary in 2036, who knows how the view will open up around books and the Dharma? Let's envision it will be even easier for a young person to open the pages of a book and enter the stream.



Parallax staff joyfully together at Blue Cliff Monastery in 2025: Leslie Schneider, Matthew Friberg, Hisae Matsuda, Katie Eberle, Katie Sheehan, Heather Weightman, Elizabeth McKellar, Jacopo Miceli, Tony Lulek, John Matsuoka, Jess Brown

¹ Arnie Kotler, "Letting Go of My Father," *Inquiring Mind*, Spring 2007 Vol 23 No. 2., Sati Center for Buddhist Studies, Redwood City, CA.

Photos on pages 94-95 courtesy of Parallax Press

Photo on page 98-99 by Yan Tie

Born in Japan and raised in London, **Hisae Matsuda/Perfect Absorption of the Heart** (she/her) first encountered Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh on retreat in England in 1993. She joined Parallax in 2016, serving as acquisitions director and publisher and editing books along the way. In 2025 she returned to her original vocation of editing. She is based in the San Francisco Bay Area, California, US; Plum Village, France; and Japan.





With gratitude, Parallax Press celebrates
 sixty years of the Order of Interbeing.
 Happy continuation.



CELEBRATE *with* US
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Rooted in the present, committed to the future

Leaving a legacy gift is easy. Learn how to become a member of the Cedar Society at tnhf.org/legacy-giving or contact us at cedars@tnhf.org and (760) 317-2330.

As a young Dharma teacher in Vietnam, Thay formed a group of 13 students, including the future Sr Chan Khong, 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 is 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.

THICH NHAT HANH FOUNDATION

planting seeds of Compassion

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In Loving Memory of Dharma Teacher Tho Ha Vinh

The Plum Village Community would like to express our deep gratitude and honor the life, teachings, and legacy of our beloved Dharma Teacher Tho Ha Vinh (True Great Understanding) in the wake of his passing on the 26th of September, 2025

Empathy, compassion, kindness, and generosity can become the foundation of a new social and economic order that will, at the same time, be fair to all those living on the earth today and sustainable for the well-being of future generations.

—Tho Ha Vinh, PhD, *A Culture of Happiness*

A LETTER FOR DHARMA TEACHER THO HA VINH

Dear Brother True Great Understanding (Chân Đại Tuệ),

The whole of the Plum Village multifold community is breathing for you and with you. In each breath we feel gratitude for your true commitment to the Applied Buddhism that was handed down to you by our beloved teacher Thầy (Sư Ông Làng Mai).

We know there is no coming and no going and the wonderful work you have done in Bhutan, Vietnam, Europe and other places as a Plum Village Dharma teacher can never be lost. That work is a beacon of light for true happiness in this world of conflict and grief.

We are committed to continuing the work you have started in helping happy teachers to change the world.

We send our condolences to your collaborator and partner, dear Lisi, Sister Chân Đại Kiều (True Great Bridge). We know that she understands that you are much more than your body and she can continue to be with you in all she does.

With deep gratitude and prayers that you continue in the legacy you have transmitted to us.

—Sister Chân Đức for Sister Chân Không
and the Plum Village multifold Sangha

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Dr. Tho Ha Vinh, son of a Vietnamese father and a French mother, met Thầy in the late eighties. He was profoundly touched and inspired by Thầy's teachings and the Plum Village practices and wove them into all aspects of his life, both personally and professionally. He was the program director of the Gross National Happiness Center (GNH) of the country of Bhutan from 2012 to 2018, demonstrating how the principles of happiness can and must apply to individuals, families, communities, and societies in order to produce the conditions for a truly satisfying life. A life-long educator, he was deeply committed to training humanitarian professionals working in war zones and emergency response in areas of conflict around the world. He truly embodied his Dharma name—True Great Understanding—comprehending the reality of interbeing, non-self, and the wisdom of non-discrimination.

Dr. Tho Ha Vinh with his wife, Lisi, Thầy, and Sister Kinh Nghiêm, taken in Lausanne, Switzerland, in the spring of 2000.





Tho Ha Vinh, PhD, a Senior Dharma teacher in the Plum Village Tradition, received the lamp transmission from Thầy in 2001.

Here we share an excerpt from Tho Ha Vinh's 2009 article, "War, Conflict, and Healing" in Issue No. 50 of The Mindfulness Bell, which is still deeply relevant today, as our world faces increased divisiveness and polarization:

MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS

True insight into the nature of suffering, interdependence, and non-self can bring about peace, reconciliation, and healing, but it cannot come from intellectual reasoning alone. It needs to be nourished by life experience, by mindfulness in everyday life, by meditation.

Meditation is not about turning away from reality and dwelling in an illusory inner peace, ignoring the suffering that so many people and other living beings experience day after day.

Meditation is looking deeply into reality as it is, both in us and around us. It is training ourselves not to react immediately with sympathy or antipathy: I like, I dislike, I want, I don't want, I grasp, I reject.

Dr. Ha Vinh Tho (center) with Plum Village monastics offering Thầy's books to the Bhutanese royal family in 2012.



But rather to create an open space, free of judgment, free of notions and preconceived ideas, allowing reality to unfold and reveal itself in our heart and mind. By doing this, insight and compassion arise naturally, effortlessly, for they are the very nature of our deeper being.

If we awaken to the reality of interbeing and non-self, we awaken to the wisdom of non-discrimination. This is the wisdom that can break the barrier of individualism; with this wisdom we see that we are the other person and the other person is ourself. The happiness of the other person is our own happiness, and our own happiness is the happiness of the other people, plants, animals, and even minerals. This is not only true on a personal level; it is also true for communities, countries, religions, and civilizations.

*This remembrance was originally published on the Plum Village website.
Photos courtesy of the Plum Village monastic sangha*

Tributes to Our Beloved Teacher, Dr. Larry Ward

January 30, 1948—August 19, 2025

Breathing together, we offer these loving remembrances from
Dharma teachers Valerie Brown and Kaira Jewel Lingo.

TRIBUTE TO DR. LARRY WARD

Dr. Larry Ward, senior Dharma teacher in the Plum Village tradition, was and remains a light, a beacon for peace, creativity, and solidity in the Plum Village community and beyond. A poet, Buddhist teacher, sangha builder, community leader, educator, activist, and friend to countless people, Larry's creative presence gently reminds us all that love, justice, and compassion never die, that love and light live on.

I met Dr. Ward and his devoted wife Peggy Ward-Rowe about twenty-five years ago at a Plum Village retreat in the United States. Even now, I recall Larry's signature stature, grace, and dignity. He embodied both the Plum Village teachings and his Christian roots as a Baptist minister. Dr. Ward, together with Sister Kaira Jewel, was highly instrumental in organizing and launching the first BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) retreat in North America at Deer Park Monastery, which brought together hundreds of BIPOC practitioners from around the world. That highly successful retreat gave rise to a film on the Colors of Compassion Retreat and a book largely based on the retreat, entitled *Together We Are One: Honoring Our Diversity, Celebrating Our Connection*, written by Thích Nhất Hạnh and published by Parallax Press in 2010. Larry's efforts and commitment to bring the practice of mindfulness in the Plum Village tradition to a broad audience, and especially to historically socially marginalized groups, planted seeds that now flourish with diverse sanghas worldwide.

In 2015, I interviewed Dr. Ward for my book, *The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School*. At the time, Dr. Ward was the Head of Organizational and Business Development at The American School of Bangkok, Thailand, and he was completing his PhD in brain plasticity at

the University of the West in Rosemead, California. This was not an ordinary day and not an ordinary interview. Just outside his office was the sound of explosions and antigovernment protests that had left dozens injured, rocking the country. Despite the violence, Larry remained calm and composed throughout the interview, an anchor in a sea of turmoil and a true embodiment of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and calm, grounded presence under the most chaotic and dangerous circumstances.

Dr. Ward embodied a global perspective as an educator and mindfulness practitioner with Tibetan Buddhists in Hong Kong, Soto Zen Buddhists in the United States, and Chinese Buddhists in Taiwan and China. As an international leader and mindfulness practitioner, Larry spoke eloquently about his mindfulness practice within the Plum Village community, his devotion to his teacher, Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh, celebrating and cherishing awareness of his breath and body, and releasing tension within his body to remain a calm and peaceful presence.

On June 29, 2025, I received an email from Larry with a copy of his new book of poetry, inviting me to write an endorsement. As I read the book, I was





overcome with a stunning sense of joy, wonder, and awe. I realized Larry came home to himself. Through his poetry, he touched an essential and elemental Buddha nature within himself and illuminated that for us to see and feel. His poetry was a transmission.

Recently, I was in conversation with a Taiwanese friend and fellow mindfulness practitioner about the power of listening, and of course I thought about Larry. They mentioned that the Chinese character for listening contains many elements, including those for the ears, eyes, mind, and heart. In other words, we listen not just with the ears to hear but with the mind to reflect and discern, with the eyes to see and focus, a quality of attentiveness, and with the heart to feel. Dr. Ward embodied the essence of true listening to the bounty, beauty, and brutality of life, to the great turning of our lives to transform and to be transformed, to the potential and power of community, to the light within.

I am endlessly grateful to have accompanied Larry on the path of practice and the community of love that is Plum Village. His life continues to shine with clarity and depth of expression with each breath, each step.

—Valerie Brown, Dharma teacher, Plum Village

HOMAGE TO OUR BELOVED ANCESTOR, DR. LARRY WARD

Larry Ward has been a powerful presence of love and care in my life since before I was born. He and my parents worked together in the Ecumenical Institute (later known as the Institute of Cultural Affairs), a global intentional

community dedicated to spiritual renewal and social change. Because the children in our community were cared for collectively, Larry cared for me as a baby. He was among the first Black leaders in both the Ecumenical Institute/ICA and the Plum Village Order of Interbeing, where he was a gifted teacher, bringing wisdom, courage, and compassion to the community.

Larry was both a Baptist minister and a Buddhist Dharma teacher, a combination that for him never posed a conflict. He felt that Jesus and Thích Nhất Hạnh were deeply aligned, and his life reflected the way these two traditions could harmonize. At times, his voice carried the power and fire of the Black Baptist tradition, and at others, the gentleness and clarity of the Buddha's path—blending seamlessly into something uniquely his own.

His Dharma name was True Great Sound, and he was indeed a master of sound. He soothed, uplifted, and gave confidence through his soulful songs; through the way he recited a poem from the depths of his being; and through the way he directed us in his teachings to listen to the sounds of the world—both the suffering and the joy—and to respond wholeheartedly.

When I became a nun, Larry's mentorship and steadfast support were a guiding light. Together, he and I helped bring into being the first POC retreat at Deer Park Monastery in 2004, which is still to date the largest BIPOC retreat ever held in the US, and we continued organizing and teaching these retreats in subsequent years. Larry's Dharma talks were tender, authentic, and transformative, addressing the pain and resilience of people of color. He embodied and encouraged us to "stand up in the house of belonging," as he writes in his poem, "For You."

Larry Ward, Peggy Rowe Ward, and Kaira Jewel Lingo, with participants of the Be Not Afraid Retreat they led together at Omega Institute, summer 2023. Photo courtesy of Rob Walsh Media



We also collaborated with others on creating a new Touching the Earth practice to honor the many racial and ethnic land ancestors in the US. When Thích Nhất Hạnh asked me to edit his teachings from the POC retreats into a book, he requested that I include Larry's and my teachings in it, and *Together We Are One: Honoring Our Diversity, Celebrating Our Connection* came out in 2010.

Larry experienced enormous suffering in his life, but he moved through the world with grace, humor, and lightness. He was deeply grounded in the Dharma, which allowed him to steadfastly engage with both personal and collective shadows. His book *America's Racial Karma* is a luminous and courageous guide on how healing America's racial wounds is inseparable from our collective awakening. Thích Nhất Hạnh's deep love and respect for Larry and his wife Peggy were evident in his invitation to them to live permanently at Deer Park, a rare honor. Larry and Peggy invested their lives in building community and mentoring others wherever they went, and they were beloved as a teaching couple all over the world.

Larry and I had the opportunity to teach together again at Omega in 2023, at the "Be Not Afraid: We Were Made for These Times" retreat. Larry and Peggy's visit to our home in 2023 left us with such wonderful memories of their warmth and presence. That same year, we gathered with Buddhist and Christian practitioners for a communal reading of bell hooks' last unpublished work of poems and prayers at Harvard—an experience of communing with the ancestors and each other in which Larry was a bright and powerful light.

He wrote an incredibly supportive foreword to *Healing Our Way Home*, affirming the three of us Black women co-authors and the importance of our stories. His luminous book of poetry, completed just this summer (2025), moved me deeply, and I was honored to endorse it. His words reveal what he lived: the wisdom, beauty, and compassion he continually shared with the world.

Larry Ward was, as Judi White put it, both a spiritual revolutionary and a spiritual evolutionary, embodying the courage to challenge systems of suffering while also evolving our collective consciousness toward love and liberation. And he loved life while doing this—he savored music, poetry, friendship, dogs, and the joy of connection to the living world.

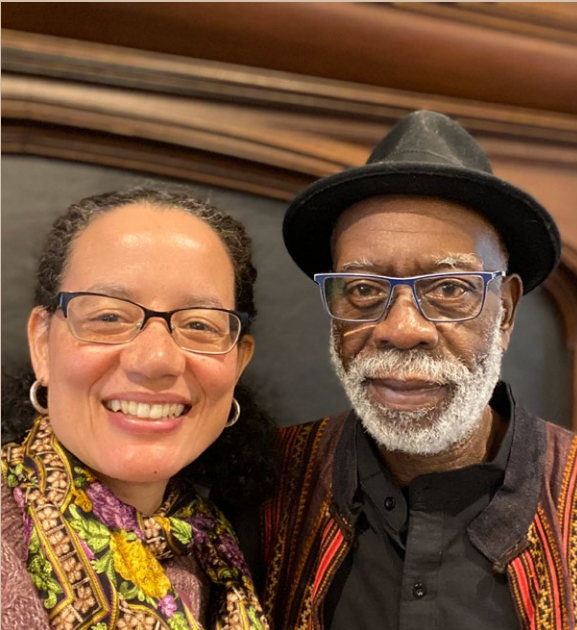
Larry Ward's life was a testament to love, courage, and service. He leaves a luminous legacy of teaching, mentorship, and presence that will continue to guide and inspire. I am so grateful for the gift of his life and feel honored that I had the opportunity to walk alongside him on this beautiful path.

—Kaira Jewel Lingo, Buddhist teacher, Order of Interbeing

Photos of Larry and Larry with Peggy courtesy of The Lotus Institute



Valerie Brown/True Sangha Power (she/her) is a Dharma teacher in the Plum Village tradition, ordained in 2018, and a member of Religious Society of Friends. She transformed her twenty-year, high-pressure career as a lawyer-lobbyist into human-scale, social-equity-centered work, guiding leaders and organizations to foster greater understanding, authenticity, compassion, and trust.



After living as an ordained nun for fifteen years in Thích Nhất Hạnh's monastic community, **Kaira Jewel Lingo** now teaches internationally in the Zen lineage and the Vipassana tradition, as well as in secular mindfulness, at the intersection of racial, climate, and social justice with a focus on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and activists, as well as artists, educators, families, and youth. Kaira is the author of *We Were Made for These Times: Ten Lessons in Moving through Change, Loss and Disruption* and co-author of *Healing Our Way Home: Black Buddhist Teachings on Ancestors, Joy and Liberation*. Her upcoming events and teachings can be found at www.kairajewel.com.

The Crossing

To cross the great water of frozen
perception is the great adventure
of our epoch.

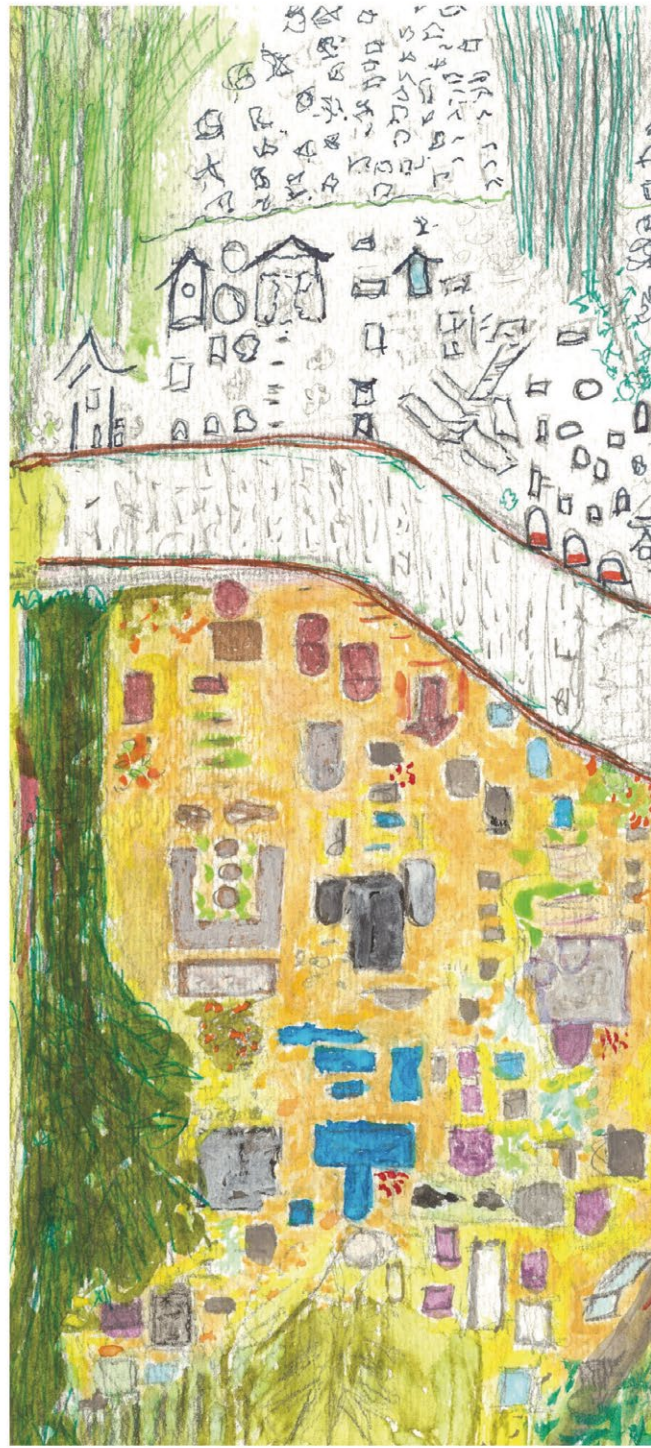
Learning to love is the great path
of all earthlings, bound to
this world of disturbance and light.

Stepping out of the constructs
created by others to be
less than, more than, even equal.

We have been underestimated.
You can feel it in your heart.
We shape ourselves.

We are no longer caught in the net
of shiny things or
rusty ideas of power.

We shape ourselves,
again and again
tasting freedom and radiance.



*From Dr. Ward's recently published
Morning Night: Poems on Spirit, Race,
and Nature. Reprinted with permission
from The Lotus Institute.*

*Artwork by Dr. Larry Ward
Okunoin Cemetery, Mount Koya, Japan,
Mixed Media, 2023*



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.

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.

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

nhaplouu.org

Mountain Spring Monastery, Australia

mountainspringmonastery.org

Asian Institute of Applied Buddhism, Hong Kong

pvfhk.org

Plum Village Thailand

thaip Plum Village Thailand

The Mindfulness Bell

mindfulnessbell.org

Parallax Press

parallax.org

The Plum Village App

plumvillage.app

The Way Out Is In Podcast

plumvillage.org/podcasts/the-way-out-is-in

The Raft

thichnhathanhfoundation.org/the-raft

Thích Nhất Hạnh Dharma Talks

tnhaudio.org

ARISE Sangha

arisesangha.org

Happy Farm

thehappyfarm.org

Earth Holder Community

earthholder.training

Wake Up

wkup.org

Wake Up Schools

wakeupschools.org

Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation

thichnhathanhfoundation.org

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MindfulnessBell.org: Explore new and expanded digital content every week, an archive with over thirty-five years of articles, a worldwide sangha directory, practice resources, and more.

Submissions: We welcome your articles, poetry, photos, and artwork on the fruits of your practice. Articles 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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