

# Buddhism Responding to the Needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

## Helping the Buddha to turn the Dharma Wheel in the West

### Introduction

In this new century and new millennium, we have a great opportunity for Buddhism. During the last 100-200 years, the seeds of Buddhism have been sown in the West, and we have seen them begin to blossom. Buddhism initially was introduced to the West more on the intellectual level of ideas and concepts. Now we can see it beginning to take root in our practice.

One of the things that Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh and his community of monks and nuns in Plum Village have contributed in the last 30 years, is to bring the teachings from the theoretical to the applied level. We have experienced this movement in many areas. The techniques we use are based on the sutras on the Full Awareness of Breathing, the Four Establishments of Mindfulness and Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone, and on key principles of Mahayana, implemented through the Zen tradition. So our core teachings and practice include the three traditions: original Buddhism as expressed in the sutras just mentioned; the interpretations of the Mahayana tradition; and the Zen tradition as expressed in the way we actually apply the teachings to our daily life.

We have offered these teachings and practices at all different levels of society, from the individual and the family to various larger segments. Our efforts have found success, and we are happy to share this experience with our sisters and brothers of other traditions. We hope that those of other traditions will help us by shining the light of their experience and insight on us and how we can do better. If other traditions think our way is beneficial, we welcome them to take these methods into new and different areas.

### Methods of Practice Taught by Ven Thich Nhat Hanh:

The Sutras on the Full Awareness of Breathing, on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, and on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone

The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing (*Anapanasati Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya* 118; see Appendix 1) is the foundation of Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh's ("Thay's") teaching in the West. A few years into his monastic life and studies, Thay was very happy to find the teachings of the Buddha recorded in the sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing. The sutra shows us how to be aware of what is happening in the four main areas of our life (our body, our feelings, our mental formations, and our perceptions), so that we can live our life deeply. The insight we get from doing this liberates us from many afflictions such as fear, anger, and craving. When Thay discovered this sutra, he felt he was the happiest man in the world, as if he had found a goldmine. He has continued to practice the teachings of this sutra for the sixty or so years that have gone by since then. According to Thay's understanding and insight,

the sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing is a very essential practice for any Buddhist. It is a very safe and very easy way for anyone, even a child, to enter into Buddhist meditation.

The sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing has four sets of exercises concerning the spiritual development of our body, our feelings, our mental formations, and our perceptions. Each of the four sets contains four main exercises. The structure of these exercises is similar from one set to the other, and traces the development of our awareness of each object of meditation. The structure begins with the awareness of the object; then that awareness develops into concentration; and concentration gives rise to liberation.

For example, for the first set of exercises, which concerns the body, the Buddha begins with awareness of the breath. The breath is a bridge between our body and mind. When we become aware of our breath, we begin to harmonize the mind and the body. After a few minutes of practice, the mind and body become unified. As we continue to maintain our awareness, we can learn to relax our body, allowing our body to rest and recover from stress and tension, and this makes healing possible. Based on this understanding, Plum Village has developed the practice of deep relaxation, and the technique of scanning the body to bring awareness to each part. As we scan through, we learn to embrace each part of the body with the energy of mindfulness and help it to release tension and to heal.

The same technique applies to the transformation of our mental formations. We begin to be aware of our mental formations, and whatever mental formation arises in our mind will be embraced, calmed, and ultimately transformed, thanks to the energy of mindfulness. Slowly, slowly, when our mind is calm enough, it reaches concentration. The mind is focused, not wandering around, and eventually that mental formation is liberated. Our mind is free, not dominated or controlled or burdened by that mental formation.

The exercises given by the Buddha in the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing are brief -- for each set there are only four exercises -- but with this understanding and insight, we are able to develop many exercises. The exercises do not stay stuck in formality; they enter into our daily life in a very natural way. They and our earlier spiritual ancestors have devised *gathas* (practice verses) to support mindfulness in daily life that not only are very useful and easy to apply, but in fact are rooted deeply in the sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing.

Let us take, for example, the gatha “in/out, deep/slow, calm/ease, smile/release, present moment/wonderful moment.” In this exercise, we begin to shine our awareness on the in-breath and thus giving rise to the energy of mindfulness, and we say to ourselves “breathing in, I know I’m breathing in;” then, “breathing out, I know I’m breathing out.” The exercise is then shortened to two key words, “in/out,” and from there our body and mind naturally move into the state of deeper and slower breathing. This is a reflection of our mind being able to settle, calm, and relax. The practice bears further fruit with feeling calm and at ease. We are able to recognize that fruit so that another fruit comes to us, “breathing in, I smile; breathing out, I release.” Because we have been able to stop, our mind becomes very clear and we get in touch with the positive elements of life. With the practice of “breathing in, I am in

the present moment; breathing out I see this moment is a wonderful moment,” we see life in its true essence in the here and now. In Plum Village, we use mindfulness practice songs to help us remember the gathas and use them in our daily life.

Please stop reading now for a moment; sit up straight, but comfortably; relax; and practice with us.

The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 10*; see Appendix 2) goes together with the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing, helping us to live deeply the present moment and to understand life in that moment. The Four Establishments of Mindfulness help us to deepen our meditation on the four aspects of our being (body, feelings, mental formations and perceptions). They lead us to discover the oneness of the subject of perception and the object of perception, so that we can come to a true understanding of the teaching of the Manifestation Only school of Buddhism. It helps us deepen our insight into the three Dharma seals of non-self, impermanence and nirvana. When we are able to understand these features of the Dharma and apply them continuously in our daily life, we have a chance to attain full liberation.

The exercises prescribed by the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing and the Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness can be used when offering guided meditation for beginners who don't know what to do during sitting or walking meditation. We have developed a manual for guided meditation, called *The Blooming of a Lotus*, which includes thirty-four guided meditation exercises on various subjects, with commentaries explaining their sources.

Another key sutra in our tradition is the Discourse on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone (*Bhaddekaratta Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 131*; see Appendix 3), in which the Buddha taught us to live fully in the present moment -- the only moment in which life is available. The past has gone, and the future has not yet come. This sutra is a direct link between original Buddhism and the Zen tradition of Master Lin Chi (see Zen Roots section below). To miss the present moment is to miss life. This teaching also was well developed by the Buddha in other sutras, such as the Discourse on Teachings Given to the White-Clad Disciple (*Upasaka Sutra, Madhyama Agama 128*), in which the Buddha pronounced the phrase “dwelling happily in the present moment” (*drstadharmasukhavihari, 现法乐住*) at least five times. This teaching plays a very important role in our tradition and has developed into the Seal of Plum Village (discussed in more detail below).

## Mahayana principles

In Plum Village, the mind and body are one reality. Our practice does not exclude the body from the mind. The calming and transformation of the body lead to the calming and transformation of the mind; and calming and transforming the mind leads to calming and transformation of the body. So our way of interpreting and applying the sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing is based on the Mahayana teaching that mind and body are one.

Our afflictions and liberation also are one; they inter-are. We can never have a transformation where there is no affliction. Afflictions are the very basis of our transformation. Liberation is the process of understanding deeply the nature and roots of our afflictions. In the Plum Village teaching, there is only transformation; there is no termination of afflictions, only transformation from ill-being to well-being. The existence of well-being is based on the existence of ill-being. Without ill-being, there can be no well-being. In the past, people have thought that we had to terminate our afflictions, completely end them, in order for liberation to manifest; but in fact, it is possible to have joy and happiness in this very moment even if there is still some affliction there as well.

Without a boat, even a small pebble will sink quickly into a river; but with a boat, you can carry tons of rock and it will not sink. It's possible to enjoy happiness even though there are still pebbles of afflictions in our body and mind. Another feature of Plum Village practice is the central importance of the Sangha, which is like the boat. If we allow ourselves to be carried by a sangha, then even if we still have suffering in our body and mind, thanks to the practice of the sangha we will not sink, we still will be able to go through life. Transformation is a process that happens day by day. There is no such thing as a completely self-contained nirvana. Nirvana is a state of mind in which we can see into the nature of reality. The mind can be free even though there are still seeds of afflictions remaining in our *alaya vijñana*. The teaching on Manifestation Only is used extensively in our tradition as a foundation for understanding these transformations at the base of our consciousness.

Together with the implementation of Mahayana teachings, in Plum Village we emphasize a strong dimension of social engagement. During the war in Vietnam, Thay brought Buddhism "to the streets." When there is so much suffering in the world, the Buddha can not simply remain in the temple; he must go out into the street to help people. For this reason, Thay founded a new Buddhist order, the Order of Interbeing, with Mindfulness Trainings (precepts) that applied the teachings to war situations. Later it was developed more broadly for social engagement and service, mainly social service. The Order of Interbeing very much embodies the bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism. (See Appendix 4 for text of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing.) To bring more ethical guidelines for responsibility in society, to fulfill the ideals of the Order of Interbeing, Order members are asked to practice strongly the 5 Mindfulness Trainings, i.e. the five precepts given by the Buddha for laypeople.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings have been rewritten by Plum Village in a modern way, so people in modern society can easily accept and understand the teaching and be able to apply it in their daily life (see Appendix 5 for this text). For example, in the Fifth Mindfulness Training, we have expressed the larger concept of mindful consumption, which includes mindful consumption of magazines, books, and TV in addition to not taking drugs or alcohol to protect our body. UNESCO essentially adopted, with very little change, these Mindfulness Trainings and promulgated them in the form of the UNESCO Manifesto 2000, which, by 21 February 2006, was signed by 75 847 655 (close to 76 million) people all over the world (see Appendix 6).

## Zen Roots, and the Plum Village Dharma Seal

Thay is in the 42<sup>nd</sup> generation of Zen Master Lin Chi; we, his students, are in the 43<sup>rd</sup> generation. In the 35<sup>th</sup> generation of Master Lin Chi there was Master Lieu Quan, who began a new, Vietnamese dharma line of which Thay belongs to the 8<sup>th</sup> generation, and we his students to the 9<sup>th</sup> generation. The majority of Vietnamese Buddhists belong to the Lieu Quan dharma line.

In Plum Village, our practice carries a lot of Zen aspects, especially our focus on generating mindfulness in all aspects of daily life, and our reliance on the three trainings of mindfulness (*smṛti*), concentration (*samadhī*) and insight (*prajna*) as the path to liberation. Our tradition is strongly rooted in the teachings of Master Lin Chi, especially the teaching that “to walk on Earth is a miracle” ( 地行神通 ). In many talks, Thay and the monks and nuns of Plum Village have continued Master Lin Chi’s Zen teaching in the form of a new Dharma Seal, which is at the same time a continuation of the Buddha’s phrase, “dwelling happily in the present moment.” Any teaching of Plum Village must bear the Dharma Seal, “I have arrived, I am home.”

This Dharma Seal is saying that we can touch nirvana, or the Pure Land, here and now, in the present moment. We don’t have to search for a Pure Land that is far from us in space or in the future. The Pure Land is available to us 24 hours a day. The question is: Are we available to the Pure Land? It is not a separate reality from suffering. We believe that “pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.”

This understanding is very useful for social action. In normal daily life, people might encounter a lot of difficulties; but as soon as they are able to return to their practice, to the awareness of breathing, right there they can be in touch with the freshness and coolness of nirvana. Nirvana has the capacity to cool, to extinguish the fire of afflictions in our body and mind; and as soon as we are able return to awareness of our breathing, in that moment we can touch nirvana deeply.

So, as bodhisattvas, we continue to do the work of transforming society, and as a practical matter we don’t hope to reach a place where there is no suffering. Suffering has to exist as the raw material for the bodhisattva to do the work of transformation. There can not be a Pure Land without suffering. Plum Village has come to a new definition of the Pure Land: where understanding and compassion are, there is the Pure Land. From this Zen perspective on the reality of our suffering and our happiness, we encourage people to maintain their practice in every moment of their daily life, continuously. Whether sitting, walking, sleeping, or engaging in any other kind of activity, we all are encouraged to touch the Pure Land in every moment as we practice walking in mindfulness, sitting meditation, listening to the sound of the bell, and mentally reciting various gathas for various activities. Plum Village has introduced the portable Pure Land -- just like a portable phone (or: instant coffee -- instant Pure Land). We can have a Pure Land, instantly, wherever we go!

Practicing contemplation and action together, we base our actions only on the ground of stability, clarity and compassion. Then every action can be right action. We can build a temple, work in a hospital, or start a business, but we do not lose our stability, clarity and compassion to projects and stress.

## Building Monastic Community

In Plum Village, we believe that in order for Buddhism to take root in the West, there must be a very strong monastic community. So far, in Western Buddhism the building of monastic community has not been emphasized, due to the decline of monastic culture in the West. Most people in the West do not look on monastic community, whether Christian or otherwise, as a place of refuge; hence Buddhism has entered the West primarily through the laity rather than through monastics. In Plum Village we believe that, for lay Buddhism to develop and grow, there must be a monastic culture existing in parallel, to hold the practice and to form the foundation on which Buddhism can enter into the society.

We have tried in the last 30 years to build a monastic community based strongly on *brotherhood and sisterhood*. Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh has observed that if we do not structure the monastic community as a family, we will not be able to last very long. Historically, in Asian countries, most monastic communities are structured like blood families with an elder monk acting like a father, an elder nun like a spiritual mother, elder brothers and sisters, and younger spiritual brothers, sisters, sons and daughters.

In our monastic community, we do not practice so much devotion, or teaching the lay people to pray to the Buddha to solve their problems. We try to develop our understanding and insight so that *meditation and social service* are the core of our monastic life. We still have the religious aspect; but it is very minimal. We do not perform a lot of ceremonies. We have a lot of meditation in our daily life – sitting, walking, playing or working. All aspects of our life are viewed as meditations in which we stop and look deeply.

During the last 20 years, we have tried our best to update the *Pratimoksha* that has been handed down to us through thousands of years. In 2003, during a trip to Korea, we were able to release a first draft Revised Pratimoksha to help monastics to practice in modern times. We have received a lot of input from monks and nuns of different traditions. A final revised Pratimoksha has been published since then, and is available on our website, [www.plumvillage.org](http://www.plumvillage.org). We have kept the structure of the traditional Pratimoksha according to our tradition which is in the Dharmagupta school; but many precepts have been rewritten to help protect monks and nuns encountering the challenges posed by 21<sup>st</sup> century society. For example, we have added provisions concerning the skillful use of motor vehicles, mobile phones, the Internet, e-mail, and so on.

In our community, while the importance of seniority is very much respected, the hierarchical element of monastic life has been reduced to a minimum and the more democratic *Sanghakarman procedure* is used for decision-making in all aspects of community life. This approach is actually closer to the tradition of the original Sangha. The role of the abbot is to take care of the spiritual life of the members of the community, rather than being consumed in administrative tasks. A “caretaking council” composed of younger brothers or sisters of the community oversees the day to day operations of the community, and a dharma teacher council is responsible for guiding all matters concerning the practice of the community; but all final decisions

are in the hands of the bhikshu or bhikshuni council. These fully ordained monks or nuns are the ultimate governing body of the community.

In our community, we transform together as one sangha body. We do not emphasize so much the career or progress of the individual. The most important element of community life is the cultivation of real brotherhood and sisterhood. Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh has said in his more than sixty years as a monk, he has found there is no higher principle or ideology than brotherhood and sisterhood. Fame or other forms of success are not worth trading for brotherhood and sisterhood.

It is in this spirit that we practice *shining light*, a very sincere sharing offered to each member from all the other members of the community concerning the strengths and weaknesses in that member's practice. Every year, we practice the three-month rains retreat during the winter season. Traditionally, shining light is offered at the Pavarana ceremony at the end of the rains retreat from just one community member to another. In Plum Village, each member receives shining light from all other members of the community, and we take the time necessary to accomplish this. Then, at the Pavarana ceremony, a shining light letter summarizing the insights shared by the whole community is given. It is a very deep practice to receive so much wisdom from the eyes of the whole Sangha. In Buddhist tradition, we have spoken of the Buddha eyes and the Dharma eyes, but not yet of the Sangha eyes. In Plum Village we are developing the understanding and action of Sangha eyes. The Sangha eyes contain the Buddha eyes and the Dharma eyes.

Due to the needs of modern society, monastic *dharma teachers* are not enough to satisfy the demand for receiving the teachings. In the past twenty years, we have trained lay as well as monastic practitioners to become dharma teachers in our tradition. We have transmitted the lamp of wisdom to nearly 200 monastic and lay teachers. The dharma teachers are trained, not to lead ceremonies, but to have the understanding and depth in their practice to be able to help people transform their suffering. Our lay dharma teachers are in many countries. We have approximately 700 local sanghas practicing all around the world, and most of them do not have a dharma teacher to lead their practice. Hence there is a great need for dharma teachers everywhere.

### Social Service: Rural Development, Care for the Dying

When we have worked in rural development, we have learned not to impose our urban knowledge on people. Even if we are engineers or doctors, we need to look and listen deeply to see how people can heal themselves and their situation. Then we try to adapt and add our knowledge and experiences to what they already have. We help people to help themselves; we don't just throw money at them and say, "Here, take this and set up a medical center." We come to learn, and build from the strengths that are already there. The question we ask is, "Can we do something here, using the knowledge of the village elders and experts, to help them set up their own school or medical center?" If they are blocked in some way, then we offer proposals for them to discuss. When they say they need money, we ask, can we find materials from here? How about a bamboo thatch-roof school? Our financial aid is just for the last

part, and this way, people feel it is their own project and they will care for it. It is a true cooperation between trained experts and the local people.

When we have practiced and taught about caring for the dying, we don't advocate describing some kind of paradise to which the dying person is going. We remind the person of what is wonderful from the life they have lived, because the Buddha said that when we leave this body, we take with us the consequences of our actions. If the person can speak, we ask him or her to tell us what were the most wonderful things in his or her life, so we can water the person's good seeds, to be carried forward upon leaving this life. We revisit positive times with them, such as when they saved living beings. We show them that the talents that manifested in their own life are not now lost, but already have been reborn in new forms in their sons and daughters, and they can see they don't have to die for this rebirth to take place. In this way, many people have been able to die peacefully and lightly.

### Bringing the Practice and the Pure Land to People in All Walks of Life

Over the past 30 years, Plum Village has offered many, many retreats to bring this portable Pure Land -- based on the practice of meditation techniques from original Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhist ideals of service, and concrete practices from Zen Buddhism -- to every corner of society. We are in the process of creating a new book about this work of engaged Buddhism, which we will summarize here.

#### Summer and other regular retreats

Every year, Plum Village organizes a four-week *summer opening* which attracts thousands of people -- old and young, couples, families with children, etc. -- from more than 40 countries to come and practice with us. The retreatants are required to stay for at least one week so they can really stop and calm themselves, for transformation to be possible. Every week, Thay, plus one other dharma teacher in rotation, each give one dharma talk each day, in languages that rotate between English, French, and Vietnamese with simultaneous translation into many languages including German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. People are guided in different practices like sitting meditation, listening to the bell, walking meditation, awareness of breathing, deep relaxation, touching the Earth (prostrations), listening to dharma talks, watering positive seeds in their *alaya vijnana*, recognizing and transforming negative habit energies, communicating compassionately with their loved ones, practicing Beginning Anew to express skillfully their difficulties with their beloved, stopping and looking deeply. (For more details on our more innovative practices such as listening to the bell, touching the Earth, Beginning Anew, and hugging meditation, see Appendix 7 for excerpts from our orientation booklet describing these practices.)

One of the strongest aspects of Plum Village practice is the *dharma discussion*, in which our lay friends meet in a smaller group and share their joys and their difficulties with other members of the sangha. We have learned that the power of deep listening by the sangha -- truly being there, present, in silence and allowing the person to share deeply from their heart -- brings a great deal of healing and deep transformation to our retreatants. We also have in each week a festival, in which



retreatants can express themselves, enjoy the present moment, and recognize and cultivate the seeds of joy in themselves together with the community.

The majority of new retreatants request formal *transmission of the Five Mindfulness Trainings* and commit themselves to bringing the practice back home with them. They are encouraged to come together to recite the precepts regularly to keep the practice growing. Many people begin to have the seeds of bodhisattvas flowering in them and join an existing local sangha, or start a new one.

In Plum Village, we offer our lay friends a considerable amount of *contact to learn from our monastics*. We do not hire staff to work for us; all the monks and nuns organize themselves and the lay retreatants into different working teams to make the retreat possible. Working alongside the monastics as they practice mindfully walking, working, listening deeply, and using loving speech, the lay people receive the dharma in a very natural way. Monastics also offer *consultations* to lay friends who need more specific guidance in dealing with very difficult situations in their lives, such as divorce, conflict among family members, physical or sexual abuse, death, grief and severe depression.

In Plum Village, we believe that the dharma is not complicated; it can be easily accessible, even to *children*. In the first twenty minutes of each of his dharma talks in the summer, Thay introduces an aspect of practice to children in a very gentle and simple way that the children can understand. The children are seated in the very front rows of the Dharma hall, to help Thay give the most appropriate teachings by receiving their attention directly. We have seen that children are capable of receiving the Dharma even more naturally than adults, who come with a lot of their own knowledge and life experience which can prevent them from fully receiving the Buddha's teachings.

Later, in groups, we share with the children ways of implementing the teachings offered in the morning, through various activities. We usually share about the importance of fostering a sense of inclusiveness among the group of children, and a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. We start with a "core" group of children who already have practiced in Plum Village for some years; they help guide the other children by playing the role of elders taking care of the younger ones. This helps create strong bonds among the members of the group, as well as mutual recognition of each other's values and talents. Everyone is offered a space to express himself and to be listened to, thus recovering a sense of social integration often lacking among the children in the West. We always use stories and different kinds of play to convey the essence of the practice to the young ones.

The practice of the *pebble meditation* is a very effective one that is always introduced to the children in a Dharma talk. We go for a walk, searching for four nice pebbles for each person. These pebbles will represent, respectively, a flower, a mountain, water, and space. Each of these four elements symbolizes a quality that helps guide our sitting meditation and make it more vivid. The flower represents the capacity for freshness within us; the mountain, our solidity; water, the clear mirroring of every thing just as it is; and space, the freedom that we experience in meditation.

We also transmit the two trainings for children, also called the “*Two Promises*” (see Appendix 8). These are the two main precepts about developing understanding and compassion to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. At the beginning of the same weekly ceremony in which adults will receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings, children formally take refuge in the Three Jewels and receive the Two Promises in the presence of their parents, friends and the whole Sangha.

Singing practice is another important and joyful aspect of our community, and it allows children to incorporate the practice easily through singing dharma songs about breathing in and out and seeing oneself as a fresh flower, a solid mountain, and so on.

We try to create opportunities for parents and children to implement the practice together, planting seeds for them to continue their practice back home. Practices such as inviting the bell to sound and listening deeply to the bell, walking meditation, eating in silence, juice & tea meditation, and Beginning Anew (“watering” the “flowers” in one another), help families a great deal to recover and strengthen harmony and trust. In fact, we feel it is crucial to involve the parents in the program as much as possible.

At the beginning of their week in Plum Village, many children who have come for the first time are shocked and upset to be in a place with no television or electronic games. By the end of the week, many do not want to leave Plum Village at all, and they want to come back. Upon returning home, they often help their parents come back to their practice, e.g. by inviting a bell to sound when a difficult or tense situation arises in the family.

For *teenagers*, we encourage them to reflect, before and immediately after their arrival in Plum Village, about what they may be seeking in coming here and what is relevant and meaningful in their lives or in a path of practice. We do our best to help them feel at ease, such as by housing them together in a large room and/or special camping area reserved just for them. We invite them to join the Sangha’s work by watering our small trees, bushes and flowers, working in small groups every evening after dinner. This helps them to have a sense of sisterhood/brotherhood, responsibility and solidarity, as well as a feeling that they are really at home and can help care for that home. In our contacts with teenagers and young adults, we have observed how much they need to feel responsible and trusted. Teens likewise appreciate being involved in decisions regarding the group. They like, for example, to help make decisions on the schedule they will be following for the retreat.

Every morning after the first Dharma talk, teen boys and girls are together in one group. We play games, share dharma discussions, or go for a mindful walk. In the afternoons and evenings, teen boys and girls each practice and play in their own respective groups. We nurture our mindfulness and joy by doing artwork together, singing, and being out in nature. Artwork is especially appropriate at the end of the week as a way of encouraging teens to express the experiences and feelings that they had during their time in Plum Village. We call upon our adult retreatants with experience in art, theater, dance, music and many other endeavors, to come and share their skills with the teens. We also may like to share concrete practices for relating well with our parents and improving communication.

A few examples of activities we share with teens:

- Arranging a space together in a hut, making it our own by contributing decorations and artistic creations. We go out for a walk and pick up elements from Nature, then go back to the hut and sit down in a circle. We share what the piece of nature that we brought back means for us. We may invite each person to make a vow or wish or prayer associated with the gift that Mother Earth provided us, whether the vow is expressed silently inside of us, aloud, or written on a piece of paper. Then we place our sacred object on a table where there are flowers, fruits, candles and incense; the whole ensemble becomes an altar.

- “Dharma drama”: play-acting something that has been shared in the group or in the Dharma Talk concerning communication, deep listening, loving speech, etc. We could write down proposed themes on pieces of paper and then pass a basket containing the papers around the circle for everyone to pick a subject. Groups of at least three people may be formed for sharing a skit.

- An outing to a nearby lake is a very important time for teens to spend time together joyfully, outside the monastery. The group has an opportunity to relate to one another and especially to the staff in a very informal way. It is a good chance for teens to play together and then sit down for sharing, and the sharing may come from a deeper place with much sincerity. This is also a very appropriate time to practice “flower watering” in a Beginning Anew session towards the end of the week.

We have been relying on “seed teens,” teenagers who are already strong in the practice and want to participate in the program as part of the staff. They are a very useful bridge between the monastery and the young people coming in from the world outside, promoting good communication and understanding within the group. They are like a kind of glue bonding the different participants in the program, since they are both teenagers and practitioners.

One of the main challenges to keeping a group unified is the language barrier. Affinity groups naturally do form around shared languages; but that doesn’t prevent the possibility of interactions between these groups -- hence the importance of shared activities involving everyone at the same time, such as dharma discussion and mealtimes. It is crucial to provide as much translation as possible, because this is what helps the group to connect by sharing the same reality.

In addition to the large summer retreats, Plum Village offers ongoing opportunities for retreat throughout the year for lay friends to come and practice with us. Every two years, we offer a 21-day retreat with daily talks by Thay in English, going deeply into a particular area of teaching and practice. Many long-term, experienced practitioners, Dharma teachers and Order of Interbeing members come to these retreats. This coming June, Thay and the sangha will offer a 21-day retreat, “The Breath of the Buddha.”

## USA and other tours

Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh and the other monastics travel quite a lot to offer retreats in the United States and in many other countries, including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Germany, Holland, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Macau, Norway, Poland, Russia, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. We frequently offer retreats lasting five to seven days, which are commonly attended by 400 to 1200 people, as well public talks attended by 1,000 to as many as 10,000. At the end of a retreat, there is always a ceremony to transmit the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and as in the summer retreat, a majority of new retreatants, i.e. several hundred people in each retreat, formally receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings and join a sangha or start a new one to continue their practice when they return home.

## Special retreats

The first retreat Thay offered especially for a particular interest group was in 1985, for *environmentalists*. Thay taught from the Diamond Sutra, which says there are four notions that must be released: the notion of self; the notion that humans are higher than other living beings; the notion of living beings; and the notion of a lifespan. He taught that we humans are not higher than trees, plants and minerals, and we have to live in harmony with them. He declared the Diamond Sutra the earliest text advocating environmental protection.

The second special retreat was for *artists*, in 1987. There were musicians, sculptors, painters, writers, and others. Thay believes that the arts can be a much deeper and more powerful means of communication than normal human discourse. He taught that artists have to practice stopping, relaxing, and looking deeply in order to create responsible art. Art can be very destructive, or it can be very constructive; a terrible scene can be depicted in a way that helps people be more responsible and work for change. Thay discussed the Sutra on the Son's Flesh (*Samyukta Agama 373*) as a very important teaching for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He also discussed these themes in a special retreat for members of the film-making industry in Hollywood, in 2003.

Also around 1987, Thay offered a retreat for *children*. There were 100 people there and we invited a lot of “seed” children who already knew the practice, to help the other children want to practice. We paid 20 plane tickets for seed children to attend. Of course, we accepted the children's parents in the retreat as well, so they could learn how to practice with their children. The retreat ended with hugging meditation, and the children were asking their parents why they had to leave.

Next came a retreat for *peace activists*, in 1989. Thay taught that we have to know how to write “love letters” to our lawmakers and president, instead of shouting at them. We can demonstrate in a way that is powerful, while still embodying peace and compassion in our own heart, and touching the same in others instead of their anger.

All of Thay's life work is for peace and for human rights. We always try to bring justice to the world. Thay teaches that we only can change people if we are their friend. If you are their enemy, then even if you are powerful, they may obey while they have to; but they'll find a way to get around you. There is a great deal that we can share about our work for peace and human rights -- too much for us to share in detail for this paper; we hope you can have an opportunity to read one or more of our books on this subject, such as *Love in Action* by Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh and *Learning True Love* by Sister Chan Khong.

An *inter-religious* retreat was offered the following year, with participation from Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, and Buddhist practitioners. We celebrated Passover and Easter, enjoying Easter eggs and practicing the Eucharist and the washing of feet from the Christian tradition. We emphasized that we should not be telling each other how wonderful this or that tradition is, but tasting it through practice. Grape juice was used in place of wine for Catholic and Jewish rituals.

Thay and the sangha offered a retreat for *psychotherapists* in which the first 4 days were entirely silent. Some of the psychotherapists attending had been expecting something more like a professional conference, and were unhappy with the silent time at first. The purpose of the silence was to help them calm their thinking and restore their stillness and clear mind, so they could be empty enough to listen to their clients, understand their suffering, and then offer them a truly insightful prescription for healing. Thay encouraged them to use whatever instrument is appropriate, and not to be caught in the doctrines of this school or that school of psychology. By the end of the retreat, the psychotherapists had experienced deep transformation enabling them to see that the "buddha" in each of them could help them to help their patients. Thay also spoke against the practice of pillow beating as a means of "venting" anger, and now it seems more psychologists agree that "venting" just waters the seeds of violence, rehearses negative mental formations and actually makes it more likely that someone will act violently.

Thay has offered several retreats in the USA for *veterans of the war* in Vietnam. The first such retreat was very challenging to offer. Thay explained to the veterans that they are at the white-hot tip of the burning candle, but the whole collective consciousness had given rise to the war and is responsible for what happened, not only these veterans. He asked everyone to find a tree, sit by it, write down their own experience and shine light on their compassion or their anger, and give the writing to Thay so his talks would be relevant for them. When Thay and Sr. Chan Khong read the letters, they suffered a lot, because there were a number of descriptions of cruel acts against Vietnamese people including children. One man described how, after shooting for three days from a helicopter, he saw all the human bodies strewn about like logs. He was so shocked because while in the helicopter, he never imagined it was like that. At the retreat he saw a very young Vietnamese woman who, he said, looked like the people he had killed. Another revealed that he had not been able to practice walking meditation with the sangha because, when he looked at the Vietnamese monastics, he was afraid of being ambushed by them.

Thay taught the veterans that when they take the Five Mindfulness Trainings and make the vow not to kill, they are transformed. He said, “You may have killed a child before; but you can save five children from death every day, now, in the present moment. Do the opposite of what you did before.” Thay asked them to write down their painful experiences and then burn these papers to represent their new freedom, that they were new persons. He used a flower to sprinkle water on everyone, to wash them clean. Then they practiced hugging meditation with Vietnamese. All the Vietnamese Americans who lived nearby were invited to come and participate, and the veterans practiced hugging them to feel that the Vietnamese could forgive them and now they were friends. Three retreats just for veterans were held; now the program for veterans is offered as one part of our larger, general interest retreats.

A retreat was offered in Plum Village especially for *business leaders*. Thay told a very powerful and true story about a businessman who was always asking his wife and family to wait a little longer for him to be there for them, because his enterprise was in a certain stage where it could not be managed without him. He said that maybe after two or three years, he would be able to spend more time with them. The man ended up dying young, before that stage ever arrived – and the company replaced him within hours. This story was shared to wake up the retreatants and bring home the importance of living the reality of impermanence.

Thay taught the retreatants that we have to live in harmony with those few people who are closest to us, then widen our circle of concern out to our five, or twenty, or even one thousand employees. He said that business leaders should give their employees more time to eat their lunch, and they should eat with them, and even consider offering them total relaxation practice at the workplace. Employees should be treated like one’s own partners, and business leaders should show care and concern about their employees’ lives and families. Recently Thay met a Chinese doctor who had been too indifferent to his employees, and one of them became disgruntled and poisoned the doctor and his family. Only the doctor himself survived. Three months after the retreat for business leaders ended, many reported that it continued to have positive effects on their way of relating with their employees and others. Thay’s talks at this retreat were made into a book, *Power*, which has already sold 200,000 copies in Korea.

Several years ago, Thay went to offer a day of mindfulness practice to *prisoners* at a maximum-security prison in Maryland, USA. We had to go through sixteen doors, each one locking heavily behind us as soon as we had passed through it. The inmates listened to Thay describe the practice of eating mindfully, after which the food was served. They gulped it down very fast; then they looked at the monastics still eating, mindfully; perhaps that may have made more of an impression on them than the teaching in words. Many of the men appeared to be transformed. They asked, “Can I really change my life?” and they sought to start doing good things already from right there in prison.

Many things were not permitted to be brought into the prison with us, including recording devices such as the video camera we normally use to record Thay’s teachings. So we asked the officials to record the teachings with their own

equipment. We asked permission for Thay to bring in his own tiny mini-disc recorder, which we normally use as a backup. At first they refused, but then they allowed it. This was a good thing, because their equipment didn't work, and from our recording came the small book *Be Free Where You Are* which has been translated into several languages already.

During his tour offering retreats around the USA in 2003, Thay offered a retreat that was initially intended specifically for police officers, prison officials, and others working in *law enforcement*. The target audience then was broadened to include others in public service, particularly school teachers. In his talks, Thay emphasized that law enforcement workers need to practice peace, to practice walking mindfully and relaxingly to calm themselves, and to take care of their family and not treat them like underlings. The officers disagreed with Thay about walking relaxingly, saying they could get shot at from any side in dangerous areas of a city. Thay then recommended that when they go home to their own neighborhood, they practice walking meditation before going in to see their family, their foundation of peace.

We learned the shocking statistic that many more police officers are shot by their own hand than in service. The stress of their jobs also pushes many of them to drink heavily. We proposed that they create a kind of spiritual family at their workplace, and that they read and discuss the Five Mindfulness Trainings, to make life more centered and meaningful. This way, they could have greater freshness, friendship and connection with their co-workers, like a family supporting each other. To help these public employees to do all of this in an absolutely non-sectarian way (so as to preserve the separation of church and state mandated by the U.S. Constitution), we performed a ceremony to transmit the Five Mindfulness Trainings with all "Buddhist" language removed from the precepts and the ceremony.

For the *school teachers* at this and other retreats, Thay has said that the school is like a second chance for children who come from broken families to receive the nurturing they need. Teachers must practice listening to their children, offering them not only knowledge, but also compassion and the appropriate teaching that each individual child needs. Thay encouraged teachers to use skillful means to introduce mindfulness practice in the classroom, like designating one child each day to clap her hands every fifteen minutes, for everyone to stop what they are doing and just breathe.

On the same 2003 tour, Thay also held a very special retreat for *members of the U.S. Congress*. Thay spoke to them about the circles of concern, starting with one's own nuclear family and then making the staff like another family, and so on. The members of Congress are so busy, flying back and forth between their home districts and Washington D.C. When they get to their office, there are so many things they must quickly read and resolve. Many of the members who participated in this retreat said that practicing walking meditation from their office to the voting place was the most helpful tool for them.

In various retreats, Thay has spoken to the concerns of *parents*. He has said that many single mothers may think they have to find a man to help support them and their

child; but often, searching for this can make things even more complicated than one's own task of having to be both father and mother. Thay taught these single mothers to focus more on their own practice and on making themselves strong, solid, happy and peaceful; then, if the partnership comes by itself, that is good. To all parents, Thay has said that children are the parents' continuation into the future, and parents are the children's continuation back into times past. In reality we do not have a separate self. The input coming into this generation of children from society is so different from the input into their parents' generation; so even when a parent's weakness manifests in the child, it may not be recognized because it looks different, it manifests in a different way. When you look deeply, you can only say, "You look like me."

At a retreat held in Oldenburg, Germany, a few years ago, Thay spoke about the importance of reconciling with family members from whom we've grown apart, before it is too late. It was the fifth day of the retreat, and he encouraged people to reconcile with family members by midnight that night. For those who had family members there at the retreat with them, it could be done in person. For those whose family members were far away (the majority), Thay authorized them to use their cell phones to call and heal their relationships. The following day, four men came and reported to Thay that, thanks to the teachings on deep listening and the practices at the retreat, they had been able to use their cell phones the previous night and reconcile with their fathers – something they had not believed possible before attending the retreat. We are sure there were many others who also reconciled, but were too shy to come and report it to Thay. This is something that occurs, in one way or another, with every retreat we offer.

From January to April, 2005, Thay was able to make an historic return trip to his homeland of *Vietnam*, from which he had been exiled for 40 years. There were many people in the Vietnamese government who were extremely fearful that Thay, and the 100 monastics and 100 lay friends in his delegation, would make demonstrations and disturbances. At Thay's first public lecture, in Hanoi, when our senior monk Thay Phap An arrived one hour before the lecture was to begin, he saw security everywhere, apparently due to fear of a riot breaking out. To the great surprise of Thay and the delegation, only eighteen people were allowed to enter the hall to hear Thay's talk; but Thay spoke just as if there were 300 or 3,000 people in attendance.

After the delegation had conducted a number of visits and talks in various locations, and due to the very patient and compassionate attitude of the delegation in dealing with authorities, the level of the authorities' fear decreased significantly. Thay was permitted to offer a second public lecture, in Saigon, and this time 600 people including government and police officers were invited. At our request, loudspeakers were placed outside the building, and so close to 1,000 people got to listen. Then in Hue, another public talk was organized, with 600 people inside, and speakers outside with thousands of people listening. When the delegation returned to Hanoi, Thay spoke at the political institute, and then one more lecture was organized in a big hotel with 600 invited people in the main room and an overflow area with 200 people.

While in Vietnam, Thay offered the government seven points of recommendation (see Appendix 9) to allow the Buddhist church in Vietnam to heal itself and help reduce the suffering of Vietnamese people due to social ills such as the drug trade. He



proposed mutual acceptance and reconciliation between the two opposing camps of the divided Buddhist church, saying we should discuss as brothers, not shout as enemies. A high monk who used to speak angrily on this subject now speaks kindly. The attitude of the Vietnamese government has changed; it is giving sincere respect and attention to Thay's proposals, and showing much more respect for Buddhism and what it can do to help Vietnamese society. The government has allowed the formation of many local groups of the Buddhist organization that previously did not have government approval.

Just as those men at the retreat in Oldenburg, and so many other retreats, have found that deep listening works on the family level, in Vietnam we found that deep listening is also highly effective at the broader level of society.

## Conclusion

We have presented here some ways of applying core Buddhist teachings to everyday life in modern times. There is still a wealth of Buddhist teachings whose applications are yet to be explored, much work to be done to renew the teachings of the Buddha. The psychology and understanding of our society are different from those in the Buddha's time. Advances in science, technology and medicine have been growing exponentially, and we have gained many new insights into nature. For Buddhism to be relevant and concretely applicable to modern life, there must be a deeper understanding and renewal of the teachings. It is a duty of all Buddhists in modern times to remain true to their roots, but at the same time to bring forth the teachings in a very intelligent way so that the people can accept and benefit from them.

For 2600 years, the Buddhist tradition has developed many techniques of practice. In our small capacity and humble efforts, we have tried, and we see it is possible, to renew Buddhism and bring it into the modern world. We hope this effort will be taken up by all Buddhists. We have only scratched the surface and there is still a long, long way to go. In Plum Village, we see our community as a Buddhist "laboratory" where we experiment with new "medicines." When a medicine is proven effective in our laboratory, we offer it to the world. We have shared in this paper about some of our experiments and techniques we have found to be useful. We invite our sisters and brothers of other traditions to join in this approach, and help the Buddha to turn the Dharma Wheel again, in the West in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Appendix 1:

### Excerpt from the Discourse on the Full Awareness of Breathing

#### Part II

“O bhikkhus, the method of being fully aware of breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will have great rewards 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.

11. ‘Breathing in, I concentrate my mind. Breathing out, I concentrate my mind.’ He or she practices like this.

12. ‘Breathing in, I liberate my mind. Breathing out, I liberate my mind.’ He or she practices like this.

13. ‘Breathing in, I observe the impermanent nature of all dharmas. Breathing out, I observe the impermanent nature of all dharmas.’ He or she practices like this.

14. ‘Breathing in, I observe the disappearance of desire. Breathing out, I observe the disappearance of desire.’ He or she practices like this.

15. ‘Breathing in, I observe cessation. Breathing out, I observe cessation.’ He or she practices like this.

16. ‘Breathing in, I observe letting go. Breathing out, I observe letting go.’ He or she practices like this.

“The Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously according to these instructions, will be rewarding and of great benefit.”

*Anapanasati Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya, 118*

THICH NHAT HANH and the Monks and Nuns of Plum Village, *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, California, 2000, pp. 241-247.

## Appendix 2:

### Excerpt from the Discourse on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness

#### Part I

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when he was living at Kammassadharma, a market town of the Kuru people. The Buddha addressed the bhikkhus, “O bhikkhus.”

And the bhikkhus replied, “Venerable Lord.”

The Buddha said, “Bhikkhus, there is a most wonderful way to help living beings realize purification, overcome directly grief and sorrow, end pain and anxiety, travel the right path, and realize nirvana. This way is the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.

“What are the Four Establishments?”

1. “Bhikkhus, a practitioner remains established in the observation of the body in the body, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.

2. “He remains established in the observation of the feelings in the feelings, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.

3. “He remains established in the observation of the mind in the mind, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.

4. “He remains established in the observation of the objects of mind in the objects of mind, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.

*Satipatthana Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya, 10*

THICH NHAT HANH and the Monks and Nuns of Plum Village, *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, California, 2000, pp. 248-255.

## Appendix 3:

### Discourse on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying at the monastery in the Jeta Grove, in the town of Shravasti. He called all the monks to him and instructed them, “Bhikkhus!” And the bhikkhus replied, “We are here.” The Blessed One taught, “I will teach you what is meant by ‘knowing the better way to live alone.’ I will begin with an outline of the teaching, and then I will give a detailed explanation. Bhikkhus, please listen carefully.” “Blessed One, we are listening.” The Buddha taught:

“Do not pursue the past.  
Do not lose yourself in the future.  
The past no longer is.  
The future has not yet come.  
Looking deeply at life as it is  
in the very here and now,  
the practitioner dwells  
in stability and freedom.  
We must be diligent today.  
To wait till tomorrow is too late.  
Death comes unexpectedly.  
How can we bargain with it?  
The sage calls a person who knows  
how to dwell in mindfulness  
night and day  
‘the one who knows  
the better way to live alone.’

“Bhikkhus, what do we mean by ‘pursuing the past’? When someone considers the way his body was in the past, the way his feelings were in the past, the way his perceptions were in the past, the way his mental formations were in the past, the way his consciousness was in the past; when he considers these things and his mind is burdened by and attached to these things which belong to the past, then that person is pursuing the past.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘not pursuing the past’? When someone considers the way his body was in the past, the way his feelings were in the past, the way his perceptions were in the past, the way his mental formations were in the past, the way his consciousness was in the past; when he considers these things but his mind is neither enslaved by nor attached to these things which belong to the past, then that person is not pursuing the past.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘losing yourself in the future’? When someone considers the way his body will be in the future, the way his feelings will be in the future, the way his perceptions will be in the future, the way his mental formations will be in the future, the way his consciousness will be in the future; when he considers these things and his mind is burdened by and daydreaming about these things which belong to the future, then that person is losing himself in the future.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘not losing yourself in the future’? When someone considers the way his body will be in the future, the way his feelings will be in the future, the way his perceptions will be in the future, the way his mental formations will be in the future, the way his consciousness will be in the future; when he considers these things but his mind is not burdened by or daydreaming about these things which belong to the future, then he is not losing himself in the future.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘being swept away by the present’? When someone does not study or learn anything about the Awakened One, or the teachings of love and understanding, or the community that lives in harmony and awareness; when that person knows nothing about the noble teachers and their teachings, and does not practice these teachings, and thinks, ‘This body is myself; I am this body. These feelings are myself; I am these feelings. This perception is myself; I am this perception. This mental formation is myself; I am this mental formation. This consciousness is myself; I am this consciousness,’ then that person is being swept away by the present.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘not being swept away by the present’? When someone studies and learns about the Awakened One, the teachings of love and understanding, and the community that lives in harmony and awareness; when that person knows about noble teachers and their teachings, practices these teachings, and does not think, ‘This body is myself; I am this body. These feelings are myself; I am these feelings. This perception is myself; I am this perception. This mental formation is myself; I am this mental formation. This consciousness is myself; I am this consciousness,’ then that person is not being swept away by the present.

“Bhikkhus, I have presented the outline and the detailed explanation of knowing the better way to live alone.”

Thus the Buddha taught, and the bhikkhus were delighted to put his teachings into practice.

*Bhaddekaratta Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya, 131*

THICH NHAT HANH and the Monks and Nuns of Plum Village, *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, California, 2000, pp. 234-236.

## Appendix 4:

### The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing

#### The First Mindfulness Training: *Openness*

- Aware of the suffering created by fanaticism and intolerance, we are determined not to be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist teachings are guiding means to help us learn to look deeply and to develop our understanding and compassion. They are not doctrines to fight, kill, or die for.

#### The Second Mindfulness Training: *Nonattachment to Views*

- Aware of the suffering created by attachment to views and wrong perceptions, we are determined to avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. We shall learn and practice non-attachment from views in order to be open to others' insights and experiences. We are aware that the knowledge we presently possess is not changeless, absolute truth. Truth is found in life, and we will observe life within and around us in every moment, ready to learn throughout our lives.

#### The Third Mindfulness Training: *Freedom of Thought*

- Aware of the suffering brought about when we impose our views on others, we are committed not to force others, even our children, by any means whatsoever - such as authority, threat, money, propaganda, or indoctrination - to adopt our views. We will respect the right of others to be different and to choose what to believe and how to decide. We will, however, help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness through compassionate dialogue.

#### The Fourth Mindfulness Training: *Awareness of Suffering*

- Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help us develop compassion and find ways out of suffering, we are determined not to avoid or close our eyes before suffering. We are committed to finding ways, including personal contact, images, and sounds, to be with those who suffer, so we can understand their situation deeply and help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace, and joy.

#### The Fifth Mindfulness Training: *Simple, Healthy Living*

- Aware that true happiness is rooted in peace, solidity, freedom, and compassion, and not in wealth or fame, we are determined not to take as the aim of our life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure, nor to accumulate wealth while millions are hungry and dying. We are committed to living simply and sharing our time, energy, and material resources with those in need. We will practice mindful consuming, not using alcohol, drugs, or any other products that bring toxins into our own and the collective body and consciousness.

#### The Sixth Mindfulness Training: *Dealing with Anger*

- Aware that anger blocks communication and creates suffering, we are determined to take care of the energy of anger when it arises and to

recognize and transform the seeds of anger that lie deep in our consciousness. When anger comes up, we are determined not to do or say anything, but to practice mindful breathing or mindful walking and acknowledge, embrace, and look deeply into our anger. We will learn to look with the eyes of compassion at those we think are the cause of our anger.

The Seventh Mindfulness Training: *Dwelling Happily in the Present Moment*

- Aware that life is available only in the present moment and that it is possible to live happily in the here and now, we are committed to training ourselves to live deeply each moment of daily life. We will try not to lose ourselves in dispersion or be carried away by regrets about the past, worries about the future, or craving, anger, or jealousy in the present. We will practice mindful breathing to come back to what is happening in the present moment. We are determined to learn the art of mindful living by touching the wondrous, refreshing, and healing elements that are inside and around us, and by nourishing seeds of joy, peace, love, and understanding in ourselves, thus facilitating the work of transformation and healing in our consciousness.

The Eighth Mindfulness Training: *Community and Communication*

- Aware that lack of communication always brings separation and suffering, we are committed to training ourselves in the practice of compassionate listening and loving speech. We will learn to listen deeply without judging or reacting and refrain from uttering words that can create discord or cause the community to break. We will make every effort to keep communications open and to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

The Ninth Mindfulness Training: *Truthful and Loving Speech*

- Aware that words can create suffering or happiness, we are committed to learning to speak truthfully and constructively, using only words that inspire hope and confidence. We are determined not to say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people, nor to utter words that might cause division or hatred. We will not spread news that we do not know to be certain nor criticize or condemn things of which we are not sure. We will do our best to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten our safety.

The Tenth Mindfulness Training: *Protecting the Sangha*

- Aware that the essence and aim of a Sangha is the practice of understanding and compassion, we are determined not to use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit or transform our community into a political instrument. A spiritual community should, however, take a clear stand against oppression and injustice and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.

The Eleventh Mindfulness Training: *Right Livelihood*

- Aware that great violence and injustice have been done to our environment and society, we are committed not to live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. We will do our best to select a livelihood that helps realize our ideal of understanding and compassion. Aware of global



economic, political and social realities, we will behave responsibly as consumers and as citizens, not investing in companies that deprive others of their chance to live.

The Twelfth Mindfulness Training: *Reverence for Life*

- Aware that much suffering is caused by war and conflict, we are determined to cultivate nonviolence, understanding, and compassion in our daily lives, to promote peace education, mindful mediation, and reconciliation within families, communities, nations, and in the world. We are determined not to kill and not to let others kill. We will diligently practice deep looking with our Sangha to discover better ways to protect life and prevent war.

The Thirteenth Mindfulness Training: *Generosity*

- Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, we are committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. We will practice generosity by sharing our time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. We are determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. We will respect the property of others, but will try to prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other beings.

The Fourteenth Mindfulness Training: *Right Conduct*

*(For lay members):*

- Aware that sexual relations motivated by craving cannot dissipate the feeling of loneliness but will create more suffering, frustration, and isolation, we are determined not to engage in sexual relations without mutual understanding, love, and a long-term commitment. In sexual relations, we must be aware of future suffering that may be caused. We know that to preserve the happiness of ourselves and others, we must respect the rights and commitments of ourselves and others. We will do everything in our power to protect children from sexual abuse and to protect couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. We will treat our bodies with respect and preserve our vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of our bodhisattva ideal. We will be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world, and will meditate on the world into which we are bringing new beings.

*(For monastic members):*

- Aware that the aspiration of a monk or a nun can only be realized when he or she wholly leaves behind the bonds of worldly love, we are committed to practicing chastity and to helping others protect themselves. We are aware that loneliness and suffering cannot be alleviated by the coming together of two bodies in a sexual relationship, but by the practice of true understanding and compassion. We know that a sexual relationship will destroy our life as a monk or a nun, will prevent us from realizing our ideal of serving living beings, and will harm others. We are determined not to suppress or mistreat our body or to look upon our body as only an instrument, but to learn to handle our body with respect. We are determined to preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of our bodhisattva ideal.

## Appendix 5:

### The Five Mindfulness Trainings

#### The First Mindfulness Training

- Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

#### The Second Mindfulness Training

- Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I will practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

#### The Third Mindfulness Training

- Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

#### The Fourth Mindfulness Training

- Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

#### The Fifth Mindfulness Training

- Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and

society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

## Appendix 6:

### The UNESCO Manifesto 2000

Recognising my share of responsibility for the future of humanity, especially for today's children and those of future generations, I pledge - in my daily life, in my family, my work, my community, my country and my region - to:

1. **“Respect all life.”** Respect the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination and prejudice.
2. **“Reject violence.”** Practice active non-violence, rejecting violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, psychological, economical and social, in particular towards the most deprived and vulnerable such as children and adolescents.
3. **“Share with others.”** Share my time and material resources in a spirit of generosity to put an end to exclusion, injustice and political and economic oppression.
4. **“Listen to understand.”** Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference always to dialogue and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation and the rejection of others.
5. **“Preserve the planet.”** Promote consumer behaviour that is responsible and development practices that respect all forms of life and preserve the balance of nature on the planet.
6. **“Rediscover solidarity.”** Contribute to the development of my community, with the full participation of women and respect for democratic principles, in order to create together new forms of solidarity.

## Appendix 7:

### Excerpt from the orientation booklet, “How to Enjoy Your Stay in Plum Village”

#### *Bells of Mindfulness*

On your arrival you might hear a bell sound and suddenly people around you have stopped still, stopped talking, and stopped moving. It might be the telephone ringing or the clock chiming, or the monastery bell sounding. These are our bells of mindfulness. When we hear the sound of the bell we relax our body and become aware of our breathing. We do that naturally, with enjoyment, and without solemnity or stiffness.

When we hear one of these mindfulness bells ring, we stop all of our conversations and whatever we are doing and bring our awareness to our breathing. The ringing bell has called out to us:

*Listen, listen,  
this wonderful sound brings me back to  
my true home.*

By stopping to breathe and restore our calm and our peace, we become free, our work becomes more enjoyable and the friend in front of us becomes more real. Back home we can use the ringing of our telephone, the local church bells, the cry of a baby, or even the sound of fire engines and ambulances as our bells of mindfulness. With just three conscious breaths we can release the tensions in our body and mind and return to a cool and clear state of being.

#### *Beginning Anew*

To begin anew is to look deeply and honestly at ourselves, our past actions, speech and thoughts and to create a fresh beginning within ourselves and in our relationships with others. At the practice center we practice Beginning Anew as a community every two weeks and individually as often as we like.

We practice Beginning Anew to clear our mind and keep our practice fresh. When a difficulty arises in our relationships with fellow practitioners and one of us feels resentment or hurt, we know it is time to Begin Anew. The following is a description of the four-part process of Beginning Anew as used in a formal setting. One person speaks at a time and is not interrupted during his or her turn. The other practitioners practice deep listening and following their breath.

*1) Flower watering - This is a chance to share our appreciation for the other person. We may mention specific instances when the other person said or did something that we had admired. This is an opportunity to shine light on the other's strengths and contributions to the sangha and to encourage the growth of his or her positive qualities.*

*2) Sharing regrets - We may mention any unskillfulness in our actions, speech or thoughts that we have not yet had an opportunity to apologize for.*

*3) Expressing a hurt - We may share how we felt hurt by an interaction with another practitioner, due to his or her actions, speech or thoughts. (To express a hurt we should first water the other person's flower by sharing two positive qualities*

*that we have truly observed in him or her. Expressing a hurt is often performed one on one with another practitioner rather than in the group setting. You may ask for a third party that you both trust and respect to be present, if desired.)*

*4) Sharing a long-term difficulty & asking for support- At times we each have difficulties and pain arise from our past that surface in the present. When we share an issue that we are dealing with we can let the people around us understand us better and offer the support that we really need.*

The practice of Beginning Anew helps us develop our kind speech and compassionate listening. Begin Anew is a practice of recognition and appreciation of the positive elements within our Sangha. For instance, we may notice that our roommate is generous in sharing her insights, and another friend is caring towards plants. Recognizing others positive traits allows us to see our own good qualities as well.

Along with these good traits, we each have areas of weakness, such as talking out of our anger or being caught in our misperceptions. When we practice “flower watering” we support the development of good qualities in each other and at the same time we help to ease the difficulties in the other person. As in a garden, when we “water the flowers” of loving kindness and compassion in each other, we also take energy away from the weeds of anger, jealousy and misperception.

We can practice Beginning Anew every day by expressing our appreciation for our fellow practitioners and apologizing right away when we do or say something that hurts them. We can politely let others know when we have been hurt as well. The health and happiness of the whole community depends on the harmony, peace and joy that exist between every member in the sangha.

### *Touching the Earth*

The practice of Touching the Earth is to return to the Earth, to our roots, to our ancestors, and to recognize that we are not alone but connected to a whole stream of spiritual and blood ancestors. We are their continuation and with them, will continue into the future generations. We touch the earth to let go of the idea that we are separate and to remind us that we are the Earth and part of Life.

When we touch the Earth we become small, with the humility and simplicity of a young child. When we touch the Earth we become great, like an ancient tree sending her roots deep into the earth, drinking from the source of all waters. When we touch the Earth, we breathe in all the strength and stability of the Earth, and breathe out our suffering- our feelings of anger, hatred, fear, inadequacy and grief.

Our hands join to form a lotus bud and we gently lower ourselves to the ground so that all four limbs and our forehead are resting comfortably on the floor. While we are Touching the Earth we turn our palms face up, showing our openness to the three jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. After one or two times practicing Touching the Earth (*Three Touchings or Five Touchings*), we can already release a lot of our suffering and feeling of alienation, and reconcile with our ancestors, parents, children, or friends.

### *Hugging Meditation*

When we hug, our hearts connect and we know that we are not separate beings. Hugging with mindfulness and concentration can bring reconciliation, healing, understanding, and much happiness. The practice of mindful hugging has helped so

many to reconcile with each other -- fathers with sons, mothers with daughters, friends with friends, and so many others.

We may practice hugging meditation with a friend, our daughter, our father, our partner or even with a tree. To practice, we first bow and recognize the presence of each other. Then we can enjoy three deep conscious breaths to bring ourselves fully there. We then may open your arms and begin hugging. Holding each other for three in-and-out breaths. With the first breath, we are aware that we are present in this very moment and we are happy. With the second breath, we are aware that the other is present in this moment and we are happy as well. With the third breath, we are aware that we are here together, right now on this earth, and we feel deep gratitude and happiness for our togetherness. We then may release the other person and bow to each other to show our thanks.

When we hug in such a way, the other person becomes real and alive. We do not need to wait until one of us is ready to depart for a trip, we may hug right now and receive the warmth and stability of our friend in the present moment. Hugging can be a deep practice of reconciliation.

## Appendix 8:

### The Two Promises

#### The First Promise

- I vow to develop understanding, in order to live peaceably with people, animals, plants, and minerals.

#### The Second Promise

- I vow to develop my compassion, in order to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals.

Young students of the Enlightened One, understanding and love are the two most important teachings of the Buddha. If we do not make the effort to be open, to understand the suffering of other people, we will not be able to love them and to live in harmony with them. We should also try to understand and protect the lives of animals, plants, and minerals and live in harmony with them. If we cannot understand, we cannot love. The Buddha teaches us to look at living beings with the eyes of love and understanding. Please learn to practice this teaching.



## Appendix 9:

### Seven – Point Suggestion of Zen Master Nhat Hanh About the Policy of the Government of Vietnam toward Buddhism

1. The government affirms its willingness to separate the political domain of the State from the religious domain of the Church. These two domains have different areas of services, and neither has the right to interfere with other's affairs. However, both Church and State have to have ethical values, if they do not want to be bankrupt. Therefore, religion can help politics and politics can help religion, and both have to abide by the laws. Religion can offer its insights and can remind politics about the spiritual dimension in both the Executive and the Legislative institutions. Politics can offer its constructive criticism to religions about the degeneration of moral values and abuse of religious authority to seek fame and power. Additionally, the government can support religious institutions in ethical education and practice of religious activities to bring about a healthy society.

In the past during the Lý Dynasty, King Lý Thái Tổ supported Buddhism by building temples and facilities for the Buddhist Congregation, and Zen master Vạn Hạnh advised the King in the economic, cultural, ethical and political arena. However, the King did not control Buddhism and the Zen master did not hold any position in politics.

From now on the Government guarantees that monastics will not be forced to become: members of the national assembly, members of provincial People Committees, members of the Vietnam Fatherland Front or members of any policies party. Monastics involved in politics in such manners transgresses their precepts, lessen the prestige of the Buddhist Sangha, and create an image that the government is using them to control religion.

From now on monastics will not receive medals from the government. Venerable monastics, who have been good advisors and have offered concrete methods which bring benefits to the country and the people, may only received purple Shanghais as token as gratitude.

2. Due to misunderstanding, fear, suspicion and unskillfulness, there have been many regrettable events in the Buddhist community in the last 50 years. These events created quite a few difficulties for both the government and the Buddhist community. To help reconcile existing difficulties, to heal the wounds, to rebuild brotherhood in the Buddhist community, and to establish good communication with the Government, the Government will invite venerable monks and nuns in the Buddhist Sangha to advise both the Executive and Legislative Institutions. Suggested venerable monastics are: (Most Venerable) Trí Quang, Trí Tịnh, Nhật Liên, Huyền Quang, Quảng Độ, Phổ Tuệ, v.v... The Government would like to listen deeply to the insights of venerable monks and nuns in major areas related to Buddhism. The advising monastics can meet for several weeks or several months, at places of their choosing, in any part of the country. They should have ample time and space to contemplate so they can offer concrete suggestions and solutions. The

government will not try to sway their thinking and decisions by any direct or indirect mean. The government would like the venerables monks and nuns to advise on the following aspects:

- a. Concerning the Decrees relating to Religions, which points are appropriate that can be enhanced and which points are not appropriate that need to be revised. The Executive and Legislative Institutions should be informed so these points can be modified. If needed, involved executive and legislative offices will discuss with the advising venerables before modifying these points.
  - b. How to unify the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) in brotherhood and how to put this unified organization out of the interference of political power inside and outside of Vietnam? Please let the Government know about what to do (and what not to do) to support this unification? Two Buddhist Churches carrying on their activities within the law and not being affected by politics is a reality that can be accepted, if both Churches have the conditions to listen to each other's difficulties and aspirations. The government needs to listen to the difficulties in the Buddhist community and the Buddhist community needs to listen to the difficulties that the government is facing. There is nothing that we can not do if we are willing to sit down to talk honestly and directly with each other.
3. To deal with social ills such as crime, prostitution, drug, debauch, and corruption the government's current policy is to establish wards of culture. To accomplish this, the government calls for help from local residents and increases surveillance and punishment, but ruling by law is not enough to deal with these social ills at the root. Do the Buddhist Churches have concrete rule-by-ethic programs to help parents communicate with their children and spouses to communicate with each other, to re-establish happiness in the families so that youths do not have to bury their unhappiness in drug, drinking, debauch, gang, and crime. What can the neighbourhood's temple do to help build and re-establish ethic and trust in the community?
  4. What can the two Buddhist Churches do to help stop the abuse of power within the Buddhist community and in the government, besides public appeal and denouncement? Corruption and power struggle exist not only in political parties, in politics but also in religious institutions. Do venerable monks and nuns have concrete methods to stop the deterioration: of student monks and nuns, of monastics whose only aspirations are to seek and consolidate fame and power, and of members of administrative systems in all levels? In the work of protecting Buddhism, of preventing corruptive members of the Buddhist community who are not abiding the precepts and are manipulating the Buddhist community for their own benefits, the government needs insights of venerable monks and nuns, and vice versa.
  5. The government will order responsible agencies to support the monastics by granting permanent residency to those who would like to join a temple or a monastery to practice, bypassing the 3-month temporary residency requirement. The 3-month temporary residency created bribery and extortion in both religious and government agencies. The government pledges from now

on, the maximum time for issuing passports for monastics is 21 days, like that for other Vietnamese citizens, not six months to two years like before.

6. The trip to Vietnam to visit and to share the practice of Zen Master Nhất Hạnh and the International Buddhist Delegation of Plum Village has not ended, but it has brought about reconciliation, therapy, nourishment, and happiness to Buddhist from the South, Central and North Viet Nam; it has helped mend many broken relationships and helped build brotherhood. Many lay and monastics living in Thua Thien, in Vietnam and abroad, were very happy about the being together again of all the monks from Thua Thien on 22.2.2005 at Tu Hieu temple, to recite the Bihkshu precepts, after 13 years of reciting separately. The conferences given at: National Administrative Institute in Ho Chi Minh, at Ho Chi Minh National Political Institute in Ha Noi, at Committee for Vietnamese Living Abroad in Ha Noi, the talks given at monastics retreats for 1200 monks and nuns in Hoang Phap Temple in Ho Chi Minh and for 900 monks and nuns at Tu Hieu Temple in Hue, helped remove many wrong perceptions, suspicion, and fear. The government also wants to see Most Venerable Huyen Quang and Quang Do have the chances to teach like those of Zen Master Nhat Hanh. The government ensures that the venerables can travel, can teach in all parts of the country and will find ways to support them. The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam is a reality. It is not difficult to have this church operated again. The difficulty is that we need to sit down together, to talk, to re-establish communication, to listen to each other, to be aware of other's difficulties, and to make decisions that satisfy both sides.

The government has Government Committee for Religious Affairs to support religions; the Buddhist community has Buddhist Committee for Governmental Relations to support the government. Government Committee for Religious Affairs does not control and direct religions. It observes and suggests to religious officials about corruptions that can take place in religious domain and to be informed about what the government can do to safeguard religious facilities and to support religious institutions in the work of building wholesome society. Buddhist Committee for Governmental Relation does not: participate in governmental activities, request favours from the government, or control the government. It observes and advises the government for ways to eliminate abuse, injustice, corruption which brings damages to the government, to the country and to Buddhism.