Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing
By Thich Nhat Hanh

The Last Walking Meditation
An Account from Bat Nha Monastery

The Ultimate Dimension
By Haven Tobias
A fruitful relationship
June 3–8, 2010 (with German translation)
June 15–19, 2010 (with Dutch translation)

All of us wish to relate well with ourselves, our family, our community and the world. To relate well with ourselves is to be able to recognize, understand and embrace our body and mind. Once we can do this, we can more easily embrace others. These retreats include a program for children 6–12 and for teens 13–17.

A few of the many courses offered at the EIAB in early 2010:

- Training and Mastering Our Mind: Applied Buddhist Psychology taught by Sr. Annabel | March 5–19 (Course 5B in the EIAB Course Catalog)
- My Parents, Myself, My Children, Myself: Healing and Enjoying Parent-Child Relationships with the EIAB Monastics April 1–8 (Course 2F in the EIAB Course Catalog)
- The Buddha’s First Dharma Talk: Facing and Transforming Suffering taught by Br. Phap An | April 9–16 (Course 4D in the EIAB Course Catalog)
- Mindfulness Retreat for Artists with EIAB Monastics April 16–23 (Course 3F in the EIAB Course Catalog)

Visit www.eiab.eu for more information about our upcoming courses taught by both lay and monastic Dharma Teachers, and for our Course Catalog with a full description of all courses.

If in our daily life we can smile, if we can be peaceful and happy, not only we, but everyone will profit from it. This is the most basic kind of peace work.”

Visit plumvillage.org for more information.
## Dharma Talk

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Dear Thay, dear Sangha,

It is with deep gratitude that I write this letter to you. Gratitude for the honor of editing this much-loved magazine; gratitude for every writer, artist, volunteer, and supporter who brought this issue to life; gratitude for your hands holding these pages. I’m indebted to Sister Annabel, the senior editor, for her discerning wisdom; to each prior editor whose mindful steps created a path to follow; and to Janelle Combelic, whose patient assistance was a clear and guiding light.

Our local Sangha, the Heart Sangha in Santa Cruz, California, recently hosted a weekend retreat, led by Dharma Teacher Wendy Johnson and writer Maxine Hong Kingston. One of the themes was “moving from war to gratitude.” Maxine told us about a group of young soldiers who returned from Iraq and Afghanistan and formed a writers’ group. “They had faith that writing would bring them home,” she explained. She showed us a small book of poetry with a rough, scratchy cover, which the veterans had created. They’d cut up and boiled their uniforms and used the remains to make book covers. As a Sangha, they transformed their suffering: their war clothes became book jackets; their pain became poems.

This issue offers powerful stories about the transformation of suffering into love. Heartfelt stories in “Death and Dying” show us how mindfulness, kindness, and Sangha building can nourish us through the uncertain terrain of loss. “Mindful Living” includes stories about transforming busyness and distraction into mindfulness at home and at work.

“Miracle of Sangha” offers stories from the Estes Park, Colorado retreat. This retreat was just one of several in the 2009 U.S. Tour. From Massachusetts to Colorado, and California to New York, practitioners gathered by the thousands, strengthening the collective energy of mindfulness. The Estes Park retreat was unique—the largest retreat ever conducted by monastics without Thay’s physical presence, it demonstrated that each of us is a continuation of our teacher, and that many beautiful flowers can blossom when “over one thousand Thays” practice joyfully together.

“Embracing Vietnam” calls our attention to the young monastics who were forcibly removed from Bat Nha Monastery in September 2009. Dear friends, please do everything you can to support our Vietnamese sisters and brothers. Look at page 18 to find out how to help. And enjoy the essay about Maitreya Fonds, a German organization enriching children’s education in Vietnam.

Thich Nhat Hanh tells us he wouldn’t want to live in a place where there is no suffering, because there would be no compassion. The Mindfulness Trainings encourage us to spend time with beings who are suffering, “so we can understand their situation deeply and help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace, and joy.” May the stories in this issue show us ways to transform war into gratitude, suffering into peace. May they help our hearts to open and to love.

Benevolent Respect of the Heart
Dear Friends,

The Mindfulness Bell is in the process of transformation! A group of monastic and lay practitioners is looking deeply at possible new directions for our beloved publication. This is a work in progress, and there are many possibilities for the future, including a new Internet presence.

To realize the full potential of this transformation of the Mindfulness Bell, we ask for your help.

1. Please consider renewing your subscription to the magazine, or offering it to a fellow practitioner or friend as a gift.

2. Have your local Sangha consider subscribing as a group, and display different issues during regular gatherings.

3. Share about the MB with other Sangha practitioners in your local community.

4. Donate to support the MB transformation.

5. Volunteer to help with the MB transformation as an editor, assignment writer, illustrator, web designer, web programmer, or web administrator. Please contact Brother Phap Dung (phapdung@dpmail.net) if you’re interested in volunteering.

6. Contribute writings, photographs, poetry, drawings, cartoons, etc., about your practice and inspirations. See page 2 for submission guidelines.

Over the long term, our intention is to create a website that will provide greater nourishment and networking for local Sanghas and practitioners all over the world. As we take time to re-vision, the current issue of the MB will not be available in its full form online. Past issues will still be available.

If you are a prisoner or someone working with prisoners, please contact Br. Phap Ho at Deer Park Monastery, 2499 Melru Lane, Escondido CA 92026, for information regarding free subscriptions for prisoners.

Thank you for your practice and for your trust in our community. We hope that your heart continues to grow every day and that the insights you have will bring you happiness and peace.

Thank you,

Brother Phap Dung
Abbot of Deer Park Monastery

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**Retreats 2010**

- **Feb 12 - 15** Têt Week-end Truly at Home
  - celebrating spring, the opening of our heart

- **April 23 - 25** Meditation & Education Lazy Meditating?
  - discover the middle way of effortless effort

- **May 26 - 30** Young Adult Retreat Wake Up!
  - playing with our monkey mind

- **June 16 - 20** Teen Camp Rebel Buddha!
  - discover the true rebel - the warrior, the artist & the dreamer

- **June 30 - July 4** Family Retreat Opening the Family Up
  - take down the fence and let the flowers bloom

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**Deer Park Monastery**

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Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing

Dharma Talk at Stonehill College, Massachusetts

August 16, 2009
Today is the last day of our five-day retreat. We will speak about the sixteen exercises proposed by the Buddha on mindful breathing.

The first four exercises are about practicing with the body. The second set of four are practicing with feelings. The third set of four are practicing with the mind. And the last four are about practicing with the objects of mind.

**Body-Centered Practice**

The first exercise is to identify the in-breath and out-breath. Breathing in, I know this is my in-breath. Breathing out, I know this is my out-breath. To recognize my in-breath as in-breath.

The second is to follow my in-breath all the way through. By doing so, I keep my mindfulness and concentration strong. I preserve my mindfulness and concentration during the whole time of my in-breath and my out-breath.

The third exercise is: Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. This exercise will bring mind and body together. With mind and body together, we are truly established in the here and the now, and we can live our life deeply in each moment.

The fourth exercise is to release tension in our body. These four exercises help the body to be peaceful. They help us to take care of our body.

**Practicing with Feelings**

With the fifth exercise we come to the realm of feelings. We bring in a feeling of joy. We cultivate and recognize joy within us.

With the sixth exercise we bring in happiness. The practitioner knows that mindfulness is a source of happiness. Mindfulness helps us to recognize the many conditions of happiness we already have.

So to bring in a feeling of joy, to bring in a feeling of happiness, is easy. You can do it any time.

There is a little difference between joy and happiness. In joy there is still some excitement. But in happiness you are calmer. In the Buddhist literature there is the image of someone very thirsty walking in the desert, and suddenly he sees an oasis, trees encircling a pond. So he experiences joy. He has not drunk the water yet. He is still thirsty, but he is joyful because he needs only to walk a few more minutes to arrive at the pond. That is joy. There is some excitement and hope in him. And when that traveler comes to the oasis, kneels down and cups his hands, and drinks the water, he feels the happiness of drinking water, quenching his thirst. That is happiness, very fulfilling.

The practitioner should be able to make use of mindfulness, concentration, in order to bring himself or herself a feeling of joy, a feeling of happiness, for his own nourishment and healing. Just with mindful breathing, mindful walking, we can bring in moments of happiness and joy, because the conditions of happiness are already sufficient inside of you and around you.

The seventh exercise is to be aware of painful feelings. When a painful feeling or emotion manifests, the practitioner should be able to be present in order to take care of it. With mindfulness, she will know how to recognize and embrace the pain, the sorrow, to get relief. She can go further with other exercises in order to transform, but now she’s only recognizing and embracing. Recognizing and embracing tenderly the feeling of pain and sorrow can already bring relief.

The eighth exercise is to release the tension, to calm the feeling. So the second set of four exercises is to deal with feelings. The practitioner should know how to recognize her feelings, and know how to embrace and deal with her feelings, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant.

**Nirvana is not a place you can go. Nirvana is not in the future. Nirvana is the nature of reality as it is…. You are in nirvana.**
Discourse on the Full Awareness of Breathing

“O bhikkhus, the full awareness of breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will be rewarding and bring great advantages. It will lead to success in practicing the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. If the method of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness is developed and practiced continuously, it will lead to success in the practice of the Seven Factors of Awakening. The Seven Factors of Awakening, if developed and practiced continuously, will give rise to understanding and liberation of the mind.

“What is the way to develop and practice continuously the method of Full Awareness of Breathing so that the practice will be rewarding and offer great benefit?

“It is like this, bhikkhus; the practitioner goes into the forest or to the foot of a tree, or to any deserted place, sits stably in the lotus position, holding his or her body quite straight, and practices like this: ‘Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.’

1. ‘Breathing in a long breath, I know I am breathing in a long breath. Breathing out a long breath, I know I am breathing out a long breath.

2. ‘Breathing in a short breath, I know I am breathing in a short breath. Breathing out a short breath, I know I am breathing out a short breath.

3. ‘Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.’ He or she practices like this.

4. ‘Breathing in, I calm my whole body. Breathing out, I calm my whole body.’ He or she practices like this.

5. ‘Breathing in, I feel joyful. Breathing out, I feel joyful.’ He or she practices like this.

6. ‘Breathing in, I feel happy. Breathing out, I feel happy.’ He or she practices like this.

7. ‘Breathing in, I am aware of my mental formations. Breathing out, I am aware of my mental formations.’ He or she practices like this.

8. ‘Breathing in, I calm my mental formations. Breathing out, I calm my mental formations.’ He or she practices like this.

9. ‘Breathing in, I am aware of my mind. Breathing out, I am aware of my mind.’ He or she practices like this.

10. ‘Breathing in, I make my mind happy. Breathing out, I make my mind happy.’ He or she practices like this.

Practicing with Other Mental Formations

With the ninth exercise, we come to the other mental formations. Feeling is just one category of mental formations. In Buddhist psychology we speak of fifty-one categories of mental formations. Formation—samskara—is a technical term. This pen [Thay holds up a pen] is a formation, because many conditions have come together in order for it to manifest as a pen. It is a physical formation. My hand is a formation, a physiological formation. My anger is a formation, a mental formation. We have fifty-one categories of mental formations, the good ones and the not-so-good ones.

The ninth exercise is to become aware of any mental formation that has manifested. There is a river of consciousness that’s flowing day and night. Anger, hate, despair, joy, jealousy, compassion, all continue to take turns manifesting. As a practitioner, you are always present so you can recognize them. You don’t need to fight or to grasp; you just recognize them as they arise, as they stay for some time, and as they go away. There is a river of mind in which every mental formation is a drop of water, and you observe the manifestation and the going away of that mental formation. Don’t try to grasp, don’t try to fight. Just calmly recognize them, smile to them, whether they are pleasant ones or unpleasant ones.

The tenth exercise is to gladden the mind, to make the mind glad, to bring vigor to the mind. There are so many good seeds in us, like the seed of mindfulness, the seed of concentration, the seed of insight, the seed of joy, the seed of peace. We should know how to touch the seeds in our store consciousness, and how to invite them to come up. Then the landscape becomes very pleasant.

It’s as if you have some films on DVDs, and many are very uplifting. As a practitioner, you know how to select a movie that will bring joy and happiness. Suppose you are watching a film that contains violence, hate, and fear. You know that it is not good for you to watch, but you don’t have the courage to turn it off, because you feel that if you turn it off, then you will have to confront the fear, the anger, the loneliness inside you. You are using the film to cover up your afflictions.

The Buddha advises us that there are many good DVDs available, and you have to choose good DVDs in order to watch the fine films that are available. The DVDs of Buddhahood, of understanding, compassion, forgiveness, joy, and peace are always there. So to select DVDs that can bring joy, encouragement, strength, aspiration, compassion, is the object of the tenth exercise. We can practice that together. We can help another person to touch the good things in her, so that she will have the energy and strength to succeed in her practice.

The eleventh exercise proposed by the Buddha is to bring the mind into concentration. The Buddha has proposed many topics of concentration for us to use, to concentrate the mind.

The twelfth exercise is to liberate the mind. The mind is tied up, caught by the afflictions of sorrow, of fear, of anger, of discrimination. That is why we need the sword of concentration in order to cut away all these binding forces.

Impermanence: Notion or Insight?

Suppose we speak about the concentration on impermanence. We have a notion of impermanence and we are ready to accept that things are impermanent. You are impermanent, I am impermanent. But that notion of impermanence does not help us, because although you know intellectually that your beloved one is impermanent, you believe she will be here for a
long time, and that she will be always the same. Everything is changing every moment, like a river, and yet you still think of her as she was twenty years ago. If you are unable to touch her in the present moment, you are not in touch with the truth of impermanence.

Using mind consciousness, you need to meditate to touch the true nature of impermanence. You need the concentration, the insight of impermanence rather than the notion of impermanence to liberate you.

The notion of impermanence may be an instrument which can help bring about an insight into impermanence. In the same way, a match is not a flame, but a match can bring about a flame. When you have the flame, it will consume the match. What you need is the flame and not the match. What you need for your liberation is the insight of impermanence and not the notion of impermanence. But in the beginning the notion, the teaching of impermanence can help to bring the insight of impermanence. When the insight of impermanence is there, it burns up the notion of impermanence.

Most of us get caught in notions when we learn Buddhism. We don’t know how to make skillful use of these teachings in order to bring about insight. We have to practice. While sitting, walking, reading, drinking, we are concentrating on the nature of impermanence. That is the only way to touch the insight of impermanence. Concentration means to keep that awareness alive, moment after moment, to maintain it for a long time. Only concentration can bring insight and liberate you.

Suppose you and your husband disagree about something. You are angry and are about to have a fight. Suffering is in you, suffering is in him, and the mind is not free. To free yourselves from anger, you need concentration. Let us try the concentration on impermanence. You close your eyes. “Breathing in, I visualize my beloved one 300 years from now. What will he become in 300 years? What will I become in 300 years?” You can touch the reality of impermanence. “We have a limited time together, and we are wasting it with our anger, with our discrimination. That’s not very intelligent.”

When you visualize both of you 300 years from now, you touch the nature of impermanence and you see how unwise you are to hold on to your anger. It may take only one in-breath or one out-breath to touch the nature of impermanence in you and in him. With that insight of impermanence you are free from your anger. “Breathing in, I know I am still alive and he is still alive.” When you open your eyes, the only thing you want to do is to take him into your arms.

That is liberating with the insight of impermanence. If you are inhabited by the insight of impermanence, you will deal with him or with her very wisely. Whatever you can do to make him happy today, you do it. You don’t wait for tomorrow, because tomorrow may be too late. There are those who cry so much, who beat their chests, who throw themselves on the floor when the other person dies. That is because they remember that when the other person was alive, they did not treat him or her well; and it is the complex of guilt in them that causes them to suffer. They did not have the insight of impermanence.

Impermanence is one concentration. In Buddhism, impermanence is not a doctrine, a theory, a notion. It is an instrument, it is a concentration, a samadhi. The Buddha proposed many concentrations; for example, the concentration on no-self. When the father looks into his son and sees himself in his son, his son is his continuation. His son is not a separate person. So he can see the nature of no-self in him and in his son. He sees that the suffering of his son is his own suffering. When he sees that, he is free from his anger.
Investigating Objects of Mind

In Buddhism the world is considered the object of mind. Our mind, our consciousness, our perception, may be described as having two components: the knower and the knowable. In Buddhism when you write the word “Dharma” with a capital letter, it means the teaching, the law. When you write the word “dharma” with a small letter, it means the object of your mind. The pen is the object of my mind. The flower is the object of my mind. The mountain, the river, the sky are the objects of my mind. They are not objective reality; they are objects of my mind.

The last four exercises investigate the nature of the objects of our mind. Many scientists are still caught in the notion that there is a consciousness in here, and there is an objective world out there. That is the most difficult obstacle for a scientist to overcome.

In Buddhism we call it “double grasping,” when you believe that there is a consciousness inside, trying to reach out, to understand the objective world out there. Buddhism explains that subject and object cannot exist separately, like the left and the right. You cannot imagine the existence of the left without the right.

Consciousness is made of the knower and the knowable. These two manifest at the same time. It’s like up and down, left and right. An object of mind is the business of perception. You perceive something, whether that is a pen, or a flower. The object of perception always manifests at the same time as the subject of perception. To be conscious is always to be conscious of something. To be mindful is to be mindful of something. You cannot be mindful of nothing. To think is to think about something. So the object and the subject manifest at the same time, like the above and the below, the left and the right. If you don’t see it like that, you are still caught in double grasping.

The thirteenth exercise is contemplating impermanence. Impermanence is just one concentration. But if you do it well, you also succeed in the contemplation of no-self, because going deeply into impermanence, we discover no-self. We discover emptiness, we discover interbeing. So impermanence represents all concentrations.

While breathing in, you keep your concentration on impermanence alive. And while breathing out, you keep your concentration on impermanence alive, until you make a breakthrough into the heart of reality. The object of your observation may be a cloud, a pebble, a flower, a person you love, a person you hate, it may be your self, it may be your pain, your sorrow. Anything can serve as the object of our meditation.

Contemplating Non-Desire

The fourteenth exercise is contemplating non-desire, non-craving. It has to do with manas, that level of our consciousness that always runs toward pleasure. If you look deeply into the object of your craving, you will see it’s not worth running after. Instead, being in the present moment, you can be truly happy and safe with all the conditions of happiness that are already available. Because manas ignores the dangers of pleasure-seeking, this exercise is to help manas to enlighten, to see that pleasure-seeking is dangerous and you risk damaging your body and your mind. If you know how to be in the present moment, happiness can be obtained right away.

No Birth, No Death

The fifteenth exercise is contemplating nirvana. This is real concentration. This concentration can help us touch the deep wisdom, the nature of reality that will be able to liberate us from fear and anger and despair.

In Buddhism the word nirvana means extinction. Nirvana is not a place you can go. Nirvana is not in the future. Nirvana is the nature of reality as it is. Nirvana is available in the here and the now. You are in nirvana. It’s like a wave arising on the surface of the ocean. A wave is made of water, but sometimes she forgets. A wave is supposed to have a beginning, an end. A coming up, a going down. A wave can be higher or lower than other waves, more beautiful or less beautiful than other waves. And if the wave is caught by these notions—beginning, ending, coming up, going down, more or less beautiful—she will suffer a lot.

But if the wave realizes she is water, she enjoys going up, and she enjoys going down. She enjoys being this wave, and she enjoys being the other wave. No discrimination, no fear at all. And she doesn’t have to go and look for water; she is water in the present moment.

Our true nature is the nature of no beginning, no end, no birth, no death. If we know how to touch our true nature of no birth and no death, there is no fear. There is no anger, there is no despair. Because our true nature is the nature of nirvana. We have been nirvanas from the non-beginning.

The other day we talked to the children about a cloud. We said it’s impossible for a cloud to die, because in our mind, to die means from something you suddenly become nothing. From someone you suddenly become no one. And grief is the outcome of that kind of outlook. It is possible for a cloud to become rain or snow or hail, or river, or tea, or juice. But it is impossible for the cloud to die. The true nature of the cloud is the nature of no death.

So if you have someone close to you who just passed away, be sure to look for her or him in her new manifestation. It’s impossible for her to die. She is continued in many ways, and with the eyes of the Buddha you can recognize him, you can recognize her, around you and inside of you. And you can continue to talk to him, talk to her. “Darling, I know you are still there in your new forms. It’s impossible for you to die.”

The nature of the cloud is also the nature of no birth. To be born, in our mind, means from nothing you suddenly become something. From no one you suddenly become someone. That is why you need a birth certificate. We seem to believe that from non-being we have passed into being. And when we die, from being we pass into non-being again. That is our way of thinking, which is erroneous. Before becoming a cloud, the cloud has been the ocean water, the heat generated from the sun. The cloud has not come from nothing. Her nature is the nature of no birth and no death. So this meditation helps us to remove all notions, including the notions of beginning, ending, being, and non-being.
Suppose I draw a line representing the flow of time, from left to right. And I pick up one point as the point of birth. They say that I was born on that moment, “B”. It means that the segment before “B” is characterized by my non-being. No being. And suddenly from point “B” I begin to be. And I might last, maybe 120 years [laughter], and suddenly I will come to the point “D”. And from being I pass into non-being again. That is the way we think. We think in terms of being and non-being.

To the children we said that before the date of their birth, they already existed in the womb of their mother. They spent about nine months in the womb of their mother. So it’s not true to say that they began to exist on the day of their birth. The birth certificate is not correct. But did you begin to exist at the moment of conception? Before your conception, you already existed at least half in your father and half in your mother. You have not come from nothing, from non-being. You have always been there in one form or another. So your nature is the nature of no birth.

Extinction, nirvana, means the extinction of all notions, including the notion of birth and death, the notion of being and non-being. We remove all views, all notions. That is the job of the fifteenth exercise.

There are theologians who say that God is the ground of being. But if God is the ground of being, who will be the ground of non-being? God transcends both notions of being and non-being. The fifteenth exercise is to remove, to transcend all kinds of notions. True happiness, non-fear, is possible only when all these notions are removed.

Imagine our beautiful wave. She now recognizes that she is water, and knowing that she is water she is no longer afraid of beginning, ending, coming up, going down. She enjoys every moment. She doesn’t have to go and look for water; she is water. Our true nature is the nature of no birth and no death, no being and no non-being.

The sixteenth exercise is to throw away, to release all these notions, and to be completely free.

The Sutra on Mindful Breathing offers sixteen exercises on mindful breathing that cover four areas of life: body, feelings, mind, and objects of mind. We can use the sutra as a manual to practice meditation. Together with the sutra called the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Sutra on Mindful Breathing is very precious. A real gift from the Buddha. In the Plum Village Chanting Book, you can read both the Sutra on Mindful Breathing and the Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, which are common in every school of Buddhism.

Dear friends, as I told the children, the Sangha is always there. It is a joy when you see the Sangha manifesting like this. Please continue with your practice. Please share the practice with your friends and help bring joy and peace and hope to our society. Continue to be a torch. Each of you is a continuation of the Buddha. We should keep the Buddha alive, the Dharma alive, the Sangha alive in every moment of our daily lives.

When you go home, please do your best to set up a group of practitioners in order to have a refuge for many people who live in your area.
Dear Brothers, Sisters, and Friends,

A miracle took place at the One Buddha Is Not Enough retreat in Estes Park, Colorado. Each person at the retreat experienced that he or she was surrounded by Thich Nhat Hanhs (Thays) and that he or she was indeed also Thay. In fact, there were over one thousand Thays practicing deeply and joyfully together. The retreat came to be affectionately known as “One Thay Is Not Enough.”

It all started when Thay was unable to attend the retreat. He was diagnosed with a severe lung infection while conducting a retreat at Stonehill College in Massachusetts, and he was admitted to Massachusetts General Hospital for a two-week course of IV antibiotics. Seven monastic brothers and sisters stayed with Thay; the rest of us, over sixty people, went to the YMCA of the Rockies to prepare for the retreat as it had been planned. It was the largest retreat that the monastics would conduct without Thay’s physical presence.

Even though the retreats on this teaching tour were advertised as led by both Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village Sangha, all of the retreatants expected to be with Thay. The monastic brothers and sisters had several meetings to discuss the best way to support our teacher and our retreatants. The practices of deep listening and loving speech were followed more earnestly than ever. Unified by the urgency of the situation and by our love for Thay and for our lay brothers and sisters, we experienced a profound solidarity. Every person stepped up to take on responsibilities, even those who might have hesitated in other circumstances. We realized that the success of the retreat depended on each one of us contributing our best.

On the night of orientation, all of the monks and nuns arrived early. Without planning it, when we got on the stage, we stood closely together as one unit. Those of us who were present will always remember that moment. The Sangha was invited to listen to three sounds of the bell and touch a spacious and calm place within, so that Thay’s love letter could be received. As it was reported later, many people became immediately alarmed: “Love letter! What?” “Where is Thay? Is he O.K.?“ “Where is Thich Nhat Hanh? Why is he not on stage?”

Brother Phap Khoi read Thay’s letter slowly and clearly. “Boston, August 21, 2009.... My dear friends, I am writing to you from the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. I know the Sangha has manifested today in Estes Park. I miss the Retreat. I miss the beautiful setting of the Retreat. Especially I miss the Sangha, I miss you....”
Tears were streaming down faces. One retreatant later shared that she felt a strong urge to scream at that moment, but everyone was so still, she did not dare to. People said that they felt overwhelmed by disappointment, worry, and grief; but as Noble Silence started immediately after the orientation, no one gave voice to these feelings. Instead, there was an opportunity to listen to one’s unpleasant and painful feelings and to embrace them. Leaving the meditation hall that first evening, everyone walked ever so quietly and attentively.

Many of us had to ask ourselves: did we come to a retreat to see Thay in the same way we would go to a concert to see a rock star? If the rock star did not show up, we would be entitled to a full refund. Then, should we also demand a full refund and leave the retreat, since Thay was not there?

Thay’s absence forced everyone to re-evaluate their intention for the retreat. Thay could not be looked to as the main focus, nor could he be relied on for energy and inspiration. During the next five days, the retreatants came to a decision to invest wholeheartedly in the practice. The monastic and long-term lay practitioners became Thay in the way they walked so stably, in the way they spoke so compassionately, and in the way they thought so gratefully—for Thay, for each other, and for the shared path of practice.

There were over four hundred first-time retreatants, and they, too, practiced deeply. From the early morning first activity to the late evening last activity, all were fully present. Thay was not at the retreat. Yet, Thay was everywhere. All of us experienced Thay’s presence, in ourselves and in one another. This powerful energy of our collective practice enabled everyone to look into their own past experiences with love, loss, expectation, and disappointment. By staying together as a Sangha, we broke through habitual patterns of avoiding and running away from pain. Transformation and healing took place in every person, monastic and lay, long-term practitioner and beginner.

We experienced directly the immense value and strength of the Sangha. We realized that Thay and the teachings will be continued well into the future because we are a Sangha. Wherever we are, as long as we come together as a community of practice, we can generate this powerful energy of peace and healing. The miracle of Sangha manifested because each one of us took the practice to the deepest level, in which we experienced the nature of interbeing with Thay and with one another. No individual talent could have performed this miracle. It was the success of a community of practitioners.

The Be-In on the last night of the retreat was truly a joyful and meaningful feast of the practice. Thay’s second letter was read at the beginning. In response to Thay’s proposal that a retreat in Colorado should be conducted every year, with or without Thay’s physical presence, we all bloomed flowers with our hands.

One teenager said he was very happy that there would be a retreat in 2010, since he could not bear the thought of having to wait for it for two years. Over seventy-three people signed up to help organize the 2010 retreat in Colorado. One person reported that after he left the YMCA, he shared with many friends about his wonderful experience at the retreat. He realized that he was saying to them, “I was at the retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh.” Indeed, we were all at the retreat with Thay in the deepest possible way.

Dear spiritual family, together we can continue our awareness and realization of the miracle of Sangha. Thay has suggested that we write a book about our beautiful experience at the One Buddha Is Not Enough retreat. Please send us your writings and photographs from this retreat. Already we have received many poignant, enlightening letters and articles from both lay and monastic brothers and sisters. Thay has thoroughly enjoyed reading each one of them. For those of us who did not attend the retreat in Estes Park, Thay encourages us to write about our direct encounters with the miracle of Sangha in other places.

May we allow the Dharma and the Sangha to take care of us in our daily lives. May we take good care of the Dharma and the Sangha, so that all beings may receive their wonderful benefits.

Sincerely,

Brothers and Sisters of the Plum Village Sangha

Please send your writings about the YMCA retreat in Estes Park to clarity@dpmail.net, with subject line: Sister Dang Nghiem (or Sister D), re: YMCA (or Miracle of Sangha).
I was so excited to be in the presence of Thay for the first time. I knew that it would be a unique and loving experience. I made a beaded pouch that I was hoping to place in Thay's hands as a gift, in gratitude for all that he had taught me over the years and for opening his heart to all of us.

Like all of us who heard the news, I was saddened and concerned when I heard that Thay was in the hospital. However, fairly quickly, I looked at it as an opportunity to “be in the moment,” as Thay has taught us all to be. It was also a good lesson in not being attached to expectations. I decided that I would give the beaded pouch to one of the monks or nuns to give to Thay. I made a vow to myself that first night that I was going to “be in the moment” every moment during the retreat and experience it all for what it was, however it unfolded.

It was my first retreat, and I had no idea what to expect. What an amazing, wonderful, peaceful and loving journey I had the pleasure of experiencing! This retreat far surpassed anything I could have begun to imagine. It was six of the best days of my life, with the exception of the day I met my soulmate and best friend, who also happens be my husband.

Throughout the retreat, I continued to be amazed at how quiet 900 people could be. When we were all doing sitting meditation together, you could hear a pin drop. I found myself frequently gazing at the altar and the beautiful words, “One Buddha Is Not Enough.” All of us were there to help expand that statement.

We all know how challenging it is to apply the teachings to our daily life, but I am beginning to incorporate them into my work and personal life. One example was a difficult meeting that I had the other day. I work with children with special needs, and this meeting was with parents, their attorney, and the school district team. I was feeling stressed about it in the days prior to the meeting. That morning, I did a sitting meditation and a walking meditation. I practiced mindful walking as I approached the building where the meeting was to be held, and watched my breath.

The meeting started out with some friction, but then it transformed. The facilitator had a very calm demeanor. I focused on watching my breath go in and out. When it was my turn to talk, I realized that I was talking slower than I normally do and was much more thoughtful before speaking than I ever have been before. The magic of the Sangha, Thay’s teachings, and my daily practice all were contributing factors. I felt very good after leaving the meeting, and it has given me renewed hope that I will be able to apply the teachings to my every waking moment...if I just remember to be mindful...and watch my breath.

Mariann Taigman is an occupational therapist who works with children with special needs. She has been following the Buddhist path for the past twenty years.
Boston August 21, 2009

Dear Friends and Co-practitioners,

at the Retreat the Buddha is not enough
Estes Park, Co.

My dear friends,

I am writing to you from the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. I know the Sangha has manifested today in Estes Park. I miss the Retreat. I miss the beautiful setting of the Retreat. Especially I miss the Sangha, I miss you.

I always enjoy sitting with the Sangha, walking with the Sangha, breathing with the Sangha. The joy of being together, sharing the Dharma and the Practice together is always very nourishing and healing.

But I do not suffer, because I know I am taking care of myself. And taking care of myself is to take care of you. The doctors have decided that I should stay 14 days here for the treatment of a lung infection by Pseudomonas aeruginosa. Please do not worry. It is only an infection. But it has to be treated right away. My kidneys, my liver, my heart, my digestive tract all function well. I am given two strong antibiotics, four I. V. injections per day. And the clinicians here are monitoring closely the process of treatment. I am allowed to go out of the hospital to the park nearby one hour per day to do walking meditation.

There are almost 1000 of us now practicing together at the Estes Park Retreat. It must be joyful. I am confident that our many Dharma teachers, lay and monastic, are conducting the Retreat the best way we can. Dear friends,
If you look deeply enough, you will see me in the retreat, walking with you, sitting with you, breathing with you. I feel clearly that I am in you and you are in me. In this retreat, you will witness the talent of the Sangha: you will see that Thầy is already well continued by the Sangha, and the presence of the Sangha carries Thầy’s presence. Please let me walk with your strong feet, breathe with your healthy lungs, and smile with your beautiful smiles.

We had finished a wonderful and joyful retreat at Stone Hill College in the State of Massachusetts before Thầy went to the hospital for a check-up. The doctors said that we should not delay the treatment. So Thầy is doing his best here for you and you are doing your best up there for Thầy. In that way we can still enjoy our true Togetherness. Please enjoy the retreat for me, and bring home a set of the Dharma talks given at the Stone Hill Retreat, especially the last one. I hope to write to you again in a few days before the end of the Retreat. Yours faithfully,

[Signature]
In the Eyes of the Sangha

By Soren Kisiel

As we became used to seeing Thay in each monk and nun, we began to look for him in every one of us.

“Thay...will not be coming to Colorado.” My friend’s words were carefully chosen: neutral, to lessen the blow.

Volunteering at the Order of Interbeing sign-in table, I heard those words before most people. Some of the Dharma teachers had been informed, and I found myself privy to their whispered conversations.

My first thought was for Thay’s health. But once it had been explained to me that he was in good hands and didn’t seem to be in danger, disappointment came to me in such a rush that my head swam. I thought of my wife’s efforts, single-parenting for a week so I could be here, and of the money I’d spent to get here. I would be ordaining in the Order of Interbeing at this retreat. But without Thay? What would that mean? Could one be ordained without Thay?

A line was forming at my registration table. “If you can’t practice non-attachment here,” I whispered to myself, “where can you?” I took a few breaths, found a smile, and continued signing people in.

the morning sun

brightens the mountainsides

whether my heart is light or not

Thay’s letter was read to us, and the monastics forged ahead with the retreat. I decided: this retreat would be all about my practice. My disappointment began to lift. I could make the best of the opportunity by practicing fervently. I was here.

Then something happened. As the monastics began to share with us, in the Dharma talk and private hellos: there was our teacher! There was Thay, right before our eyes! His teaching, his understanding, his gentleness, so carefully transmitted to our monastic brothers and sisters. We were dazzled with how diligently they’d learned, and I was filled with gratitude for their efforts. In return we all sat a little straighter, practiced a little deeper. More people practiced mindful walking after that first Dharma talk than I’d seen at any other retreat.

Within a day or so, as we became used to seeing Thay in each monk and nun, we began to look for him in every one of us. And there he was. In each
person’s eyes, in each smile, in each gentle step. His presence permeated the retreat. Something very precious was taking place. We all felt it. We discussed this in our Dharma groups. Here was interbeing, right before our eyes. Thay and the Sangha were one and the same. We and the Sangha were one and the same. Here was Thay, present with each of us, in each of us.

Suddenly I felt lucky to be at this retreat. The Sangha was crystallizing into a glittering diamond. It was developing confidence in itself, in its strength and ability to support, to carry on. How fortunate to be here for that—to be a part of this magical and precious teaching.

When I shared my feelings with Brother Phap Hai, he joked, “Oh, great. When Thay calls tonight, I’ll tell him you’re glad he’s not here.”

my brother
is listening
I can see myself in his eyes

When I first came to the practice eighteen years ago, I was living on my own in Sri Lanka, and the practice for me became wrapped in a sort of lonely romance. It wasn’t something I wanted to share with others; it was my own pursuit, meaningful, intimate, and private. I practiced alone.

After more than a decade of this style, I found Thay’s teaching, and it turned my practice on its head. Thay stressed Sangha, community, to a degree that I found startling. My mentor for ordainment, Rowan Conrad, tells a story of first arriving at Plum Village in the late 1980s. “You think you are here to see Thay,” he reports Thay saying, “but that is a misperception. You are here to see the Sangha.”

Once that seed was planted, Sangha became key to my practice as well, its support taking me to depths I hadn’t imagined possible, teaching me that compassion was every bit as important as wisdom. My practice began to bloom, but as one blossom in a wide field of flowers.

without a sound
a dewdrop
has fallen into the lake

As my ordination into the Order of Interbeing approached, to my surprise I found myself feeling that Thay’s absence made a sort of sense. I missed Thay that morning, and wished he were there to be a part of it. On my way to the Dharma hall, I sat on a bench to quietly thank Thay for all I was learning. In my heart I sent my ordination to Thay as a get-well gift. But as I took this step into the community, I knew the only individual that had to be there was me. Me, and the Sangha.

“You think you are here to ordain with Thay,” I said to myself, “but that is a misperception. You are here to ordain with the Sangha.”

The Be-In celebration that evening was filled with light and love and joy. We had seen something in one another and in ourselves. The energy of our smiles filled the room to bursting. The bears in the hills, I’m quite certain, could hear our laughter.

dragonflies
dazzled with one another
—late summer in the Rockies

The first time I wore my brown jacket at the retreat, shortly after ordination, a woman stopped me and asked me to instruct her in walking meditation. I was thrilled at the opportunity to share.

After some initial guidance, we walked together. “Picture lotuses blooming in each footstep,” I told her quietly, paraphrasing Thay. “You are leaving a path of lotuses behind you.”

She breathed deeply at the image and smiled, eyes wet. I knew in that moment she saw Thay in me. And, in that moment, I could too. Gratitude flooded through me, deep and strong. And my eyes, too, filled with tears.

Soren Kisiel, True Land of Serenity, was ordained last summer, and is part of the Deer Park DharmaCast team. His home Sanghas are the Open Way and Flowing Mountain Sanghas in Montana.
A Living Thay
By Caleb Lazaro

Words about a sickly Thay were on the lips of most of us during the first two days of retreat. But as our practice deepened, this notion withered away, it slowly left our thoughts, and the reality of a living Thay—within us and among us—began to fill our broken hearts. Whatever peace, love, and compassion the monks and nuns had during these six days, they poured over us selflessly, as if we were their own blood children. And the very experience of this community became Thay’s presence—the spirit of relentless and compassionate love being expressed mutually, mindfully, and unconditionally wherever we turned. To hear about this is not enough. To experience it is to know that the Kingdom of God is truly at hand.

Caleb Lazaro, Selfless Strength of the Heart, is a member of Sun Mountain Sangha in Colorado Springs. He is developing an innovative Christian community called “The Light.”

Present in Thay’s Absence
By Lucy Mail

I am a Buddhist at heart but I’m not a disciplined practitioner. I come to the retreats every year to listen and see our dear Thay. In 2005, when I first heard Thay speak, he broke my heart and then put it back together with his words, compassion, and wisdom. Since then, my practice has been to do what Thay asks of me. I joined a Sangha, I use the skills he taught me to live in harmony with my significant other, I practice compassion with my co-workers and my patients, and during the retreats, I try to move as one with the Sangha. During the YMCA retreat in Colorado, I worried about Thay’s health to the degree that I was almost unable to participate in meditations or Dharma talks without breaking down. I realized at this retreat that everything I have done in my practice has been to please my teacher and not to find my own way. Thay’s absence helped me realize this. I love Thay dearly and want him to be at peace, not experience pain or disease, and be pleased with the progress of the Sangha, to the point that I missed his message. Thay’s teachings are present even in his absence.

Lucy Mail, Gentlest Diligence of the Heart, is a physical therapist on the Texas Gulf Coast. She finds Thay’s teachings to be very powerful when assisting her patients.

The Buddha of the Future
By Trish Nelson

In 2007, in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, Thich Nhat Hanh quoted Master Lin Chi: “Don’t come to me for your enlightenment!” I was a little stunned to hear him say that. You can imagine how I felt at the Colorado retreat two years later when he was not there at all.

Thich Nhat Hanh is made of non-Thich Nhat Hanh elements. This is the teaching of non-self, and we all got to practice it at the Colorado retreat—like a kid who had just lost the training wheels from her bike, and didn’t know if she was going to wipe out or keep flying down the hill. Non-self means a flower could not be without the sunshine, the water, the earth. Likewise, Thich Nhat Hanh could not be without his students, without the practice, without the community that supports the practice, or without the beautiful earth that is always nurturing the practice through her beauty and freshness.

Facing the absence of our teacher, who turned eighty-four in October, helped prepare us for what it will be like when his form passes. We have been told by him, “All forms are impermanent.” Yes, but, don’t leave us! We saw together that although all forms are impermanent, the seed of awakening is in every one of us. And just as we carry our blood ancestors in our DNA, we also carry our spiritual teacher in our heart.

It has been said that the Buddha of the future, Maitreya, is not an individual but a community. If so, it is certainly a community of people practicing to live in the present, transform their own suffering, and help awaken others. It is a community of people who care about each other. Letting their own light shine, and being a light unto themselves, they also make light for the rest of the world.

Trish Nelson, Compassionate Understanding of the Heart, practices with the Santa Cruz Heart Sangha after relocating from Oregon to Northern California.
I came back from the Colorado retreat totally transformed. Before the trip to Colorado I’d read several of Thay’s books but had never been to a retreat or practiced with his Sangha before. Nor had I ever met Thay in person.

To be honest, when I arrived the first evening and realized that Thay was not there, I was very disappointed and felt cheated. I even told one friend that it was as if I had gone to a rock concert but the rock star had bailed out!

I was a night owl, so I couldn’t fall asleep on my first night, and by the time I finally felt sleepy it was time to get up to do walking meditation. It was very difficult for me to keep up with the activities of the first two days. Because of the lack of sleep, I slept through the Dharma talks. And while many of the Sangha members found the food to be quite decent, I didn’t enjoy it during the first two days. I wasn’t used to a vegan diet. Of course I practiced eating meditation, but the more I meditated, the more I thought about the food I enjoyed outside the retreat. I also formed negative perceptions of some Sangha members.

I’m not exactly sure what happened to me in the following days, but gradually I found myself enjoying every moment of the retreat. I think the wonderful songs were a great help. It was very healing to be able to sing and practice with a Sangha of nearly 1,000 people. Everyone was so friendly, focused and happy. It was very comforting to me, especially because I grew up in a different cultural environment and always have felt racial and gender discrimination around me. Toward the end of the retreat I became quite mindful. The food became tastier. Before the retreat I had only known Thay’s works by their titles, but his teachings really sank in during the retreat.

After a few days I began to realize that Thay’s physical absence was a good lesson in itself. It had been so silly of me to compare the retreat to a rock concert! I’d attended the retreat to practice mindfulness, not to look for the rock star! I think because Thay was not there, the members were less attached to his presence and became more focused on the practice itself. I did feel Thay’s spiritual presence, and I missed him very much. But I also want to express my gratitude to the monastic brothers and sisters who tried so hard to make the retreat possible. I could totally see both the Buddha and Thay in all of them! Thank you, Thay, for training our future teachers.

I received the Five Mindfulness Trainings on the last day. I hadn’t planned to do so. But since the day after the retreat was my birthday, and I wanted to celebrate my transformation (rebirth?) and show my commitment to becoming more mindful, I decided to receive them. I also was given a beautiful Dharma name—Wonderful Fragrance of the Heart. I felt peaceful when I left Colorado.

Here are a few of the ways my life has changed since the retreat:

- I had insomnia before, and couldn’t get up until around 10:00 a.m. Now the insomnia has been cured and I wake up at 7:00 every morning.
- I practice walking meditation every day.
- I’ve cut down my meat and seafood consumption by 40%.
- I’ve also decided not to cook meat at home.
- I try not to kill any living beings.
- I can concentrate much better at meetings.
- I’ve practiced “beginning anew” with friends. These friendships are now better than ever. I will continue to listen to them with my heart.
- I used to have an inferiority complex, which had been affecting my life in many ways. Now I am more aware of my mental formations and try not to water my negative seeds. Life is more pleasant and I feel more confident and engaged.
- I’ve become less judgmental of others and have built new relationships!
- I drive more mindfully. I think I’m a safer driver now.
- I’ve witnessed some improvement in my meditation and breathing practices.
- Even though negative emotions still visit me frequently, I’ve learned to be patient and try my best to take care of them.

I was so inspired that I attended a Day of Mindfulness at Deer Park Monastery for the first time and finally met Thay! It was a blessing.

Angelina Chin, Wonderful Fragrance of the Heart, lives in Southern California. She was born and grew up in Hong Kong. She teaches East Asian history at Pomona College.
Support Monastics in Vietnam

By Susan O’Leary, Mitchell Ratner, and Members of the Monastic Community

On September 27, 2009, 379 monastics practicing in the Plum Village tradition were violently evicted from their monastery, Bat Nha, in the central highlands of Vietnam, by a government-organized mob. Emergency calls made to the police were ignored. The monks were forced from their buildings, and made to stand for hours in monsoon rain while the monastery buildings were ransacked. Several dozen were pushed into cars and driven away; the rest were made to march in the rain over fifteen kilometers to Bao Loc, the nearest town. Some nuns were also forced to march in the rain. The remaining nuns took refuge in their dormitories and fled the next morning.

That day, the Venerable Thai Thuan, abbot of the small Phuoc Hue Temple in Bao Loc, courageously offered protective sanctuary. There were no arrests for the beatings or property destruction. Two of the senior monks, Phap Sy and Phap Hoi, were held under house arrest. Police and local authorities in Bao Loc continued to harass the Bat Nha monastics,广播 threatening announcements over city loudspeakers, restricting access to the temple, and searching the temple several times a day. Police from the monastics’ home provinces came to talk with the monks’ and nuns’ parents, and threatened that their families would suffer consequences if the young monks and nuns did not leave Phuoc Hue.

Within Vietnam, there has been an unusually strong response to this assault on the monastics. Hundreds of writers, academics, scientists, and Communist Party members have signed an open letter to the government decrying the attack and calling for an immediate investigation. Nguyen Dac Xuan, a journalist and Communist party member for thirty-six years who witnessed the eviction from Bat Nha, has courageously written a public letter condemning what he saw. Thich Nhat Hanh has been writing to the monastics as a loving parent, encouraging them to continue their deep practice of mindfulness and compassion.

The Bat Nha monastics are requesting the government of Vietnam and authorities in Lam Dong Province to:

- Immediately stop the current campaign of persecution against the community and its supporters in Vietnam, including all attempts to intimidate, harass, defame, disrupt, and forcefully disperse the community and its individual members.
- Officially confirm the Bat Nha monks’ and nuns’ full legal status (guaranteed by the law of Vietnam and international treaties to which Vietnam is party, and already stated in government documents 212/CV/HDTS and 525/TGCP-PG issued in 2006) to practice Buddhism according to the Vietnamese Plum Village tradition, together as a community, in an established location of their own.
- Allow the monks and nuns to live and practice peacefully all together at their temporary location, Phuoc Hue Temple (or another appropriate location the Sangha agrees to), until the current situation is resolved. The two brothers currently under house arrest, Phap Hoi and Phap Sy, should be immediately released; threats to arrest other community members should be withdrawn.

World governments have been responding to the situation. In October the U.S. Embassy made an official visit to Phuoc Hue Temple to express concern. On November 26, the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning the expulsion of the monastics from Bat Nha and urging the Vietnamese government to curb its violations of freedom of expression, religion, and assembly. The United Nations Human Rights Council has recommended sending a United Nations Special Rapporteur to Vietnam to examine the situation.

As we go to press, the situation appears to again be worsening. Signs indicate that the Vietnamese government’s intention is to break up the Bat Nha community, and to force the monks and nuns practicing in the tradition of Plum Village to renounce their vows and leave the monastic life.

How you can help:

1) Practice diligently so as to nourish the energies of equanimity, compassion, and non-duality.


3) Develop and maintain relations with your national government and national representatives, keeping them informed of new developments and suggesting concrete actions they could take. The governments who have expressed concern have done so after being contacted by Sangha members.

4) Contribute to the Help Bat Nha fund, which will be used to support the monastics in Vietnam as well as pay for the operational costs of international support efforts. (Contribute at www.HelpBatNha.org.)

5) Send a message of support to the Bat Nha monks and nuns at: we.are.all.here.for.you@gmail.com.
In September 2009, over 350 monastic disciples of Thich Nhat Hanh were violently expelled from Bat Nha (Prajna) Monastery in Vietnam’s central highlands. They took emergency refuge at Phuoc Hue temple in the nearby town of Bao Loc. Following is an eyewitness account from a young monastic sister from Bat Nha. Further stories, photos, press coverage, petitions, and opportunities to help can be found at www.helpbatnha.org.

On Sunday, September 27, we had the opportunity to do sitting meditation together, and then to do walking meditation around the Garuda Wing Meditation Hall. It was raining heavily that day. My brothers’ and sisters’ robes were soaking wet, but we continued to walk next to each other in peace, love, and understanding. In me, the mind of love and faith reignited brightly.

We never thought that this would be our last walking meditation on this lovely piece of land that was full of life. The atmosphere was still peaceful, and everyone was ready for the next activity, a Day of Mindfulness. For our class, “The Heart of the Buddha’s Teachings,” the topic of the four nutriments was going to be presented, but it had to be cancelled. Perhaps that presentation became the non-verbal Dharma talk, manifesting its insights through our love and profound brotherhood and sisterhood.

At 8:00 a.m., all of us returned to our rooms and sat on our own beds, waiting. I did not know what I was waiting for; I only thought of it as a routine Sunday schedule. Over the last few months, there had been no Sunday when we were not shouted and cursed at. We only knew to sit still and keep our minds calm and receptive.

At 9:00 a.m., we—the sisters in the Mountain Cloud Hamlet—received the news that the brothers’ hamlet, Fragrant Palm Leaf Hamlet, was being attacked. Everything was being destroyed and thrown into the rain. A number of elder and younger brothers were dragged outside and driven away. We were shocked by the news, and we did not believe that it could be true. Soon after that, I saw one elder brother and one young novice running toward Mountain Cloud Hamlet in soaking wet robes. They only had enough time to bring their Sanghatis [monastic ceremonial robes] wrapped on their shoulders.

Victims of Ignorance

At 10:30 a.m., we were allowed to take our food. I was on the cleaning team, so I stayed back to clean up and put things away before I went to eat. As soon as I sat down on the straw mat and picked up my alms bowl, I was told to get my things immediately. All of us put down our alms bowls and went to pack our belongings. We only thought about bringing our Sanghatis, alms bowls, monastic certificates, and identification cards. It would be all right if people came and took the rest of our belongings for their own use. We understood that they were only victims of poverty and constant struggle. They were unfortunate to grow up and live in negative environments, so they were easily “brainwashed” and incited by distorted information.

In fact, these people deserve love as much as we do. We are victims of violence. But they are victims of ignorance and lack of
reflection. Only 70,000 to 100,000 dong [Vietnamese currency] was enough to hire them to do something unwholesome. How pitiful that is! Is that the value of a human being? What about the days and months to follow, when they would suffer from the gnawing of their own conscience? Who would pay them a salary?

At 11:30 a.m., six men walked around our hamlet and knocked on the sisters’ doors, shouting, “The nuns have to leave this place. Do not make us get angry and hurt you. If you don’t leave this place, you will have to suffer the consequences.” All of us sat next to each other quietly. We listened to the sounds of glass windows being broken. People came into every room and herded us outside. They held long iron bars, which were used to hit us if we resisted. One by one, we walked out of our rooms and went out in the front yard. It was raining heavily. Perhaps the sky gods also cried for us.

Not Someone to Love or Hate

When everyone was down in the front yard, we discovered that young sister Cong Nghiem was not with us. She had recently had an accident, so she could not move. We begged the uncles [the attacking men] to allow us to go back and carry her down. All of us were so moved looking at our elder sister carrying our young sister on her back.

The more we looked, the more we also felt sorry for the uncles. There was one uncle about fifty years old, who wore a helmet and walked with a limp. While he was smashing the windows his hand got cut, and it was bleeding severely. We ran to the first aid cabinet, which was completely destroyed. We were lucky to find some cotton balls, gauze, and alcohol to clean and dress his wound. Looking into his eyes, I saw that he was deeply moved; he realized we did not hate him, but instead we took care of him wholeheartedly. During that time, for me, there was not someone to love or someone to hate. I did not think about what they had done to us. There was only this person who needed our help.

After we dressed his wound, he lowered his head to thank us and situated himself quietly in the corner, watching us standing next to each other in the rainstorm. He was not violent anymore. Then I saw him leaving quietly. At that point, all of us were together and safe. No one was stuck inside. We felt so happy to realize that we loved each other, and that we could sacrifice our lives for each other, for our ideals, and for this path of understanding and love.

We Love Vietnam

That morning, about 100 women and men came down to the sisters’ hamlet. Whenever they saw a monk, they would jump in to tear at his clothes and beat him. When we tried to protect our brothers and sisters, we suffered the same fate—they pushed us down; the women used umbrellas and rocks to hit and kick us on our hands and backs. Some of them even slapped our faces. We only knew to endure it or duck. We did not do anything else.

When all of that happened to us, we did not shed one tear or complain. We only felt that our society was full of violence, hatred, and fear. We felt that we needed to protect and guard our
Seeing my sisters sleeping, my heart surged with love. If my sacrifice would bring them peace so that they could live and practice, I would do it.

ideals, bringing understanding and love to humankind. It pains me to see that the Vietnamese nation was loving, gentle, and ethical, and that the four thousand years of history for which Vietnam has been praised is now lost at the hands of Vietnamese people. We love Vietnam. We love the gentle and kind people. We love the humanist culture that our ancestors cultivated. That is why we have chosen this path, to protect and guard the beauty in the Vietnamese people.

The pain, the shame, is too great. The beating and eviction are all right, because as monks and nuns, we have no property to be attached to. It only pains us that the dignity and humanity of our society have been brought to such a low level. I thought to myself: How happy I had felt, reading the history of those before me in the Ly and Tran dynasties! We have the right to raise our heads and feel our national pride. However, our children and future generations, when they recall the events at Bat Nha, will have to lower their heads in shame. Time will erase all the physical traces, but the wounds in the heart, the shame, the hatred, the fear, and the violence will be transmitted. With such a transmission, the ethics of our society cannot help but seriously decline. How sad that would be!

We brothers and sisters speak our own hearts; we cannot plant and spread more of those negative seeds. We have to water this arid, thorny land of the human mind with drops of wholesome nectar, so that we can revive the flowers of understanding, love, inclusiveness, and non-harming. Only because of that, we—who are carrying in our hearts the great love, the great vow—are determined not to allow those unwholesome seeds to develop further in the hearts of our people.

We love the sound of the phrase “my motherland.” We love the Vietnamese people. Even if they accuse us of being traitors, even if they beat us down, we never want “chicks of the same hen” to attack or hurt one another. So, from the moment when we were forced out on the street to stand in the rain, accepting the heckling and the beatings, enduring the dirty water tossed into our faces, we continued to stand next to each other and protect each other. Even though we were cornered, beaten, pushed and pulled, we would not leave each other.

“We Will Never Lose You”

At 5:00 p.m. that day, we were forced outside the gate of Mountain Cloud Hamlet. It was painful for us to see that we could not protect our elder Brothers Phap Hoi and Phap Sy from the violence of the uncles. We watched with deep pain as they were taken away. They tried to shoo us, but we all stood silently in the rain. We were cold and hungry.

Only when it was dark outside did we quietly walk to our sisters’ Warm Hearth Hamlet. We were moved by the way our sisters greeted us and received us. They were able to start two fires so that we could warm ourselves. Then they cooked ramen noodles for us to eat. We all felt a burning in our eyes. Was it from the smoke or from the love for each other?

That night, the Warm Hearth Hamlet was left temporarily in peace. We sat next to each other and looked at each other carefully for a long time. We knew that it would be difficult for us to be united like this again. Even though I was tired, I could not sleep. As soon as I lay down, the image of Thay Phap Hoi and the other brothers being taken away arose in my mind. I was afraid that it would be the last image, and the last time that I was able to see him. If this were true, then we would cherish even more deeply his silent sacrifice. It would further affirm our confidence in our path of practice. “Rest assured, dear elder brother. You are present in us. You have transmitted to us your quietness, your calm, and your solidity in those moments. We will never lose you.”

That night, the rainstorm continued strong. I sat up to look around our room in the “Phuong Vy 2” dormitory. Seeing my sisters sleeping, my heart surged with love. If my sacrifice would bring them peace so that they could live and practice, I would do it. Fear in my heart yielded to a powerful love. Two streams of tears ran down, and down. These were the first tears shed since what happened in Bat Nha. The teardrops came from an unlimited source of love.

At five o’clock the next morning, one by one, we got on the bus to Phuoc Hue temple. I was on the second trip. Looking at my sisters’ faces—so young, innocent, and pure—my heart jolted with a sharp pain. We began to sing Here is Our Beloved Bat Nha. Everyone’s eyes became red and teary. When we got to “Here is our beloved Bat Nha, with those who carry in our hearts the Great Vow, to live together and to build the Pure Land right here…” we could not sing anymore. We just cried. The driver saw us, and he was also moved to tears.

Never before had we cherished so much every moment we were together. To be able to stay together, we were willing to endure any amount of poverty, pain, and suffering. Only five minutes were spent in deep sadness; then we continued to sing our practice songs. We sang and sang until the bus stopped in front of Phuoc Hue temple. From that moment on, our life has moved on to a new page, not any less beautiful or majestic.
For a period that seemed longer than it really was, we were squeezed together in a small bus, rocking along over a pothole-strewn gravel road on the way to a village near the Vietnamese coast. After a wonderful retreat under the guidance of Thay, our much honored and beloved teacher, and a splendid celebration of Vesak 2008, we were eager to learn more about Thay’s native land and her people. We were about to visit a poverty-stricken area where the Maitreya Fonds (Maitreya Funds) supports children’s day care facilities.

Sitting near me on the bus, fellow retreatants asked about the Maitreya Funds. Everybody on the bus was interested in learning more about this aid project. I explained that the Maitreya Fonds was created by the late Karl Schmied in Germany in 1992, in response to the poverty widespread among rural communities in Vietnam. Under the leadership of Christian Kaufl, a small group of dedicated volunteers—all students of Thay—has come together, working hard to raise funds to finance various projects in Vietnam. I promised to provide my fellow retreatants with more information once I returned to Germany.

Kindergarten Is a Privilege

With a sharp jolt our bus came to a stop and retreatants from all over the world poured into the tiny coastal village of Phu An. Children crowded around us, eyes wide with excitement. Sister Chan Khong provided the basic facts about the kindergarten and the dire circumstances of life the parents and their children face.

The kindergarten consists of one room with tables and benches made from roughly hewn boards; a thatched roof provides minimal protection from the scorching sun and constant downpours. There are no extra amenities in this room, nothing that is not absolutely necessary, and yet for the village children it is a privilege to attend the kindergarten. It means that they are not left to their own devices to forage for edibles in the fields while their parents look for work wherever they can find it as hired laborers.

The children formed a circle and, led by their teachers, sang several songs. We returned to the bus, leaving with a mixture of feelings. On one hand, we were happy that the children were able to enjoy some education, care, and love, but on the other hand we were saddened by the magnitude of poverty and need in this country.

When I returned to Germany, I decided to be one of the volunteers working for the Maitreya Fonds, providing help to those so greatly in need in Vietnam—a humble way of showing my deep gratitude to our teacher and our spiritual ancestors. It took almost a year for me to pull together the information for my fellow retreatants on that bus. Assuming most of them will read the Mindfulness Bell, I am summarizing our work for them and any other readers here.

Beginning at a tender age, children learn to abstain from opinionated and bias behavior, replacing anger with love and understanding.
Beginning at a tender age, children learn to abstain from opinionated and biased behavior, replacing anger with love and understanding.
Where Help Is Needed

The Maitreya Fonds is a charitable association registered with the German government. All the work is done by eleven volunteers. Some of them visit the various projects in Vietnam on an annual basis, covering all their travel expenses themselves. Therefore only two percent of raised funds are needed to cover administrative costs, which consist mostly of banking fees for transferring money. On his annual visits to Vietnam, Christian Kaufl meets with social workers who are members of the Thien Hiep (Interbeing) Order, to learn about the progress made with some projects and newly-arisen needs in other areas.

The work of the Maitreya Fonds is possible only through the close cooperation of the volunteers in Germany with Plum Village and the social workers in Vietnam. The Vietnamese social workers understand where the need is most severe and where help is needed and possible, and propose projects for funding to the Maitreya Fonds accordingly. In mutual consultation with the social workers in Vietnam and Plum Village, the Board decides which projects will be funded. The work of the German volunteers consists primarily in raising the necessary money to fund the projects. On average we raise about $420,000 annually.

Our work is firmly grounded in the principles of engaged Buddhism as taught by Thay. Our basic philosophy is to assist people in gaining self-sufficiency. We believe that education and vocational training are the basis for improving one’s life. A severe problem in Vietnam is that teachers and social workers are paid less in rural areas than in urban ones, resulting in widespread teacher migration from the villages to the big urban centers, leaving rural communities destitute of educators. Therefore, a significant portion of Maitreya Fonds money goes to covering the salaries of teachers and social workers so that they may remain in rural areas where they are urgently needed. We also provide vocational training in sewing, carpentry, and computer technology, so that individuals will be able to support themselves and their families.

Another big project consists of providing children with supplementary food while they attend school or kindergarten. In general, parents must pay for the lunches their children get at school, but many parents lack the money. As a result, some children remain unfed while watching their peers eat. The Maitreya Fonds tries to cover this inequity, but sadly, at present we cannot provide adequate food for all the children in the schools and kindergartens we support.

Facilitating children’s education also requires basic physical infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and buildings which are sturdy enough to withstand the regular flooding during the annual rainy season. The Maitreya Fonds offers modern know-how to local builders and craftsmen to ensure that financial aid is spent in the most efficient and sustainable way.

While in general the Vietnamese honor and care for their aged parents and grandparents, there are situations in which elderly people cannot rely on the help and love of younger ones. In addition, lepers, shunned by most as outcasts, cannot look after themselves and are without hope. The Maitreya Fonds provides basic care for these two groups to ensure that these unfortunate people have a decent, humane life.

Without doubt, the material aid is much needed and also highly appreciated. But more precious than the material support is the education of children according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings. In every kindergarten, the children are gently introduced to the practice of mindfulness. Teachers and social workers celebrate a monthly Day of Mindfulness with the children, an occasion of singing and joyful togetherness. Beginning at a tender age, children learn to abstain from opinionated and biased behavior, replacing anger with love and understanding. Thus the ideological rift that has caused so much pain to the people of Vietnam finds no breeding ground among this younger generation. The aid provided by the Maitreya Fonds is based on the practice of mindfulness, love, and understanding, setting it apart from other charitable operations in Vietnam.

Among our first efforts at the Maitreya Fonds was the creation of an informative website in German, which was later translated into English and Vietnamese. All of the vital information is available there (www.maitreya-fonds.de) in all three languages, including past and present budgets and annual reports. The website provides all the necessary details for an easy, secure means, grounded in the Five Mindfulness Trainings, of supporting children and other destitute people in Vietnam. We welcome your support of Plum Village or the Maitreya Fonds, to reduce poverty in the home country of Thich Nhat Hanh.

For more information please contact Maitreya Fonds (www.maitreya-fonds.de).

Eva Neumaier, Peaceful Spring of the Heart, was born in Germany in 1937. She has studied Indian and Tibetan languages and taught in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta.
“Doing the winter retreat while staying at home, why not?”

Thanks to this wonderful idea, the first winter retreat for laypeople at the Maison de l’Inspir was manifested. The Maison de l’Inspir (literally, House of the In-breath) is a small monastery of monks and nuns in the eastern suburb of Paris, which opened its doors in early 2008. Sister Giac Nghiem (Sister Elisabeth) is its abbess.

In November 2008, a proposition was made to the members of the Paris Sangha to commit to a program of regular practice during the three-month winter retreat, linked with the Maison de l’Inspir. In a week, about fifteen people had expressed their wish to participate in this adventure, and thus to deepen their practice during the winter retreat while remaining at home.

A Commitment to Practice

Inspired by the monastics’ winter retreat activities, we committed to the following practices:

Listen to at least one of the two teachings given by Thay each week of the retreat. It was possible to listen to this teaching either on Thursday at the Maison de l’Inspir during the Day of Mindfulness, or at home at any time thanks to the Internet.

Make one or two resolutions.

Write daily in one’s journal.

Share about our practice once a week during meetings at the Maison de l’Inspir with Sister Ton Nghiem (Sister Stephanie). On the occasions when we could not come together in person, sharings were done by email.

Practice a new gatha each week. Gathas are little poems that are recited with daily activities to help us go back to ourselves in mindfulness (see the book Present Moment, Wonderful Moment – Mindfulness Verses for Daily Living).

We practiced the gathas for opening the tap, opening or closing a door, throwing out the garbage, sitting down, lying down, contemplating our food, beginning to eat, and finishing our meal. During the course of the retreat, we began to re-write the gathas in rhyming verses that were short and very pleasant to recite.

The gatha for throwing out the garbage (In the garbage I see a rose; In the rose I see the garbage; Everything is in transformation; Even permanence is impermanent) became:

Rose et déchets,
Tout inter-est.

(Rose and rubbish,
All inter-is.)

The one for finishing our meal (The plate is empty. My hunger is satisfied. I vow to live for the benefit of all beings) became:

L’assiette finie,
Je n’ai plus faim.
Vœu pour ma vie:
De tous, le bien.

(The plate finished,
I am not hungry any more.
A vow for my life:
For the good for all.)
A New Level of Mindfulness

When one does a retreat in Plum Village, it has a very strong effect which makes it possible to reach a state of deep calm and concentration. After this experience one always feels like going back to this state, and it is a strong motivation. However, as soon as one goes back home, I find that one loses that state, more or less rapidly, depending on the environment to which one returns.

The winter retreat at the Maison de l’Inspir was a different experience, which presented two big advantages. First, as we tried to practice during the retreat, we were forced to find solutions and adjustments in our usual environment, and this elevated the level of our mindfulness. The new quality of mindfulness remained less than the one attainable in Plum Village, but I found that it was more solid: it was in our normal life, at home, that we had created new habits. Secondly, by doing the retreat without being physically separated from the family, there was the possibility for the family to be associated with it. This is what happened with my husband, although he was not particularly interested in practicing.

One retreatant, Francoise, wrote: “This winter retreat at home, in the office, in the metro, in the streets of Paris, generated space and time for a more intense spiritual practice. I have a dream that the seeds that we have sown will germinate in other sanghas, and for the winter retreat 2009-2010 we will be a thousand laypeople participating in the retreat ‘at home.’ I make the wish that the energy generated by our collective meditation dispels the veil of ignorance and soothes the suffering of all living beings around us.”

Another practitioner, Celine, shared: “To summarize how I feel about this retreat I would like to tell this story. A magnificent hundred-year-old bonzai was given to a friend; despite all the care taken as far as light and hygrometry, after a few months, the bonzai was losing all its leaves and was showing less and less vitality. My friend took his bonzai back to the shop, and they told him to come back in three months’ time. Three months later, the bonzai was splendid with brand new leaves, and my friend asked: ‘What did you do?’ The answer was simple: ‘Nothing, I just put it with the others.’ I feel deeply the necessity of practicing/sharing in the Sangha to help each other out. Moreover, the other is a mirror.”

This retreat was very beneficial for our practice and brought us a lot of joy. And its first manifestation had a beautiful continuation. During the winter of 2009, French members of the Order of Interbeing made the “winter retreat at home” available in many places throughout the country. OI members signed up to facilitate weekly groups to talk about the special practices offered by monastics via email. More than 170 people participated in the retreat at home!
I wrote this mindfulness training during my process of aspi-
ration to ordain in the Order of Interbeing. One of my mentors,
Lyn Fine, suggested I write a mindfulness training for an area of
my life in need of transformation. It really helped. Five years later,
my work life is much healthier, and I take time to rest and practice
deep relaxation each day.

Aware of the suffering caused by overworking, I am committed to
cultivating compassion for myself and learning ways to protect
my life. I am determined not to overwork, and not to support my
compulsion to create additional work projects. I am committed to
cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for the benefit
of myself, my family, my Sangha, and society, by balancing a
healthy diet, work, and rest. I will seek and accept only work which
preserves well-being and joy in my body and in my consciousness,
as well as the collective body and consciousness of my family, my
Sangha, my clients, and society. I am determined not to ingest
certain conversations, which water my seeds of overwork. I am
aware that to damage my body or consciousness with extreme
fatigue and burnout is to betray my ancestors, my family, my
Sangha, and society.

I will work to transform the seeds of fear of scarcity, people-
pleasing, and status-seeking in myself by practicing a diet of
meditation, rest, and mindful awareness of the abundance of the
kingdom of God within me and within each moment. I will work
to transform the seeds of greed and overwork in myself and my
society by practicing circulation and sharing of my resources, gen-
erosity, ecological conservation, and mindful stopping and resting
in order to protect myself. I understand that to water seeds of good
health, rest, generosity, simple living, and awareness of the abun-
dance of the present moment is crucial for my self-transformation,
as well as for the transformation of my society.

Meryl Bovard, True Heavenly
Peace, co-founded Quiet
Mountain Sangha, and also
practices with Blue Cliff
Monastery Sangha. Meryl
practices photography
meditation and is studying to
become a yoga teacher.
Bees in Lavender

What perfect immediacy:
the intense concentration of bees in lavender.
How like pendulums entrained
they refuse distraction,
yellow monks draped in purple robes, flying zazen,
their circle of wings
forgetting all attachments,
no words to disconnect them from the world.

- Alexis Roberts, Awakened Sound of the Heart
I’m the Library Director at a large community college in Santa Barbara, California. For the past three years I’ve been leading weekly and, for one semester, daily meditation sessions on campus. All students, faculty, and staff are invited to participate in “Meditation in the Library”. The purpose is two-fold: to provide a space to introduce mindfulness practice into the community, and to provide me with time for sitting in the middle of the workday.

We typically meet in my office once a week, for twenty minutes. Fortunately, I have a large office and can easily accommodate up to eight people sitting in chairs or on the floor—though our numbers are usually two to four people per week. Each semester I invite the community to “Meditation in the Library” by sending out a campus-wide email message describing mindfulness meditation in a non-sectarian manner. Though many cannot attend due to scheduling conflicts, I often receive return messages from staff and faculty expressing a desire to participate or thanking me for providing the opportunity. In addition to the email, I usually place flyers around campus and put an ad on the student web portal. Since I’ve been offering the meditation sessions for three years now, the community is coming to expect them.

The room is set up with chairs facing one direction, though there is space to sit on the floor as well. We keep the lights off, but plenty of light comes in through the windows, so it’s not completely dark. If new people are present, I may start with suggestions on sitting posture and then begin a guided meditation focusing on the breath. We sit for twenty minutes and end with one sound of a bell. A person or two may engage in casual conversation at the end, but we generally do not share thoughts. There are one or two regulars; the rest of the participants are rather transient due to the changing schedules of college students.

On occasion, students participate to get extra credit in their Personal Development course. This course is designed to help students be successful in college, and one element of success is stress management. The students earning extra credit have also invited me to speak in their class. I attempt to keep the conversation non-sectarian, but in a thirty-minute presentation to a classroom full of students, questions about my personal practice often arise. In these class sessions I present my experience with meditation and provide concrete examples to show how meditation supports me in my work and in my relationships with other people. I provide details on sitting and breathing, plus opportunities to practice mindfulness. We end the class presentation with a five-minute guided meditation.

Having “Meditation in the Library” has been very nourishing for my practice. Reminders to practice in the work environment, and especially making others aware that I have a regular meditation practice, help my energy level and bring awareness to my interactions with others on campus.

Kenley Neufeld, True Recollection of Joy, leads the Being Peace Zendo in Ojai and “Meditation in the Library” at Santa Barbara City College. He can be reached at sangha@neuhouse.com.
Mindful In Any Weather

By Frank Doyle

Now I can enjoy the work a lot more regardless of the weather; in fact, I quite like the days when the weather is really wild.

I work as a postman in South East England. My workplace consists of a small, quiet sorting office for the first part of the day, and then the High Street and the narrow streets that lead off it for the rest of the day.

I’ve been doing this job since 1979. Years ago, I worked in a larger office in a nearby town, and that was a much noisier place to be, particularly at 5:00 a.m. when we started work. You wouldn’t think that we had all just woken up. In fact, when one man began working there, he remarked that he thought he had stumbled upon the annex to a lunatic asylum: music playing, shouting, insults (mostly friendly), laughter, complaints, arguments with management, none of it at all mindful. When I think back to how I behaved myself at that time, oh dear! But, as we all behaved very much in the same way, no one could see anything wrong with it.

The first time I heard about mindfulness was around 1990, when I came across a book called When the Iron Eagle Flies by Ayya Khema. The author wrote about washing dishes while washing dishes, quoting the Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh. This was the first time I had heard of Thay. I can remember thinking that this was an interesting idea—washing dishes while washing dishes. Ultimately, it meant being mindful all the time, something I thought only an enlightened person could do.

Having found out about Thay, I went in search of some of his books, in which he explains how mindfulness works, and that it is possible to be mindful of everything we do; we just have to practice, quite a lot.

I am now working in our reasonably quiet little office by the sea. Over time, since I have been studying Thay’s teachings and have become more committed to Dharma practice, I can see that mindfulness helps me to be more aware of what I am thinking, saying, feeling, and doing. It has helped me to accept things as they are much more easily.

As an example, I might feel that I am not happy with having to be at work, delivering mail in the wind and rain on a winter’s day. But by being mindful, I can become aware of the feelings in my body and the thoughts in my head, and say, “These are just thoughts and feelings; I don’t have to believe them; they will change anyway.” The remarkable thing is that they begin to diminish and fade away. “Hey! This really works,” I remember thinking once. Gradually, with much practice, I have been able to exchange negative thoughts and feelings for more positive ones. Now I can enjoy the work a lot more regardless of the weather; in fact, I quite like the days when the weather is really wild.
What has helped me most is being able to practice with Dharma friends. I attended an extended Day of Mindfulness led by Brother Michael at New Barn, South West England, in September 1997. The practice, the warm welcome, new friends, walking meditation in the fields, and the sound of the bell bringing us back to the present moment, all made me feel truly at home.

When I arrived back home and back at work, I decided that I would remember the sound of the bell at a couple of places on my delivery, where I could stop for a few moments, take three mindful breaths, or more, and try and be present for myself. Just stopping and taking three breaths has a wonderful effect, bringing me back to awareness, and so I am refreshed and ready to continue on my way.

At a recent retreat led by Sister Annabel, also at New Barn, she spoke about a pebble she carries in her pocket. When she feels it there, it reminds her to breathe mindfully. When she spoke about it I thought of a pebble I had at home that would be just right to use. Now I keep it in my pocket and use it during the day. It’s a reminder not only to breathe but also to come back to awareness.

On the last day of the retreat I took the Five Mindfulness Trainings. I knew that I needed to work on the fourth training, concerning mindful speech and deep listening. Mindful speech was something I felt I should be more aware of. The workplace is where I can be least mindful of what I say. Some of the topics and the language used may be acceptable to a degree in my working environment, but not anywhere else. I may find myself taking part in a conversation at work, using language that is unacceptable, and being the loudest voice, but I now am able to see what I am doing much more quickly. I’m able to see how I am watering the negative seeds within and how they affect me as they rise up. If I am aware enough, I will stop. And then, eventually, I won’t take part in unmindful speech in the first place.

Frank Doyle, Wonderful Sharing of the Heart, took Thay’s advice and started a Sangha in South East England, called the Folkestone and Hythe Sangha. He also practices with Deep Listening Sangha, a telephone conference Sangha in the UK.
Some friends and I joined in a practice to write about death and dying.* When we shared what we had written, we learned that the following drama was everybody’s worst-case scenario.

I am in a nursing home where, even if someone cared enough to prop me up so that I could look out the window, I would see only a parking lot. The nursing home is so institutionally gray and dull, and my room is so gray and dull, that I cannot tell what time of day it is, much less what season. There are no flowers or plants in my room. Whatever it is I am dying of, it is taking a while, and I have been lying in this bed a long time, becoming a drooling, pants-wetting, shrunken-up old lady. I am being warehoused, away from contact with human beings, other than a nurse’s aide, whose sole expression seems to be annoyance. I can no longer see to read, or watch movies, or do jigsaw puzzles. There is no one to read to me, or play Cyrano to my Roxanne, bringing me the news of the day. There is no one to spread lotion on my dry and cracked back and feet. There is no discernible end to this nightmare—no death, just a drawn-out dying by increments.

There was an end to the nightmare—it was a writing exercise, not immediate reality. My friends and I could conceive of more horrific circumstances, such as being kidnapped and tortured to death. But all of us agreed that the worst-case scenario, lingering on without loving care in an institutional setting, was worst precisely because it was common and probable.

While I kept trying, as I wrote, to turn my attention to compassion for all those who languish in nursing homes, honesty compels me to admit I was wallowing in self-pity for that lonely little old lady that was me.

Fortunately, the exercise did not finish with the worst-case scenario. It was with some relief that I moved on to the second part of the exercise, writing about my ideal scenario.

Ideally, I know in advance that I am dying. I can take a gentle leave of my friends and family and remove myself to the sea, to a cottage along the coast in Massachusetts or Maine. I have my wits about me. The pain comes and goes, and when it comes I am able to breathe and say, hello, I know you are just pain. Perhaps my daughter is with me. I know she understands I am at peace about my death. She knows I am at peace about my dying, too.

It is late spring or early autumn. It is warm, and I am still physically able to walk to the shore when the day becomes night and sit on the beach, listening to the waves and watching the stars. As first light comes and I watch the sky over the water turn to pearl, I have enough acuity to remember the closing gatha of the Diamond Sutra: “Thus should one view all of the fleeting world; a drop of dew, a bubble in a stream, a flash of lightning in a summer cloud, a star at dawn, a phantom and a dream.” I lie down in the sand and die.

Sharing our ideal death made all of us more emotional than sharing the worst-case scenario. There was fear that the ideal was so much less likely than the worst case. Almost all of us wanted to die on a shore or mountaintop or under a tree, and not in a hospital or nursing home, but we feared the odds.

We were ready for the third part of the exercise: what can we do, here and now, to make a life worth dying for? Most of us,

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* This practice was adapted from one recommended by Joan Halifax Roshi in her book *Being with Dying*. She advises that the exercise be done in community, so each writer has support. On two separate occasions, I facilitated different members of my meditation group sharing this practice. We found that intimacy is one consequence of this exercise and that therefore trust and respect are essential.
perhaps to calm our emotions, became very practical. We made promises to work on wills and to speak with family members about worries and fears and wishes and feelings. But we also understood that preparation for death is not limited to practicalities.

As for myself, in preparation, I have read and reread Thay’s book No Death, No Fear. Thay teaches that when the fear of dying is exacerbated by the fear of death, it is like receiving a second arrow in a wound. Thay also teaches about recognizing choices. Choice permeates every aspect of our life, the way we live it, and the way we die.

There is no element of choice in death. The self that I call “I” will die. But I can choose to overcome fear of death.

There is an element of choice in dying. Whatever the causes and conditions of my dying may be, I can choose to participate in the process with equanimity. I have two daily practices to help me understand the process and to water the seeds of equanimity.

The Five Remembrances

I practice every day with the Five Remembrances, a meditation taught by the Buddha:

*This body is of the nature to grow old. This body cannot escape old age.*

*This body is of the nature to decline in health. This body cannot escape ill health.*

*This body is of the nature to die. This body cannot escape death.*

*Everyone I love, and everything I have, I will one day have to let go. I cannot escape this.*

*I am the heir of my karma; my karma is my heir.*

This teaching of the Buddha about the impermanence of life in the historical dimension, in the “mundane world,” is a core practice in Buddhism. I am also mindful, as I practice the Five Remembrances, of Thay’s teachings about the ultimate dimension, or what some would call nirvana. Awareness of the ultimate dimension informs both my understanding of the mundane world and my grasp of the reality of no-death.

*This body is of the nature to grow old. This body cannot escape old age.* But I am not this body, and this body is not me.

*This body is of the nature to decline in health. This body cannot escape ill health.* But mindfulness practice guides me to protect my health as best I can, in my choices of what to eat or not eat, and what to drink or not drink, and in the choices I make about my activities and my attitudes. The reality of interbeing, which is the truth that no self is a separate self but rather “inter-is” with every other being, teaches me that every choice I make has consequences for myself, for my family, and for society. I cannot choose to eat a steak every day, I cannot choose to drink a bottle of wine every day, I cannot opt to watch a violent program on TV instead of taking a walk outdoors, and pretend there are no personal and societal consequences.

*This body is of the nature to die. This body cannot escape death.* But I was never born, and I will never die. When causes and conditions were sufficient, I manifested in this body. When causes and conditions cease to be sufficient, I will no longer manifest in this body. But just as surely as the morning star is still “there” even after the sun rises, so shall I be. There is a famous Zen koan: what did you look like before your grandparents were born; what will you look like in one hundred years?

*Everyone I love, and everything I have, I will one day have to let go. I cannot escape this.* We all have to leave our stuff behind. That house we put so much of ourselves into, that car we thought was so important to own, the jewelry, the gadgets—all of it will turn to junk, before or after we’ve left. The important thing is love, and because the ultimate reality is the reality of interbeing—that we all contain one another—love does not die. Love continues in every kind word I have ever spoken and every smile I have ever smiled. Kind words and loving smiles get passed around the world and back again.

*I am the heir of my karma; my karma is my heir.* Where I am now, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, is the sum total of all that I have done before now. Karma is the consequence of every action I’ve taken. But karma is not my fate. If I have had a tendency in the past to act in a certain situation with anger or anxiety, I can choose, now, not to act in that situation with anger or anxiety. In
Almost all of us wanted to die on a shore or mountaintop or under a tree, and not in a hospital or nursing home.

every moment, I can choose to nourish my seeds of peace and compassion rather than feeding my seeds of anger or fear.

Never the Same Path

My second daily practice is a walking meditation. I always walk with Thay; and breathe with the Buddha. Here, now. Walking, breathing. Walking with Thay. Happy feet, peaceful steps. Breathing with the Buddha. Releasing, letting go.

I walk the same path every day at the same time. But of course, it is never the same path and it is never the same time. I know, because the whole cosmos has told me on these walks that I am not walking the same path at the same time. The whole cosmos tells me that nothing lasts forever as it is now. And that is a blessing.

If everything lasted forever as it is now, five-year-olds could never become teachers or nurses or mothers or fathers. New friendships could not begin. Relationships could not deepen. Everything is in the process of change. Sometimes if we are fearful or grieving, it feels like loss. But it is not loss; it is transformation.

When I start my walk, I count the stars. I count a couple of dozen without even moving my head. After twenty minutes, I look again and count maybe fifteen stars. I walk a little longer, and it is dawn, and there is only the morning star. Are all the stars gone? They are here. It's just that you can't see them. They are not gone. Night has become morning in the natural process of change. But maybe indeed one of those stars has transformed. I could have been seeing the light of a star that exploded zillions of years ago. Is it gone? Or are we all stardust, interchanging our energies?

I close my walk, as I hope to close my life, with the Diamond Sutra: “Thus should one view all of the fleeting world; a drop of dew, a bubble in a stream, a flash of lightning in a summer cloud, a star at dawn, a phantom and a dream.”

These two daily practices, sitting with the Buddha’s Five Remembrances, and walking with Thay’s interbeing, help me to develop equanimity about death and dying. And, oh, about life and living too, and the gift of the present moment.

Haven Tobias, Embracing Freshness of the Heart, facilitates the Norman Meditation Group, which includes practitioners from many traditions. She is a semi-retired lawyer.

photo by Zachiah Murray
Last summer my husband, David McCleskey, was diagnosed with liver cancer. Forty days from his diagnosis, he made his passage. He died in the arms of our Sangha. In fact, the Sangha was sitting in our house sending David a loving kindness meditation at the moment he passed. Our Sangha and the practice gave comfort to David and to me, and the Sangha received a beautiful gift by being present. The following story is one of many in a book I'm writing about David's dying.

Nights were always difficult. Like a newborn baby, David awoke frequently, and his days and nights were all mixed up. He never complained, but he needed things: water, help to the commode, light on, light off, more blankets, fewer blankets. On this night, however, David was more agitated than usual. He began to kick the bedcovers off and sigh heavily.

“What is it?” I asked.

“I’m miserable, so miserable,” he said.

“Do you need something, some water?”

“Nothing, no, nothing. I’ve wasted my life, wasted too much time. My work isn’t finished. And there isn’t any way to fix that now.”

I turned on the light. David’s face was full of grief and despair. Everything in me wanted to blurt out, “No, darling, that isn’t true. You’ve done so much with your life. You’ve had a great and wonderful life.” But a voice inside me said, “Keep still.” What to do then? I rubbed David’s shoulder. “It’s okay, okay,” I said.

He reached for my hand and squeezed it tightly, letting out a great sigh. That giant out-breath was like a message. An inner voice said, “He’s releasing. Allow it.”

Over the next several hours, David poured out mountains of regret in great sighs. His words were very few and I was not sure what exactly was being released. But I knew that each sigh, each word, held great substance and meaning for David. Our bedroom was a container for the dark and dense energy that came from my beloved’s being that night. The air was so thick that it was hard to breathe. I was not afraid of the energy itself, heavy though it was. I was afraid of the harm that might come to David if he couldn’t stop generating these terrible, agonizing regrets. I did not want my sweetheart to die with these thoughts on his mind.

Near dawn, a soft pink glow permeated the room. A presence whispered in my ear: “Patricia, everyone walks this valley of regret. You will many times; you have already done so many times. All of our work on earth is unfinished and we are unfinished and it is okay.”

I knew that David felt this presence also because he opened his eyes, smiled a very tiny smile, and said, “This is exhausting.”

“Yes it is,” I said. “But you’re letting go of a lot of bad feelings. I think everyone has regrets like this, don’t you?”

“Hmm. Maybe.” He was thoughtful for a moment. His breathing shifted, becoming more rhythmic and relaxed. We slept then

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Releasing Regret
By Patricia Webb

Watching David in the moments just after that phone call was like watching a sunrise.
until the phone rang around 8:00 a.m. Our Dharma teachers, Peggy Rowe (True Original Source) and Larry Ward (True Great Sound) were calling to check on us. I told them what had been going on. Larry asked to speak with David.

“David, how are you today? Are you getting enough rest?” He asked.

“I’m miserable,” said David. “I’ve messed it all up.”

“Understood,” Larry replied. “Okay now, David. Now is an excellent time to remember your Dharma name—True Mountain of Goodness, right? David, your practice is to bring to mind, to focus on the thoughts, the words, the actions of yours that have brought goodness. There is so much to recall, David, great fields of goodness. And you know that, man. Dwell on that. And dwell, too, on the goodness that has come to you. This is the time for that, okay?”

“Got it. Right,” David said. Then Peggy came on the line. “Remember, David, how much we love you. Your Sangha, your friends, we are with you. You’re doing a great job with this journey.” David smiled.

Watching David in the moments just after that phone call was like watching a sunrise. He gently allowed his consciousness to shift, letting light come in. I saw him surrender to the force of bright, positive consciousness. As he focused on his breathing, I quietly busied myself, making ready for the day. His mood brightened slowly as he continued the beautiful work.

After a while we knew it was time to close this ritual time. With David’s blessing, I opened the bedroom door to the garden, turned on the fan, burned sage, invited our small bell, sprinkled lemon and lavender—all to help the night’s sad energy depart.

David lived several weeks after this event, yet he never again voiced a single regret. Later that day, in a moment of sweet attention so characteristic of him, he caught my eye and simply said, “You’re a good wife.”

Our spiritual names come from a well of knowing deeper than any person or group, and they bless us in times of need. On that morning, True Mountain of Goodness surrendered to the human experience of regret, released it, and embraced the boundless goodness of his being. I continue to live in gratitude that David had a Sangha and a practice that enabled his transition to be so beautiful.

Patricia Webb, True Mountain of Action, sits with Prairie Wind Sangha of Oklahoma City. She is a writer and artist, and has been a member of the Order of Interbeing since 2005.
Mom’s Haiku

Death spoke softly
Brushing her cheek
With a white feather.
Mother said
Yes.

Tears flow.
The river carries leaves
Touched by
Lengthening shadows.

A bright quarter moon
Rises over the palm trees.
My mother’s smile
Lives.

I was very fortunate to be fully present for my mom as she was making her transition into death in March, 2008. After she died, these haiku came to me. Mom continues to be present with me.

- Sheila Klein, Flower of True Emptiness
When the tree died, she continued as a violin, a chopping board, and a floorboard.

At first the violin was very content. She felt grateful for the skill, care, and love with which she had been crafted.

But, over time, the violin started to feel a little haughty. She looked down on the chopping board and floorboard and said, “When I sing, I can touch the hearts of a thousand people in a packed auditorium! Dear chopping board, all you can do is give a few people the fleeting pleasure of a tasty meal, and, as for you, floorboard, how can you let people walk all over you?”

The violinist, hearing this, decided to have a quiet word with the violin.

“Dear violin, how could there even be an auditorium without floorboards? Where would the people sit, and where would I stand to play you? If I had nothing to eat, if there was no chopping board, how would I have the energy to play you? Your song certainly is beautiful, yet it wouldn’t be possible without help from all your sisters and brothers. You all come from the same tree—a tree born of seed, soil, water, and sunlight.”

Reflecting on this, the violin felt more connected with her sisters.

The next time she played there was something different about it. The violin sang out in such a way as to touch the sunlight in the floorboards, in the chopping board and in herself. Music full of sunlight filled the auditorium and there was such a sense of peace and harmony that the audience was moved to tears.

Those tears evaporated to become clouds and rain. They watered the young saplings of the forest, and, at nature’s pace, the next generation of trees, rooted firmly in the earth, reached up towards the sky.

*Touching Sunlight*  
*By Peter Smith*  

*Peter Smith practices with  
Wild Geese Sangha in  
Edinburgh, Scotland.*  

*illustration by Zachiah Murray*
Volunteering for Hospice brings a wealth of deep experiences, including opportunities for practice. Two years ago I was asked to visit Mary, who was dying of bone cancer and suffering from dementia. She lived with her daughter and son-in-law in a quiet, small village home, and her family needed support.

Before each visit, I sat in the car and did *metta* meditation for myself, Mary, those caring for Mary, and all beings. With peaceful steps, I walked to the house and introduced myself.

Mary was a charming woman with great stories of her family and travels. She was intelligent and asked insightful questions about my life and work. But then, on most visits, she would get lost in her own mind. Her dementia was a torment. When she felt it coming on, she would often realize what was happening and comment on losing her mind. As it progressed, she would become fearful of strangers breaking into the house and would weep over the death of her very alive daughter. This was heartbreaking to witness. Although her physical pain was well under control, her mind was far from it. Together we took deep breaths and held hands. This was never quite enough to bring her back to the room.

Her family told me that she used to practice as a Catholic, my root tradition. They thought she might like me to pray with her, but didn’t think she knew a lot of prayers herself. When asked, they told me she hadn’t said a rosary in years. I asked permission to give it a try. With little confidence, they agreed.

First I had to find a rosary, which I did—buried in my bedside table. My parents had had it blessed for me by Pope Pius XII and I’d never had the heart to part with it. Now was its time to shine! Then I had to find a prayer book that covered the rosary, since I was more than rusty. One of these was also waiting on a bookshelf. Things were coming together for my experiment.

As an interfaith minister, it is my work to find bridges between faith experiences. I thought the rosary was quite similar to the *mala*. In our tradition, to the best of my knowledge, the mala beads are used by monks to follow their breath. Our practice centers on the breath, and I wanted to find a way to bring this to Mary in a manner that she could understand and apply without introducing a Buddhist concept.

In time we were able to effectively use the breath to ease her suffering, with her rosary beads as a sustaining guide. It was like a miracle to see her agitation settling down and calm taking root. But it wasn’t a miracle at all. It was solid practice beyond the terminology and labels of traditions. As Mary took her prayer beads, we paused and followed our breath. In, out. After each short prayer, so familiar and comfortable to her, we took another breath. In, out. Steadying. Integrating. Mary found her way back to her true self.

When Mary transitioned, I felt a real loss. But in the last months of her life she was able to be more present and more peaceful thanks to the practice of mindfulness, the practice she never knew by name. It was the gift of my own practice, that I could share it and pass it along. Why else are we alive?
The evening I was scheduled to facilitate our Sangha sitting, I learned that my younger daughter had committed suicide. I had planned to talk about cultivating joy, read from Thich Nhat Hanh’s 20th anniversary edition of *Breathe, You Are Alive!*, and do a guided meditation from *The Blooming of a Lotus* on the joy of meditation as nourishment, and I did. It was my way of beginning the mourning process.

I am the convener of the Practice Community at Franklin Lakes, and I have felt wonderfully supported by my Sangha. When I finally acknowledged the reality and finality of my daughter’s act, I was able to tell my sisters and brothers in the practice that I was having a difficult time dealing with her death and I knew they understood. Sharing and writing about my experience has freed others in our community to talk about their life-altering experiences with suicide. One spoke of the effect of her mother’s suicide on her when she was five years old. Another told of her daughter’s several unsuccessful attempts to end her life.

I was no stranger to loss and abandonment. When I was five, the only person who I thought loved me unconditionally, my favorite uncle, abandoned me. My mother died when I was in my teens, and I was left with an indifferent father who had little interest in me, or later in my children, his only grandchildren. More recently, I felt strongly the loss of the person who established our Sangha ten years ago, and with whom I was co-leader the past few years, when he left the area. But surviving the death of a child by suicide is like nothing I had ever experienced and I’m not sure I will be able to come to terms with it during my lifetime.

At this time, I tell people my consolation lies in the fact that my daughter is no longer suffering the excruciating feelings of unworthiness engendered by the extremes of bipolarity. I also tell them it is comforting to know that because of her generosity, the lives of many people have been saved or extended because they received her organs and tissues. I say these things, but I don’t feel consoled or comforted.

I speak to her dear husband regularly—he needs a compassionate, nonjudgmental listener—and I learn more and more about the suffering she experienced and visited on others. I sometimes cry for days after we talk, but I will be there for him as long as he needs me, as I would have been for my daughter, if she had let me.

Every day a dozen things bring her to mind. I see her as her husband found her when he came home from work—in the driver’s seat of her locked car in the garage with a hose hooked up to the exhaust and taped in the passenger window—and I cry.

People remark how strong I am because I did not miss one sit of our Sangha or any of the classes I teach, and because I have not collapsed and given up on life. I do not feel strong. I feel incredibly weak and vulnerable, but I believe that without my Sangha to sustain me I would not be in as strong a position as I am.

I know that over time I will continue to feel better able to deal with my grief; that by continuing to practice watering the seeds of the good memories of my daughter, I will feel less sad when I think of her; and that, as in the past, I will find solace in my own island as I continue to be faithful to my practice. I know that she is part of the matter of the universe and that I have only to look into my hand to always find her. Until these thoughts become the feelings of my heart, my loss will be real and I will miss her every day.

Janice Rubin is the convener of the Practice Community at Franklin Lakes. She is a former journalist and the author of *Looking Back, Moving On: Memoir as Prolog*, and *Four Lives: Despite the Odds*. 

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**Mourning My Daughter**

*By Janice Rubin*
My girlfriend, Cameron, and I moved to New York City in 2005 with great expectations for her career as an educator and my career as a musician and novelist. My girlfriend’s career soon exceeded expectations. I, on the other hand, did not fare as well. By the end of six months, I’d run out of savings and found it difficult to locate a job that gave me time for my art.

Optimism carried me for a while, but eventually, my optimism began to wear off: gigs were hard to come by, selling music was next to impossible, and depression set in. I was attending Sangha meetings in the city, which I enjoyed, but I was not able to let go of my attachments to my version of success.

I had been at Deer Park Monastery the day it opened, and had spent a lot of time there—sometimes months without leaving—and now I returned to the monastery, thinking I could get my head together. And I did. And it was wonderful. But when I returned to the city, I began a slow descent back into depression. I started to think I needed to get back to the monastery again, but then realized: No, Nate, you need to deepen your practice where you live. I vowed that I would go back to Deer Park only when I had been able to become peaceful and happy in New York City.
The sidewalks had to become my mountain paths, and the subway had to become my hermitage.

Transforming New York City

My plan of action was simple. Scheduled meditation was difficult for me, so I had to recognize that, and not be too hard on myself. I was spending a lot of time en route to different parts of the city to participate in open mics, jam with other musicians, explore, and commute to temp jobs. So, the sidewalks had to become my mountain paths, and the subway had to become my hermitage.

The reason people walk so fast in New York is not because the entire city is composed of Type A go-getters. It's because one often has to walk long city blocks, over long bridges, or to and from subway stops. If you walk slowly here, it takes forever to get anywhere. I decided on a pace that would get me where I needed to go, but allow me to relax at the same time—something along the lines of driving on the highway at sixty or sixty-five miles per hour rather than seventy; just enough of an adjustment to take the edge off. At that pace, I could really enjoy my steps and take each one with all my love and compassion.

_Breathing in, love and compassion flow from the soles of my feet._

_Breathing out, I am happy._

_Love and compassion._

_Happy._

This meditation allowed me to smile to passersby and enjoy the city for the extraordinary place that it is. It inspired me to write positive music that deepened my practice, instead of turning to laments and despair.

Time on the subway became a time of deep practice for me as well. Once I found a job, I had to commute forty to fifty minutes each way, and wanted to make sure that I was alive during that time. I always had a book about the practice with me, and I often carried my Five Mindfulness Trainings certificate too. On the subway, I would enjoy my reading for a while, then stop, breathe, and look at the people around me. It was easy to see what a wonderful, extraordinary situation I was in: people from all nations, cultures, and religions packed into a small space together. With this new perspective, I was constantly amazed at how courteous people were—giving seats to the elderly, helping people onto trains, making space for others. There are many places in the world where this doesn’t happen.

Many times I’ve heard Thich Nhat Hanh say, “At the airport, when they search you before boarding a plane, they are not looking for your Buddha nature—they are looking for your terrorist nature. We have to start to recognize our Buddha nature.” It was important for me to notice manifestations of Buddha nature in the city.

Sometimes I sat, closed my eyes, and meditated on my breath. I got in over an hour of sitting meditation every day, and just as much walking meditation (I almost always took the stairs at the workplace). The only other place in which I had that much time to practice was at the monastery.

In the spring of 2008, my worldly situation hadn’t changed a lot, yet I was much happier. Practicing mindfulness had allowed...
me to transform New York City in my mind, so I was now able to walk in a city that was a beautiful practice center. At that time, I was studying Thich Nhat Hanh’s book, The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion. Reading the text helped me achieve a lot of insight into the nature of interbeing, and the way we erroneously define our world. In the Diamond Sutra, there are ideas akin to: A tree is not a tree; that is why we call it a tree. After some meditation, I took a tree is not a tree to mean that a tree is the whole cosmos, composed of awakened nature. We call it a tree because we are under the illusion that it has a separate self. But like everything else, a tree is of the nature to be both birthless and deathless. With the teachings of the Diamond Sutra in my heart, looking at the faces in the subway car became even more wonderful because I felt more connected to my community.

My Brother’s Presence

On May 28, I got a phone call in the middle of the night with the news that my brother, Jason, had died. He was thirty-seven years old. In a hotel in Elko, Nevada, where he worked as a dentist, he had run up three flights of stairs to avoid being on a full elevator. He then bought a drink from a vending machine, turned from the machine, took a few steps, fell forward with his arms hugging his chest, and died. We later found out that he had died from an overdose of Demerol.

My family went through a complex process of mourning. And while Jason was the sibling to whom I felt closest, I am sure that my suffering was reduced because I entered it meditating on interbeing and our birthless and deathless nature. When I saw my other siblings and cried, I wasn’t always crying because Jason wasn’t there with us. Sometimes I cried because I was so happy to be in the presence of my family. Now, many months later, much of my family is still sometimes crippled with despair and sadness. But, because of my practice, I feel very in touch with my brother and feel his presence in all things when I am mindful. In fact—and I know this may sound strange—his death feels to me like he made a decision to move forward with his life.

Everything’s in Everything

I returned to Deer Park in the second half of December, 2008. I’d achieved my goal of deepening my practice in New York City and now felt I had to be in a quiet place to make sure I wasn’t in a state of denial about my brother’s death.

During my retreat at Deer Park, we were put into groups for Dharma discussion. I told the group about my experience with the Diamond Sutra and my brother. There was another man in the group—I’ll call him “H”—who had also lost his brother the year before, and still appeared to be in a lot of pain. The next day, as the Sangha walked among the sage and boulders of the surrounding mountains, I thought to myself, Jason is not Jason. That’s why we call him Jason. “H” was walking ahead of me, and he immediately stopped and turned around. He smiled and gave me a great big hug that pushed my hat askew and stopped the long line behind us.

We walked to an open space where we all sat on boulders and ate our lunch. I smiled, remembering a conversation I once had with Brother Phap Dung, the abbot of Deer Park, about being at the monastery. “Here,” he said, “when you need a brother or sister, a brother or sister is there for you. When you need a mom, a mom tends to appear.”

A simple, childlike painting that Cameron made hangs in our bedroom in New York. It’s a large group of people, all colors and sizes, each with a heart in their chest, sitting under a yellow sun and torn-paper sky. If you look closely, you can see that the little clouds are words torn from a dictionary: we...all...have...a...beating...heart...in...our...chest. On Christmas Eve, I played a song to the Sangha gathered in the meditation hall at Deer Park. I looked at all the faces there—the children, parents, brothers, sisters, monks, and nuns—and told them how much they reminded me of the painting. The song was called Everything’s in Everything, inspired by Cameron’s painting, The Diamond that Cuts Through Illusion, and the reality of interbeing.

We all have a beating heart in our chest
There is nothing separating East and West
We are breathing in and out the same sky
We are looking at each other with new eyes
Everything’s in Everything
Everyone’s in Everything
Everything’s in Everyone
Everyone’s in Everyone
I love all the people passing by me
I love all the buildings in the sky of the city
I know all the forests are my lungs breathing
I know all the oceans are my blood streaming
Peace is resting in the palm of our hands
We can see it in a tiny grain of sand
Breathing in and out we smile to the moment
Everything’s in everything and always flowing

Nate Metzker, Compassionate Sound of the Heart, is a novelist and musician who lives in Brooklyn and teaches at the McCartney School for Children with Autism. On his website, www.natemetzker.com, is an mp3 of the song mentioned in this story.
Seeding Hope and Peace

Magnolia…sweet wafting among the plum blossoms

Dogwood…upright and delicate

Roses…reaching toward the sun, perfuming the sky

Lilies…orange marmalade springing from precious earth

Lotus…in the crescent pond subtle and engaging

During the 21-day retreat last June in Plum Village, amid the perfumed fragrances of early summer, a group of monastic and lay practitioners were inspired by Thay’s teachings, and met to discuss ways in which the practices of mindfulness could be offered more widely as a means of reducing the suffering caused by social conflicts. Our particular objective was to reach out to groups that are currently using violence as a means to achieve political ends in inter-group conflicts.

During late summer, the initiative became the Seeding Hope and Peace Project, under the spiritual leadership of Thay and Sister Chan Khong. The members of the group’s Steering Committee are: Sister Chan Khong, Thay Phap An, Brother Phap Son, Sister Tung Nghiem (Sr. Pine), Sister An Nghiem (Sr. Peace), Baruch Shalev, Dan Urech, Mitchell Ratner, Shantum Seth, and Pritam Singh. The Advisory Board includes Dharma Teachers and Order of Interbeing members from all over the world who practice the peaceful resolution of violent group conflict.

The Steering Committee has worked to create a clear statement of objectives and strategies for the Seeding Hope and Peace Project, which is shared below for the benefit of the worldwide Sangha:

Vision
Our vision is that peoples of different faiths and cultures use the practice of mindfulness, watering the seeds of hope and peace, to resolve conflicts within themselves, their families, and their communities, and between groups and nations, thereby creating the conditions for enduring peace.

Mission
Across the world, thousands of civilians are injured or killed each year because of violent struggles between ethnic or social groups. Violence plays out in communities, homes, and people.

Our aspiration is to offer the peaceful practice and insights of mindfulness to leaders, emerging leaders, and society at large through education, so that we may understand how the seeds of peace and hope can flower.

Background
Thich Nhat Hanh teaches that the true source of peace is in the mind and that it is always possible to nourish peace and reconciliation. During the worst years of the war in Vietnam, when millions were dying, he founded the School of Youth for Social Service with Sister Chan Khong. Risking their lives, they and thousands of young people went to the countryside to establish schools and health clinics and to rebuild villages destroyed in the fighting. Thich Nhat Hanh did not choose sides; he worked to bring peace rather than war to divided Vietnam. Because of his courageous efforts, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. nominated Thich Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967.

Strategy
With the support and spiritual guidance of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sister Chan Khong, Seeding Hope and Peace seeks to assist in moving toward the realization of peace, justice, and reconciliation. The group’s initial effort will be to offer two special retreats with Thich Nhat Hanh at the Plum Village Practice Center.
The first retreat for twenty to forty people will take place the first week of May, 2010. It will bring together the Steering Committee of Seeding Hope and Peace with recognized peacemakers, who will be recommended by the Advisory Board. The peacemakers will be individuals who are known both for their nonviolent methods and for their ability to work directly with groups engaged in violent conflicts. The peacemakers might be religious leaders or leaders of social organizations, who are genuine messengers of hope and peace. It may include Nobel Peace Prize Laureates and nominees.

During the week-long retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh, the group will practice together and develop plans for the second retreat, planned for May, 2011, which will include leaders and emerging leaders from conflict zones.

During the second retreat, under the guidance of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sister Chan Khong, the participants will learn and practice the tools of peace and reconciliation, including deep listening, mindful speech, trust, understanding, and compassion.

It is anticipated that the teachings, along with the experience of practicing and living together in the Plum Village community, will nourish personal transformation and encourage new ways of thinking about and moving toward peace and reconciliation.

Seeding Hope and Peace begins at an auspicious time, when the President of the United States and other world leaders are encouraging open communication and alternatives to violent conflicts. The retreats and future efforts provide a way for the Plum Village community, the Order of Interbeing, and the extended community to share our collective experience and support others in making our world, our communities, and ourselves peaceful.

We look forward to working together with the support of all our Dharma friends to realize the deep aspirations of the Seeding Hope and Peace Project. For further information, please contact pvbelovedcommunity@gmail.com.

**Qualifications:**
- Ability to work on garden and landscape projects.
- Excellent communication skills.
- Has taken the Five Mindfulness Trainings, Three Jewels and received a Dharma name.
- Sangha references.
- Has a daily practice.

For more information contact: mikemigrates@gmail.com
This book is a treasure trove of practical wisdom for longtime practitioners, beginners, anyone who is curious about the practice of mindfulness. *Happiness* summarizes in concise, clear chapters what Thay has been teaching for the last sixty years.

It also answers, for me, the question of what the word “practice” means in our tradition. Several years ago, twenty or so lay people gathered at Plum Village to consider the idea of a lay community. It soon became clear that people had vastly different meanings when they spoke of “practice.” Some meant formal sitting meditation, chanting, reciting sutras. And while those activities can enhance our experience of the Dharma, they are not the essence of our daily practice. “Mindfulness,” writes Thay in the introduction, “is the energy of being aware and awake to the present. It is the continuous practice of touching life deeply in every moment.... The practice of stopping is crucial. How do we stop? We stop by means of our in-breath, our out-breath, and our step. If you master these practices, then you can practice mindful eating, mindful drinking, mindful cooking, mindful driving, and so on, and you are always in the here and the now.”

The book is divided into six sections; each short chapter is a gem. “Daily Practices” covers the basics, such as breathing, sitting and walking meditation, bowing, gathas, and the Five Mindfulness Trainings. “Eating Practices” and “Physical Practices” are guidelines for caring for body and soul. The section on “Relationship and Community Practices” describes how to start and maintain a Sangha. It also offers techniques for creating healthy relationships, such as beginning anew, hugging meditation, deep listening, and loving speech. Several pages are devoted to anger and other strong emotions.

Some “Extended Practices” include solitude and silence, as well as lazy day, touching the earth, metta/love meditation, and the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. The section on “Practicing with Children” contains many useful tips for parents and teachers: listening to young people, walking meditation with children, the breathing room, and so on.

These are familiar teachings from Thich Nhat Hanh, which many of us have heard in Dharma talks or read in other books. But that doesn’t mean we don’t need to read them again and again, because we might need to be reminded to actually practice them. And they really do work! I can vouch for that. Even practicing as unskillfully as I have, has made a huge difference in my life. In the six years since I committed myself wholeheartedly to Thay’s tradition, I have experienced deep healing and transformation. I am far happier than ever before.

_Happiness_ is aptly titled. “We have a rich inheritance, but we don’t know it,” writes Thay at the end of the book. “We behave as if we were poor; a destitute son or daughter. Instead we can recognize that we have a treasure of enlightenment, understanding, love, and joy inside us. It’s time to go back to receive our inheritance. These practices can help us claim it.”

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Two out of three people in the United States are overweight and one in three is obese. Obesity is becoming a pandemic around the globe. Most methods of weight loss focus on the symptoms, not the root of the problem, which lies not only in our way of thinking and living as individuals, but very much in the increasingly unhealthy and toxic societies in which we live, which encourage us to eat more, to eat foods that undermine our health, and to move less.

Based on both the profound Buddhist wisdom of mindfulness as well as the latest science on nutrition, this book by Thich Nhat Hanh and Dr. Lilian Cheung offers a new and penetrating perspective on how we arrived at our current weight problem and what we can do to reverse it, individually and collectively. The authors gracefully apply the teachings on the Four Noble Truths, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Four Nutriments, and other key Buddhist teachings to help readers understand and transform the suffering of excess weight and obesity.

Thich Nhat Hanh and Dr. Lilian Cheung, of the Harvard School of Public Health, compassionately and engagingly encourage readers to have faith in their ability to change and improve their life situation, no matter what difficulties they may have had in the past around weight loss. With the lat-
Ian Prattis, a former professor of Anthropology and Religion at Carleton University, Canada, belongs to a growing school of thought that believes humanity requires a real shift in consciousness to handle the global crises—environmental, political, and economic. A core tenet of Failsafe: Saving the Earth from Ourselves is the simple maxim that our thinking has to change if the current worldview is to change.

Under the guidance of the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, Prattis states that the three poisons of the mind (to quote the Buddha) have become institutionalized. Greed pervades the corporate world. Hate pervades the military. Delusion pervades advertising. The poisoning of land, water, and air, and the catastrophes for the world’s poor and marginalized have their origins in the state of mind of those who run our institutions and their intentions to make profit, act violently upon people and the earth, and manipulate the public mind.

There are signs of soul-searching in our major institutions, and their intentions to make profit, act violently upon people and the earth, and manipulate the public mind. There are signs of soul-searching in our major institutions, but the pace is painfully slow.

Sai Baba, a controversial Indian guru, told Prattis that only two percent of the global population needs to meditate on a daily basis to transform human consciousness. Prattis endorses such a view and encourages people to slow down their relentless “doing” in order to experience a sense of “being”: a slowing down of thought, making it possible for fresh ways of thinking to emerge.

The book serves as a valuable collection of reflections on global issues and the part each one of us can play in making the necessary changes. While drawing on the wisdom of various authorities, past and present, Failsafe reminds us of the Buddha’s recipe for global ills—namely mindfulness, letting go, reflection, inner change, watching desire, inter-connection, and the transformation of consciousness.

Prattis writes that he remains “confident and optimistic about making the world a better place environmentally.” He has usefully employed his own experiences, the wise voices of others, and practical advice to address concerns about life on Earth. Failsafe concludes with a list of useful websites that inform and inspire further exploration.

Failsafe
Saving the Earth from Ourselves
By Ian Prattis
Manor House Publishing, 2008
Paperback, 192 pages

Reviewed by Christopher Titmuss (excerpted with permission from www.resurgence.org)

Touch the Earth
By Joe Reilly
CD, 40 minutes

Reviewed by Nicole Brossman

Touch the Earth showcases true genre diversity, taking listeners through an intriguing landscape of rock, hip-hop, country, eco-rock, and meditative balladry. Reilly’s honest voice and consistent message have the unique ability to pull the eclectic mix together. With his Native American heritage, roots and upbringing in contemporary Catholic folk music, ever-deepening understanding of life through Buddhist meditation practice, and academic studies in environmental justice and racism, Joe Reilly is able to unite people across diverse lines of race, class, gender, age, religion, ability, and musical genre.

While listening to Touch the Earth, listeners are able to engage in lyrical discussions of ecological cycles, meditation, global warming, war, and spirituality with an open mind. Reilly’s music strengthens community while embracing diversity, inspiring listeners to experience the interconnection with one another and their environment, and inviting them to look deeper and connect with the positive aspects in their own nature. This is exemplified when he asks, in the title song, “Where’s the Earth?,” then answers, “in your hands, underneath your feet right where you stand…. It’s what you eat. Take off your shoes and socks and sink your feet in the mud of the Earth, it’s the blood of your birth.”

Reilly is a practitioner in the Plum Village tradition, and practices with the Huron River Sangha in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He also practices at Deer Park Monastery, where he received the Five Mindfulness Trainings in 2004, with the Dharma name True Faith of the Heart. He has visited Plum Village twice, and wrote many of the songs on Touch the Earth while he was there. It’s clear from the first track of the album, when Reilly sings “Keep it E-A-S-Y,” that his songwriting invites listeners to smile, laugh, and sing along with him. Reilly’s creativity brings both humor and depth to things that seem very ordinary. Through his songs we learn that a tree, a tomato, a guitar, and a human being are not separate and isolated.
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Happiness
Essential Mindfulness Practices

by Thich Nhat Hanh

This is the first complete collection of all key practices developed and adapted by Thich Nhat Hanh. Encouraging readers to be intelligent and skillful in their practice, he outlines the essential steps by which we can all obtain real and lasting happiness. Happiness is an easy-to-understand and invaluable tool for change for both seasoned Buddhist practitioners and lay readers interested in bettering their lives through full awareness.

“Mindfulness is the energy of being aware and awake to the present moment. It is the continuous practice of touching life deeply in every moment of daily life. To be mindful is to be truly alive, present, and at one with those around you and with what you are doing.” —Thich Nhat Hanh

Paperback | $12.95 US ($16.95 CDN)

Wonderland
The Zen of Alice

by Daniel Doen Silberberg

A n exceptionally original riff on Alice in Wonderland. Daniel Silberberg’s Wonderland uses Lewis Carroll’s classic story as a jumping-off point to convey the Zen concept of “One Mind.” With a lively mix of tone, quotation, and layering, he references everything from Dogen and the Diamond Sutra to Kill Bill and ketchup, creating a unique contribution to contemporary American Zen that honors its historic roots while striking out into fresh areas.

“Down-to-earth, funny, insightful, and unique. Highly recommended.” —Dono Geenko Merzel, author of Big Mind—Big Heart

Paperback | $12.95 US ($16.95 CDN)

Anh’s Anger
by Gail Silver, Illustrated by Christiane Krömer

Children experience anger on a regular basis but lack the coping skills to guide them through these difficult moments. In Anh’s Anger, a five year old becomes enraged when his playtime is interrupted. When Grandfather suggests that he “sit with his anger,” Anh discovers a positive method by which to work through his feelings. This remarkable book teaches children to both acknowledge and resolve their difficult emotions, making it an invaluable tool for parents and teachers alike.

“Anh’s Anger reminds us that anger is part of all of us and that mindful sitting and breathing can help transform it. Both adults and children will benefit from learning how to change an unhappy situation into a joyful one.” —Thich Nhat Hanh
