

Teachings of a Young Brother



Dharma Talks, Answers to Questions, and Interviews with
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A Day in the Life of a Catholic Zen Monk in Plum Village

*December 8, 2007 — Feast of the Immaculate Conception
By Brother Pháp Đệ, The Mindfulness Bell, Autumn 2008, Issue 49*

This morning, I awaken and smile, saying “Twenty-four brand new hours are before me! I vow to live each moment fully, mindfully, and to look at all beings with eyes of compassion.” Then, I light a candle and a stick of incense before a picture of Mom, Dad, and my brothers and sisters, saying, “In gratitude, I offer this incense to you and all my ancestors. May it be fragrant as flowers, reflecting my loving reverence and gratitude. May we all be companions of the saints, especially Mary, our Mother of Compassion, on this Feast of the Immaculate Conception.”

Thanks to Thầy and to the Vietnamese practice of ancestor worship, this Catholic now feels connected to his ancestors and is nourished by reverential gratitude to his parents and other ancestors — a practice that the misguided Catholic bishops and priests tried to stop in Vietnam. When I light a candle and make the incense offering in front of their picture, I know that they are not actually in the picture. Rather, I know that they are actually in me. I know that the real altar of my ancestors is my body/mind on which I honor them by the way I live, particularly as expressed in the Fifth Mindfulness Training, mindful consumption. This living connection to my ancestors is helping me let go of my attachment to my ego, my notion of being a separate self and somebody special.

Only Zen Monks Stop

At 4:45 a.m., I quietly brew a cup of tea, without waking up my roommate. Drinking my tea, I gratefully remember that it was Mom who first taught me the devotion to Mary. As a boy, I prayed to Mary for many different things—even for assistance in winning basketball games. After this, our ordinary day begins with sitting meditation (Holy Hour) at 5:30 a.m. At 7:00 a.m., the centuries-old church bells sound the Angelus, calling us to stop and remember that Mary said “Let it be” to the Angel, and became the mother of Jesus. In the old days, everyone stopped at the sound of the bells and recited three Ave Marias. Nowadays, only the Zen monks stop. I love the sound and recite an Ave. Hearing the Angelus bells is like hearing the voice of Christ, calling me back to my true self and inviting me to be like Mary: with the energy of the Holy Spirit, to give birth to Christ in my own life, in my own soul and body. I know that if I don’t, then what she did will have been wasted as far as my life is concerned. As the Angelus bells continue, I remember the Gospel story of how the newly pregnant Mary “set out and walked with haste” (she had not yet learned slow walking meditation) to the home of her cousin, Elizabeth, who greeted her with: “Blessed are you among women.” (Luke 1:39 and 42) The sound of the Angelus bells wakes me up to the realization that like Mary, my brothers and sisters embody Christ-consciousness here and now. Thus, like Elizabeth, I say to my sisters and brothers: “Blessed are you.” How lucky we are!

Then, breakfast at 7:30. We sit, in a circle, on cushions on the floor — twenty monks and six laypersons, breaking bread together. I am surrounded by my companions. I remember that the word “companion” comes from *com* (together) and *pan* (bread), that is, breaking bread together. I remember Jesus breaking bread with his disciples. This morning I see the abbot’s mother sitting and eating with us — like Mary did with Jesus and his companions. I look gratefully at the two cooks, a New Zealander and a Vietnamese, who prepared the food, even though they understand very little of each other’s language. This is the Holy Thursday brotherhood meal and Pentecost (enlightenment) in the here and now.

Walking with Mother Mary

We study from 9:15 a.m. until we gather for walking meditation at 11:00. I usually invite Dad and Mom to walk with me. How can they not, for they are in me. Dad is learning how to walk more slowly, keeping his attention on the flowers and surroundings, not on the destination or job waiting ahead.

Today, I also invite Mother Mary to walk with me. After all, she is my spiritual ancestor and I am blessed with her spiritual DNA — the Christ-consciousness in me. Today, holding my hand, Mother Mary no longer walks “with haste.” The divine feminine energy of Mary is very much with me in this Zen Buddhist monastery. (Buddhists know Mother Mary as Avalokita or Quan The Am or Kwan Yin.) Many of us can experience Mary’s spiritual DNA through our practice of touching the earth, when we lie on Mother Earth and reflect on the presence of her healing energy in each of us and in the body of our community. We chant *Namo Bo Tat Quan The Am* and send her healing energy to people around the world. This chant often brings tears of joy and gratitude to the listeners. To me, it feels like it generates the same energy that’s found in Lourdes and Fatima, energy that once seemed lost to me.

Now, it is 4:00 p.m. and time to do my working meditation: clean the meditation hall before the community arrives for the evening sitting meditation and chanting. When I was a priest forty years ago, lay persons cleaned the church after I celebrated Mass. Now, it’s my turn. I am learning humility — like Mary. They used to call me Father Adrian, now I am called Pháp Đệ, Young Brother. Five years ago, Thầy told me that to become a monk I would have to give up my stock portfolio, property, bank accounts, and cars, and he said, “You will learn humility.” It has been surprisingly easy. Pháp Đệ is living joyfully and peacefully.

Her Wondrous Light

6:00 p.m. — Tonight, on this Feast of the Immaculate Conception, I was delighted when my Vietnamese brother led us in a chant of praise to the Great Saint of Compassion, Mary. Here are the lyrics: From the depths of understanding, the flower of great eloquence blooms:

The bodhisattva stands majestically upon the waves of birth and death, free from all afflictions. Her great compassion eliminates all sickness, even that once thought of as incurable. Her wondrous light sweeps away all obstacles and dangers. Her willow branch, once waved, reveals countless heavens, Her lotus flower blossoms a multitude of practice centers. We bow to her. We see her true presence in the here and now. We offer her the incense of our heart. May the Bodhisattva of Deep Listening embrace us all with great compassion. Praise to thee, Mary, Our Mother of Compassion.

9:00 p.m. — I am aware that I have come a long way and have let go of some old theological notions about Original Sin and the Fall/Redemption paradigm. “We have entered a broken and torn and sinful world — that’s for sure,” writes theologian Matthew Fox. “But we do not enter as blotches on existence, as sinful creatures. We burst into the world as original blessings.” Now I can see the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (Mary was conceived without original sin) as an effort to help us wake up to the magnificence of Mary. The Buddha’s gift of the communal practice of the mindfulness trainings helps this Catholic to live up to the example of Mary and the teachings of Jesus. We may be ordinary persons, but, like Mary, we are all Immaculate Conceptions. The joyful Angelus Bells repeatedly invite us to wake up to this Good News!

Brother Pháp Đệ (Brother Adrian) lives in Son Ha at Plum Village. Once upon a time, he worked as a Roman Catholic parish priest and teacher.

December 11, 2011 – Love Your Mother Earth

Today is, in the Christian Churches of the West, the third Sunday of advent, the season in which our Western ancestors made a pretty big deal about getting ready for Christmas, getting ready for the Prince of Peace, looking for the arrival of the Messiah. This looking had already been going on for 700 years before the birth of Jesus, starting back at the time of the Buddha in the time of the prophet Isaiah. In the Christian Churches, they have four candles in the advent wreath, one for each week of advent. One Candle was for waiting. One Candle was for hope. One candle was for joy. That was to be for today. I light this candle for joy.

Fifty years ago I had a friend who was a United Church minister and we used to work together on ecumenical activities. At this time of the year he would put a sign up on the office door that would say, “Jesus is coming. Look busy.” That doesn't quite fit with our practice here – *vô sự*, to be without projects. Be business-less. Whatever advent was for our ancestors in the old days, it was very important. For most of us it has lost its meaning. It is not something that we've been able to engage in with much nourishment or satisfaction. But we haven't been in mourning. Those of us who have been brought to the practice of mindfulness have found that we've been given something that works to help us to cut through our sufferings of anger or jealousy or greed, and to be able to experience joy in life. When I told Thầy that most of the people I know in this practice are so happy with their experience of the Plum Village experience of mindfulness, they don't really miss or have a sense of loss. Do some of you agree with that? Thầy doesn't agree with that. He said, in his own way, “It's in your blood.”

We can touch that, even in this season when we hear some of the wonderful old hymns or chants or songs of the advent and Christmas season. In fact, even if we aren't in to it, just singing with others and having a good time with Christmas carols touches our hearts. It's nourishing. So Thầy has persuaded me to take a deeper look, amidst my current satisfaction, to get more in touch with my spiritual ancestors, with my spiritual roots.

A lot of us here from Asia have got Buddhist DNA. But we here from the West (of European ancestry), we don't naturally come by having Buddhist DNA. We actually have something more like Jewish or Christian or Muslim DNA. And as I followed Thầy's inspiration to begin to look and get back in touch with my ancestors, I discovered something I didn't really know – that I have, in my life, been heavily caught in discriminatory thinking, or dualistic thinking. Good, logical, Western thinking where there's right and wrong, left and right, up and down, and in and out. It's very distinct. Earth is *here* and heaven is out *there*. I'm *here* and God is up *there*. Matter and spirit are separate and the body will get left *here* when our eternal soul goes away up *there* to heaven. That's dualistic thinking. After all my involvement in the church and theology, this thinking left me saying, “This isn't it.”

I realize that my ancestors, too, were caught in dualistic thinking. Some of them were able to breakthrough but for the most part, they were also trapped in dualistic thinking. So they ended up staying in that thinking and living in hope like the old Israelites, like their ancestors and like many do today. When advent came around, they thought, “It's the Christmas season. The Savior is coming. He's not here yet but He's coming.” In fact, many of us in our emotional lives do this too by living in a state of, “This isn't it yet. I'm hoping for something better.”

Thầy speaks of this in Peace is Every Step. “Hope as an obstacle. Hope is important because it can

make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today. But that is the most that hope can do for us, to make some hardship lighter.” Thầy goes on to say, “When I think deeply about the nature of hope, I see something tragic. Since we cling to our hope in the future, we do not focus our energies and capabilities on the present moment. We use hope to believe that something better will happen in the future, that we will arrive at peace, or at the Kingdom of God. Hope becomes a kind of obstacle. If you can refrain from hoping, you can bring yourself entirely into the present moment and discover the joy that is already here.”

My ancestors lived in a lot of hope. They used prayer, ritual, willpower, and good intentions. For them, prayer and ritual was a way to petition to the God who was away to take away their problems and to bring some relief to their suffering. Now, with mindfulness practice, I have a method, not just a prayer. A method that works, in my case ever so slowly, in transforming habit energies that might cause suffering, either for myself or for others. Before this practice, the dualistic thinking that I was caught in made a separation between our historical moment (our conventional existence) and the Ultimate Dimension. But with the mindfulness practice and with Thầy's teaching, I have a big advantage. Early on in my experience of Thầy, I was reading his then new book *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*, I was able to tell him, “Thầy, you understand Jesus better than all my great theology teachers. He said, “That's because I have Jesus in my heart.” It was very simple. He has continued to show to me as a Living Christ, a Living Buddha. That's helped to make it easier.

It helped me to see that that Holy Spirit who showed up in the gospel, going to Mary and making her the mother of Jesus, that same Holy Spirit is in us. And just as that Holy Spirit was busy in Mary, making her the mother of Jesus, so too is she busy in us, helping us to become new Buddha's, new Christs. And I've come to see, with Thầy's help, that that Holy Spirit is the energy that is nourishing our Mother Earth.

This morning, you were outdoors strolling, walking, touching Mother Earth. I used to think in my old ways that the earth was just a planet, an inert mass of matter without any spirit or intelligence. I used to think of the earth as our temporary address until we died and moved on to our eternal home of the Kingdom of God in Heaven. Now I see that just as the cells in our bodies have their own intelligence and are busy helping to keep us alive and well, so Mother Earth is not just made of matter but made up of cells and intelligence. As you walked this morning, you did not look at the grass and the trees as just inanimate objects. I hope that you were able to see that those trees, particularly the big, elegant oaks, are not inanimate objects but in fact, each oak is our brother, our sister. They know how to nourish themselves to grow tall and strong and to purify our air. With this practice and the wisdom of the Buddha, I've been able, finally, to go back and to look at the sayings of Isaiah, from 2700 years ago, and understand what he hoped for when he said, “For the earth brings forth it shoots and as the garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness.” Righteousness - that's Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action. Isaiah goes on to say, “We will be oaks of righteousness.” Like the oaks and the coyotes and the rabbits, we here are the children of Mother Earth and also of Jesus and Buddha. We're learning now that *this* is the Kingdom of God, present right here, in and on Mother Earth. We do not have to wait for it in the future. We do not have to live in hope. *This is it.*

So we come back home to ourselves and practice. We're particularly lucky to be able to do this on this land here at Deer Park. We come in doing it to know joy, without waiting. We come back home to Mother Earth and we let each gentle step be a kiss of peace and gratitude. And we have quite a number

of you in the community that have been coming forward here and helping the monastics, working as a four-fold Sangha, taking care of Mother Earth here. As you walk around you see all the wonderful signs of life. Each breath that we inhale comes from Mother Earth having purified it. There's a poem that comes from one of my more recent spiritual ancestors, Gerald Manley Hopkins*, that goes like this:

*Wild air, world-mothering air
nestling me everywhere
I say that we are wound with mercy round and round
as if with air this same
and makes, oh marvelous,
new Nazareths in us
new creations in us*

*The good News of Christmas
is already happening in us
Wild air, world-mothering air
nestling me everywhere*

So we are also gratefully aware that it is Mother Earth who purifies our water, aware that each drink of water comes now from our own well down in Oak Grove. The water comes through the soil of Mother Earth and reaches our well, filtered and purified by our Mother. These have been wonderful days. Cool as the evenings have been, the days have been warm to soak up the rays of the Sun, our Father. If we can think non-dualistically, we can begin to see that the Sun is our Father too. We are the children of a Mother Earth and a Father Sun. This is the wisdom of non-discrimination. This is the wisdom that helps us realize that the Kingdom of God is here and now.

This is the wisdom that helps heal what was a problem for our Jewish predecessors in the time of Isaiah on down through the time of John the Baptist and on into Europe and the Western culture of Italy, and France, Germany, Ireland, Sweden and so on. Life was viewed in such a way that there was a lot of fear, a lot of guilt, and a lot of misunderstanding of our source, a loving God. Through that time there was a loss of connection not only to the internal abiding presence and energy of the Holy Spirit but also to all of creation. In the fourteenth century one of our Ancestors, a good German monk by the name of Meister Eckhart, he had it. He was able to think non-discriminatively. This got him in trouble with the Bishops because of the way he was thinking. He said things like this, "Is this not a holy Trinity, the firmament, the earth, our bodies? And is it not an act of worship to hold a child and till the soil and lift a cup?" And of communion, "First, seek that from your lover's soul before anything offered from a priest." You know, we existed as Thầy has taught us that we are not just present here is what we call *us*. We've been around a long time in different forms and shapes for millions of years. And Meister Eckhart had that understanding. Here's a poem that shows this awareness.

*When I was the stream, when I was the
forest, when I was still the field,
when I was every hoof, foot,
fin and wing, when I
was the sky
itself,*

*no one ever asked me did I have a purpose, no one ever
wondered was there anything I might need,
for there was nothing
I could not
love.*

*It was when I left all we once were that
the agony began, the fear and questions came,
and I wept, I wept. And tears
I had never known
before.*

*So I returned to the river, I returned to
the mountains. I asked for their hand in marriage again,
I begged—I begged to wed every object
and creature,*

*and when they accepted,
God was ever present in my arms.
And He did not say,
“Where have you
been?”*

*For then I knew my soul—every soul—
has always held
Him.*

("When I Was the Forest" by Meister Eckhart, Daniel Ladinsky, [Love Poems From God](#))

Thầy has reminded me that there is a lot of richness in my tradition and look to the mystics. Here is one from John of the Cross

I was sad one day and went for a walk;
I sat in a field.
A rabbit noticed my condition and
came near.
It often does not take more than that to help at times –
to just be close to creatures who
are so full of knowing,
so full of love
though they don't
– chat,
They just gaze with
their
marvelous understanding.

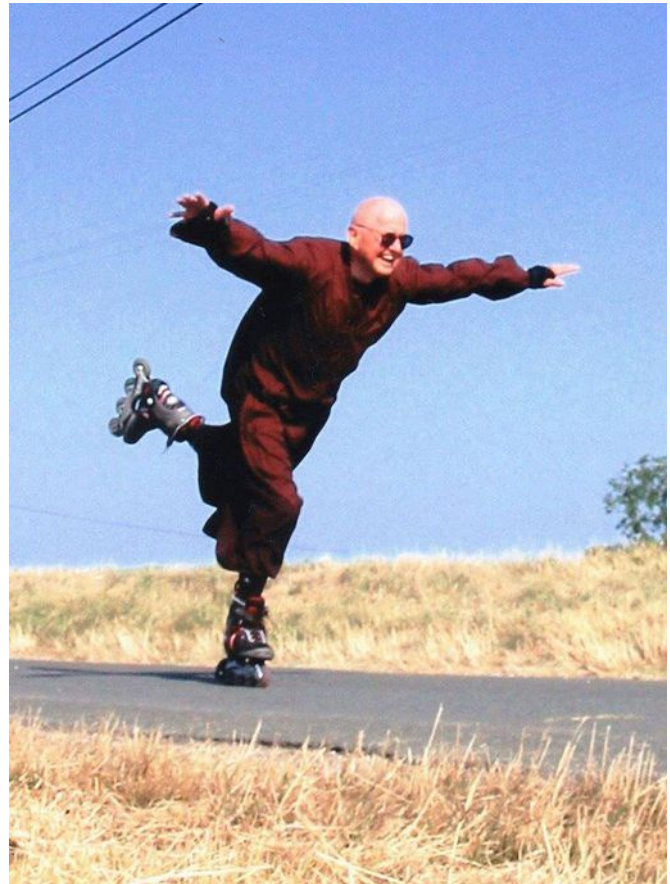
Here in Deer Park, when there are days that we get confused or a little sad or depressed, this is a place we can just go for a walk, amidst the chaparral and the oaks, feel the sun, and we find that it heals. One of our new sisters in the past year described in a Dharma sharing her experience of being here in Deer Park and all of the lovely, wonderful green nature all around and the trees. She described it as being held in the arms of a loving mother.

In a few moments we will divide up and have a time for Dharma Sharing so that the wisdom that's within this community can be shared with one another. And then after the sharing, we'll have a brotherhood and sisterhood meal together. As Christians, we come with a long tradition of the sacredness of the brotherhood meal. So when you gather in the dining room be sure to look at one another, even though it's a time of Noble Silence, and give a smile. Look around at whoever you're sitting with at the table and extend your heart of love and nourishment that's actually richer than the food that's going to be very good, as we know from our practice. When we take each morsel of food, sometimes we encourage people to receive it and then put the utensil down and just quietly enjoy chewing the good food. With each morsel, recognize that it is a gift of Mother Earth, prepared with lots of hard work and love, by the farmers and the merchants and above all, the cooks who are up there right now putting that good love into the food they're preparing for our lunch. Let us eat with that understanding that it isn't just for the taste of the food and to fill up, but it's to strengthen our bodies so that we can show up as men and women of wisdom, compassion, and forgiveness toward one another.

Another one of our spiritual ancestors, Catherine of Sienna, was also one of those who was not trapped in a dualistic mind. I'll finish with what she has to offer.

*All has been consecrated.
The creatures in the forest know this,
The earth does, the seas do, the clouds know
as does the heart
full of love.*

*Strange a priest would rob us of this knowledge
and then empower himself with the ability
to make holy
what already was.*



March 29, 2013 – Living Buddha Living Christ Retreat

Brothers and sisters, good morning. This is a happy Easter. This is a happy moment. I have had five days of very happy moments in this spiritual ancestor retreat, focusing primarily on our Christian ancestry, for a delightful exchange and a discovery of our spiritual roots. This is the final day of our retreat, a retreat that has brought me, and I'm sure all of us, a much deeper gratitude to Thích Nhất Hạnh for how he has awakened us to the importance of our blood ancestors, our spiritual ancestors, and also our land ancestors.

We've been experiencing something like the early Christians experienced when they were with Jesus. They didn't think of Jesus dying for them. They thought that Jesus was teaching them *how* to die as well as *how* to live. That little group of a couple thousand years ago experienced the resurrection in themselves and the new life that began in them. Our little retreat group has been experiencing somewhat of a resurrection as we experience, with the help of this mindfulness practice, transformation of our own suffering and difficulties.

You have just entered into the Beloved Community and you are pioneers in the sense that this is the first Plum Village Retreat bringing the work of Jesus and Buddha together, providing a retreat exploration of our own Western spiritual ancestors, particularly Jesus. I think you're particularly lucky. I'm very happy to welcome you. Also, in our doing this together, it's keeping a promise to Thầy who has, for years, asked me to help Westerners get in touch with their Western spiritual ancestors. He's been very clear that he did not come here to convert us to Buddhism. When I told in Hong Kong a couple years ago that most of our practitioners are so happy with the mindfulness practice that they don't feel they're missing anything, he didn't buy that. He said, "It's in your blood." He didn't say, "Wake up" but he could have. So what we're doing here together for these couple days is to rediscover our roots and find that there are life-giving juices in it for us.

Why did my Catholic faith grew so weak, unexciting, and unsatisfactory? I realize now I was very caught up in liturgy and ritual and good church music and being good at leading church music. I was long on ritual experience but short on living practice and living the teaching, and being together with others who are also living the teaching on a daily basis, on the streets. That was missing for me. Another part of my problem was dualistic thinking. Buddhism has helped me begin to see how deeply entrenched is my dualistic thinking. My dualistic thinking had me feeling that I'm here and Jesus, the great, is out there. That's immediately a separation. Buddhism is helping me to pull back from that and realize the presence of the Christ energy is in me. If it's not in me, then the show's over. For me, I'm in the process. I feel I'm on to something that I'm really excited about and I'm excited to have a group of friends like yourselves where we come together and we collaborate in this process, to really experience the fact that we inter-are. It isn't a solo trip. Either we do it together or it doesn't get done. For me, I'm a young brother and I'm moving in a new way that I didn't know fifty years ago.

So we're right now going to call on some other ancestors to talk to us, to share with us. Pháp Đệ and I are going to read from "The Raft is not the Shore" chapter 8, by Thầy and Daniel Berrigan. (*See Appendix***)

Easter Retreat – April 19, 2014

Brothers and sisters, let's remember the time when Jesus was aware, with his mission of bringing forth his passionate teaching of the reign of God, that his hours were limited. There was an upset in the establishment, the politicians, the priests and the Jewish authorities. He was aware that his passion for the Kingdom of God was going to get him killed. That's what the mindfulness practice is helping us to understand, getting us to wake up to this Kingdom of God by really experience that we are walking and living in the Kingdom of God. So Jesus, knowing the end was coming, gathered his followers just as we here today. I look upon you and my comrades here and know that we are revolutionaries - revolutionaries learning how to come home to ourselves and to do the work of transformation, dealing with our own afflictions and transforming them. Then we move out and help others. We are revolutionaries with an extra little fringe quality. We're *Double Belongers*. We're participating in more than one tradition. Our gathering here, then, is an opportunity for us to deepen our awareness that we are the carriers of the message of the Kingdom of God, living it here. We focus more on ourselves this weekend, aware that in another day we'll leave here and go back to our own home towns and our Sanghas. It's our responsibility to carry our realization to our friends, brothers, and sisters back home. So, like Jesus' followers, after this gathering we're going to divide up and scatter. They would scatter and later come back together. In coming back together they would experience the fire of the Holy Spirit. They would wake up to what Jesus had been giving them and we call that event Pentecost. Our practice of mindfulness which comes from the Buddha and is brought alive in Thích Nhất Hạnh, lets me recognize that this transformative energy of mindfulness is the same energy, at least for me, as the Holy Spirit. It has really been in these late years of my life a real discovery to experience the Holy Spirit in me. I have to admit that in the past the Holy Spirit was only a wonderful idea. But we who experience transformation in ourselves also experience the liberating energy of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus and his apostles, his followers, gathered every week for their brotherhood and sisterhood meal, the Seder. There were many more than the apostles, like Mary Magdalene who would have been at the last supper, too. But this week was a very special one. It was Passover Week. So we will simply share matzoh in memory of that.

At the last supper, Jesus took the bread. I didn't know it years ago but I've learned recently that at such an event there was dancing. So Jesus would have gotten up and led the community in dance, probably around that DaVinci dining room table. You know why they were all on one side? So they could get in the picture. (laughter)

Jesus had been breaking the matzoh with the apostles probably every week. He had his own style of breaking the bread. That's why, after the crucifixion, the two men on the way to Emmaus with him recognized him. They had seen this man break the bread in prior times but somehow until that moment they weren't able to recognize Jesus.

We can keep in mind a deeper understanding or a new understanding that in handing the bread to the disciples, Jesus said, "Take this. It's my body given up for you." He knew that in the next two or three days he would sacrifice or give his body over into death. Then he followed with the cup. So like Jesus and like the apostles that night, remembering the first communion event, the last supper, let us take the bread and break the bread and share it with each other with the understanding that I break this bread, I

give you life. I am here for you. You can count on me.

(eat the matzoh)

So as we eat together, we do with the awareness that I'm not just nourishing my little old body, my little spirit, but we're nourishing each other. We're sharing our energy, the energy of the Holy Spirit. So when we leave here and go back to our Sanghas and we go back to our families, consider taking

(Hebrew blessing is shared)

What we are doing is something we must take home with us and find a way to simply introduce this sharing of food with our own family, with our partners, with our children, so that there might be every now and then or once a week a meal in which bread and drink can be brought forward and we share that with our partner or with our children. And hopefully they too will eventually understand it in a way that they can initiate the sharing and give back to us the bread of life.

Jesus' passion for the Kingdom of God meant a kingdom of non-violence: nonviolence to oneself, to one another, and toward one's enemy. Not only do we get to love our friends, but we also get to love our enemies. Another way for us to continue that work of building the Kingdom of God that Jesus was about and cost him his life.

As we eat lunch today, notice in particular the fifth contemplations that will be read. We gratefully accept this food so that we may be nourished and strengthened to have understanding and compassion and to be of service to all beings. Jesus taught that to the apostles on the night of the last supper and they didn't really get it. So he got up from the table, put a towel around his waist and got down and washed their feet. They were pretty preoccupied with who was going to be the most important. And Peter said, "You can't wash my feet." Jesus said, "If I can't wash your feet, you can't be part of me." So he proceeded to wash the feet of the group, the brothers and the sisters. And then he got up and he said (notice this), "You call me teacher and you call me Lord and I have come here as teacher and Lord to be of service. If you're going to be my brothers and followers, you must learn to be of service. " We have that little, simple action after our meals – we wash each others' dishes. But notice in the fifth contemplation that it is a perfect expression of Jesus at the last supper. Thank you.



Easter Retreat - April 20, 2014

Dear Thầy, sisters and brothers,

In this moment I'm feeling a real happiness that is the result of at least fifty years journeying, coming into this mindfulness practice, learning this practice and then being able to celebrate it here this weekend with you. One of the things about this practice that is different from my old habits is we begin a sharing like this by saying something like, "Dear Thầy" and, "Sisters and Brothers." I never used to begin meetings like that. And I never understood quite what we understand, we who have taken in the teaching and have learned from the example of Thầy. We have taken in and absorbed his energy, his wisdom, his teaching and as we then come together to share that wisdom and to continue learning together, we recognize that his energy is present. He is present so we start the greeting by, "Dear Thầy." He is present in all of our practice.

Thầy, along with the Buddha, has helped me come to understand why my ancient Catholic practice grew so dry. It was no longer as nourishing as I wanted it to be. This mindfulness practice has taught me that I was really caught up in dualistic thinking. Two and a half thousand years ago the Buddha was already alerting us to this problem. Dualistic thinking is our tendency to think that we are a separate self, a unique individual. As a separate self, we're in this life to get what we want and need, and to just take care of ourselves. This dualistic mind of the separate self thinks, "I'm doing okay and fine and well. I notice you're having difficulty. That's your problem." That's the extreme of separate self that leads us to being critical of one another. Jesus said, "Stop picking on your brother for what you perceive to be the speck in his eye. Come home. Look at the log that's in your eye." And the Buddha said something like, "Know that most of our perceptions are wrong. They are the main cause of our unhappiness." The Buddha went on to show a method for dealing with that tendency to believe our perceptions, developing judgements with the certitude that we are right. This becomes an addiction to our own thinking. Jesus did not go into that kind of detail of a method. It's taken the Buddha with this mindfulness to give us a method, a process to come home to ourselves and to use the energy of mindfulness to look at our tendency to be critical and unloving of each other. The Buddha has given us a method of learning how to come home to ourselves, to stop, to concentrate on what's going on here. Then we might be able to be present in a way that allows insight to come up to liberate us, to help lighten us in the way we treat our brother or sister.

Another thing that the Buddha taught in the Diamond Sutra was on being caught in the illusion of a separate self. That separate-self illusion which I have been deeply caught in has led to us thinking that, "I'm here, a creature. God is the creator in Heaven. I'm here on earth and heaven is up there. Human is different from the divine. That separation, that dualistic thinking, is one of the things that resulted in my feeling so much sterility in my experience of my childhood religion. Thầy teaches that if we are caught in this notion of separate-self, meaning of me here on this earth as a creature and that the divine God in heaven is the creator, as long as we're caught in that notion no matter how much worship, ritual, beautiful liturgy, and song we may have,, there's no real communion. I've come to understand that this dualistic thinking of human/divine, creator/creature is what sabotaged what enthusiasm and commitment that I had fifty years ago in teaching the gospel. The gift of this practice to me is to help me understand that and find a way to get go of my dualistic thinking and to get freed up so that I can experience communion.

Communion is what we seek in our connections with each other. Lack of communion is what we suffer from and even grieve when we're in a relationship of a love and go through the bitterness and the pain of separation. That dualistic thinking has also sabotaged my understanding and love of Mother Earth because I grew up thinking, "We're creatures on this earth down here. This is temporary. This, in fact, is an exile. We're here until we get to go to Heaven after we die." With this sort of thinking, I never really grew to understand and love holy Mother Earth as my source. I grew up in the mid-West in the corn belt, an agricultural community, and we interpreted literally God's word in the book of Genesis, "God created man and gave him charge of all the animals and the earth." We misinterpreted that and took it as a reason to dominate and to control and to exploit Mother Earth. Now in these late years we're coming to understand that it was very unwise and we'll bring about our own doom if we continue to exploit and mistreat holy Mother Earth.

I want you to know that the learning to get free of dualistic thinking takes time and continuous, patient practice. It's not a good idea we pick up out of a book or a talk. It takes constant practice. I'm reminded that as a kid, I grew up in the era when in basketball, the jump shot was just invented. I discovered it when I was 17 years old and I remember the hours down in the gym, practicing and perfecting the jump shot. If I had been going after learning walking meditation like I learned that, my progress would be greater. We need to be patient with ourselves and realize that it takes time to modify and change these old habits. Most of you have habits that are much younger than mine and it still takes time and daily practice. With the help of comrades, a Sangha, to be able to make real progress.

This weekend I've been delighted to see and hear how many of you have experienced some discovery and some joy in not from this practice but in experiencing each other and experiencing joy. I enjoy hearing Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*. There's a line in there, "Joy, that beautiful, brilliant spark of divinity that is in each of us." Our work together this week has been to nourish that spark and to increase the light. I have experienced a great deal of light in this Sangha that we are. I am confident that going from here in this retreat, this will be taken out to the numerous towns and cities and communities and you'll continue sharing the light. Thank you.



Magnolia Grove Monastery Q & A –September 27, 2015

How to combine your church engagement and Sangha activities?

The first step for me was immersing myself in the practice, learning the practice to get out of my head with all sorts of notions of commandments and theological teachings I was raised with. I had to get into the basic activity of knowing what was upsetting and then learning the technique of stopping and breathing with it, and doing mindfulness meditation with it. I had to stay long enough to see what was at the bottom of it, like my inherited habit of anger. I got it from dad. He was good at it and mom had it too.

As a Catholic I prayer a lot. I did a lot of sacraments and a lot of theology but I never did get good at freeing myself up from my anger. This practice of mindfulness helped me to get at what I was not able to get at with all my theology, sacramental liturgy, masses, and all of that. So dive into the practice and learn it like we're learning it here. Then there will be time to go back to Sunday mass. We may be able to take back there our wise experience of knowing that Sangha is where it's at. As a Catholic priest I didn't realize that Jesus was up to a matter of relationships. What Jesus was up to was Sangha. He had a new way of doing things and what made the first church so successful is that his energy was in them. They embodied the risen Christ. Out of sight he was, but they embodied the energy. I've had to have the experience of Sangha to understand that this really amounts to Thầy's teaching. Here we are too. We don't speak of it as the energy of Jesus or the risen Christ in us but I'm very clear that the energy of Thầy is in us. The energy of the Buddha in us. That's a matter of relationship. It's not a head trip so if we don't get into a Sangha within a few days of leaving here, then the good stuff that fires us up will dissipate and go away.

So look for the ways to celebrate the teaching, the original practice of Jesus in the way you live. I don't go to mass on Sundays or to daily mass anymore so I don't leading the community in sharing the cup and the bread. But three times a day I gather with my brothers and sisters. I'm aware that I'm grateful for this food and what I'm eating is strengthening me to become more understanding and compassionate. That's what Jesus was all about.



December 29, 2012 – Gratitude

Recently there was an article in the LA Times*** on the benefits of gratitude. I think this is an appropriate topic for us as we look over the past year and our experiences with one another, our families, our partners, our children, our parents, and the flow of love back and forth. As we come together on this retreat, how we can also grow and deepen our understanding of our own selves so that we can be as good at taking care of ourselves as we are at taking care of other people, our children, our jobs, and all of our responsibilities? Too often, taking care of ourselves takes second place. But as some of you have learned, in the Plum Village practice of mindfulness, taking care of ourselves is a top priority.

In the article they're saying that there's even scientific evidence that being grateful is good for us. That's actually something that a good mindfulness practitioner would know for a long time. It's something the Buddha was teaching about 2600 years ago. But it's good news today. The article in the Times reported that "Practicing a conscious discipline of showing gratitude on a regular basis makes us happier and helps us suffer less depression, less stress, and it helps us sleep better." Those are good payoffs.

In our practice of Buddhism, we often finish a ceremony or an event with a chant called "Sharing the Merit". The last line says, "We vow to offer tribute to parents, teachers, friends, and numerous beings who give guidance and support along the path." These are the Four Gratuities – parents, teachers, friends, and numerous beings. I have to admit that as I look back in the process of learning that chant, then learning to sing it in tune and at the pace of the Sangha, sometimes I've been more attentive to sounding right than I have been in deeply reflecting that I am sharing my merit, sharing whatever I've got by saying thank you to my parents with some awareness of what they did. The same goes for my teachers, my friends, and numerous beings, that we can get into detail about later.

Thầy often invites us in his Dharma talks to write down a list of our conditions of happiness. Those are the things that set us up to have a sense that we've got something to be grateful for. We have to practice writing down our list of conditions of happiness. It's an important little process or task because the gifts and the blessings of life are sometimes overlooked. The blessings and the gifts are always there but often we're not aware of them and when we're not aware, they don't do much for us. There is a danger in our lives that when we become strong and successful, we feel entitled. There's also a danger that when we don't like the way things are going, we feel resentful. And there's a great danger that we become forgetful. These are sure prescriptions for unhappiness, not only for ourselves but for our teachers, our partners and our friends.

Another problem that many of us have is that we really believe many of our perceptions. The Buddha has already shown us that most of our perceptions are wrong and are the cause of most of our suffering and unhappiness. Along with believing our perceptions is the danger that we become addicted to our thinking. The particular addiction to our thinking is more prevalent maybe than alcoholism and heroin addiction. When we're addicted to our own thinking it is the cause of almost all of our suffering and that experience really kills the possibility of gratitude. Now the Buddha was very clear about the matter of gratitude to parents. I'll read a quote from the Buddha, "I tell you, there are two people that are not easy to repay. Which two? Your mother and your father. Even if you were to carry your mother and your father on the other shoulder for one hundred years and were to look after them by

anointing, massaging, and bathing their limbs, and they were to defecate and urinate right on their shoulders, you would not in that way pay or repay your parents. If you were to establish your father and your mother in absolute sovereignty over this great earth, abounding in the seven treasures, you would not in that way pay or repay your parents. Why is that? Mother and father do much for their children. They care for them, they nourish them, they introduce them to this world.”

Now for those of us who have been challenged by our experience of our parents or who have grievances, he challenges us. “But anyone who rouses his unbelieving mother and father settles and establishes them in conviction, rouses his un-virtuous mother and father and settles them in virtue, rouses his stingy mother and father settles and establishes them in generosity, rouses his foolish mother and father and settles them in discernment. To this extent, one pays and repays one mother and father.” The Buddha went on to say, “The only true way to repay your parents is to strengthen them in four qualities – conviction, virtue, generosity and discernment. To do so, you have to develop these qualities in yourself as well as learning to employ great tact in learning to be an example to your parents. As it happens, these four qualities are also those of an admirable friend.”

This means that in repaying your parents you become the sort of person who would be an admirable friend to others as well. You become a person of integrity who, as the Buddha points out, has learned to be harmless in all your dealings and to give help with an empathic heart, respectfully, in a timely way and with a sense that something good will come of it. In this way, you repay your parents' goodness many times over by allowing its influence to spread beyond the small circle of the family and into the world at large. In doing so, you enlarge the circle of their goodness as well.

When it comes to respect for parents and appreciating parents, I remember Thầy's question. I first heard it a few years ago when he said, “Where do you see your father?” And my immediate tendency was to say, “Well, dad's been dead about 40 years and he's in heaven. He's gone.” And with that, he was also away from my awareness almost all of the time. Of course you know the answer that Thầy is looking for from us, “I see my father in me. I feel my father in me.” As Thầy has gone into detail about, I am my fathers' continuation. I have all his genes and chromosomes and his habit energies. So with Thầy's help, my lifestyle now is very different from the years before I became a monk. This morning during sitting practice we had the guided meditation but also I said, “Hello dad. Are you enjoying the breathing? Hello dad. Do you feel good with your back straight like this?” Thầy has taught me to have a little picture of mom and dad by my bed. When I get up in the morning, I light a candle and burn incense and take a few moments to just reflect on the fact that I am their continuation, to reflect in gratitude. Thầy also suggests that in the shower we look at ourselves and recognize the presence of our parents in our bodies. Brushing my teeth is one of the clearest ones. Looking in the mirror I see the various aspects of mom and dad in how my teeth are being brushed in quite the same way that they brushed theirs. These are simple ways for us to call to mind our parents and to have an awareness of our gratitude to them. When I'm working, dad is with me and he's learning to lighten up and to let go. Above all in walking, we're learning how to slow down and to notice the beauty that surrounds us rather than to be preoccupied about the destination to which we're going, not yet in sight.

The second gratitude is to teachers. The principle that the Buddha laid out toward parents also applies here. In the words of the Buddha, “The only way to repay your parents is to strengthen them in four qualities: conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment.” That's also the way to repay our teachers. The Buddha said, “So this is what you think of me, the Blessed One – sympathetic, seeking of our well-being, teaches the Dharma out of sympathy. Then you should train yourselves harmoniously, cordially,

and without dispute in the qualities I have pointed out. Having known them directly, the four frames of reference, the four right exertions, the four bases of power, the five faculties, the five strengths, the seven factors of awakening, and the noble eightfold path.” In other words, the way to repay our teacher's compassion and sympathy in teaching is to apply ourselves to learning our lessons well. Only then can we spread the influence of those lessons to others.

I have yet a lot to learn here and to transform. As a boy, I was a very coachable athlete and the coaches and I always got along very well. But I was a rebellious student in the classroom. I don't know where I got that because I didn't dare to show any of that kind of rebellion to my dad that I showed to teachers. As a student I wasn't really aware of it. I thought I was being cocky and cool but I was disrespectful, especially to the teachers I didn't like. That trait was with me pretty much all the way through my education so that when it came time for the Bishop to decide which graduate school of theology I would get sent to, he sent me not to the two or three best ones but to the one that was looked upon as kind of the correctional institution – St. John's Benedictine Abbey. But somehow I was lucky. It turned out to be the best of the four schools to have gotten sent to. That wasn't evident way back then but after my other fellow students came back and we go together, they all decided that the school I got punished with was the best one of them all. I guess that maybe I have yet to really suffer for my tricks.

The third gratitude is to friends. Friends can be our lovers, our partners, our spouses, as well as the numerous comrades in the workplace. And the fourth one is referred to as numerous living beings. Now numerous living beings can be anything from the clerk behind the counter doing the checkout or the person that's providing a service or is doing a business transaction. But another one that we're learning about here, particularly with Thầy's help, is Holy Mother Earth and Father Sun. Therefore our efforts to help reduce the destruction of Mother Earth, to slow down global warming, to support good agricultural and industrial practices are ways of repaying one of the great beings to whom we're indebted. As Thầy points out in case we're in doubt, without Mother Earth we would not be. Without Father Sun, we would not be. Nor would the Buddha have ever been.

The Buddha described gratitude as requiring mindfulness. In the original sense of the word as “keeping in mind”, the Buddha defines mindfulness as, “Remembering and able to call to mind even things that were done and said long ago.” Here in our practice, Thầy is trying to wake us up to being mindful of what's really present in this very moment.

So as we look at continuing with our retreat, I offer a couple of recommendations. Make a list of gratitudes from 2012. Along with that would be to make a list of happy experiences from 2012. Be clear and aware as to who are the people and what were the events behind the points on your list. This can include Mother Earth, the satisfaction of walking amidst the chaparral, and all the life at Deer Park. And then looking at 2013, consider making some aspirations. One aspiration I know I'm going to make is that every night before I go to bed, I'm going to write in my journal what happened in this day or who happened in this day toward whom I feel grateful and what did I do this day that was a sign of kindness for me, having given me an opportunity to feel grateful. Make a special effort in learning how to really love and take care of yourself. Take time and then jot down, “What will I do in 2013 that will enhance my ability to grow in loving myself and being more kind to myself?”

On this subject of gratitude, we have a couple songs. One is Dear Friends and another one is In Gratitude. Let's sing them together. Thank you and thank you for coming here and practicing together with us.

July 3, 2016 – Interdependence Day

Tomorrow, we Americans celebrate Independence Day, going way back to 1776 when our forefathers, men like George Washington, Ben Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson led the cause of breaking free of the tyranny of the kind of England who was laying heavy taxes on the early settlers and also had installed occupying soldiers, military forces in the New England states. That's tomorrow, Independence Day. Today, we want to celebrate with you Interdependence Day. This is another way of speaking about interbeing. We want to celebrate our being part of a practice as disciples of Thích Nhất Hạnh and celebrate our bonding together so that we can find our freedom from the inner tyrannies that bother us; the tyrannies of fear, greed, excessive sensual pleasure, alcohol, eating too much, and the tyranny of the habit of rushing. The brothers are still working on that one with me after a lifetime of getting things done by rushing. Now, my brothers gently remind me.

Today, here and now, we're dealing with these things that tend to lock us up in un-mindfulness, the enemy (or teacher) coming from within, to show what causes our greed. What sets us up for such attachment to; sensual pleasure, eating too much, being too self-critical, putting ourselves down, and believing our negative perceptions of the other people around us? The Buddha said that most of our perceptions are wrong and they cause most of our suffering.

Today, here and now, we're bonding together to deal with our loneliness, our isolation, our lack of deep interconnection. Going back to the Revolutionary War of 1776, Ben Franklin wrote about how when they often came in conflict and did battle with the Native American Indians, the Apache, the Iroquois, the Mohawks, sometimes the white settlers were capture and taken back to the Indian homeland. He commented about the surprise that when they finally worked out a liberation for these captured settlers, many of the settlers chose not to come back to the “normal” society. They chose to stay there with the Indians because they found a solidarity, a community, a connection. They discovered that in a tribe, there is an opportunity for relationships that we don't often experience in the busy world in which we live. In some ways, this world in which we live has freed us up of some things. We make decisions for ourselves. We don't often have to think of the implications of what career we choose or what we do, what we buy. We're free of dogmas. This practice, as you know already, doesn't have dogmas. It's has very practical wisdom – the practice of mindfulness.

But like the American Revolution of 1776, this is not a solo practice. Like Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, George Washington, we must bond together, build relationships and work together if we want to work out our freedom - not just my own freedom but also your freedom. If you're not free, I'm not free. I can't have my individual freedom unless I help you get yours. However, all the technological advances of our modern society has enabled us to become very individualistic and wrapped up in our own success. This gift of our modern society creates a blindness in us to what's going on between us and what's going on with the people around us, those that we can see and those that we can't see. As a consequence, in our society many of us never experience first-hand the extremely close bonds created by hardship and danger, as it happened with the American Indians and even the primitive people thousands of years ago. They learned how they had to bond together to survive. But we're not much into fearing about our survival, are we?

To quote Sharon Abrahamowich, “We never experienced first-hand the extremely close bonds created

by hardship and danger. We are not good to each other.” She learned this by being in the Peace Corps in South Africa in some very upsetting times. In contrast, now “Our tribalism is to an extremely narrow group of people – our children, our spouse, and maybe our parents. Our society is alienating, technical, cold, and mystifying. However, our fundamental desire as human beings is to be close to others, close to our society, and this society does not allow for that.” So that creates the challenge for us as we come to this practice of mindfulness and take it home with us to experience true fellowship.

I was surprised myself in 1979 when my then-wife persuaded me to get into AA, the 12-step practice. After several weeks in the AA group, I said to myself, “Here, I am dealing with a fellowship like I was trying to build as a priest in the 60s and was not able to do. In AA, I’m experiencing a fellowship like almost for the first time in my life.” In 1999, 20 years and several relationships later, my then-fiancee and I were in China with Thầy. Having walked on the Great Wall, we were down at Gao Min Monastery and I had just finished reading Thầy’s new book, *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*.

Mentioning going home, see the stain glass window here in the Meditation Hall? That’s Thầy’s idea of the Buddha coming home after he went through his experience of enlightenment. The boy, Rahula, was a baby when he left, so maybe six or nine years later. Here’s the Buddha coming home. The man on his right is his father. When I finished reading the galley sheets of Thầy’s *Going Home*, I said to him, “I think you understand Jesus better than all my great theology teachers.” And I have some of the best in the world. Thầy simply said, “That’s because I have Jesus in my heart.” That was part of my discovery that yes, Thầy is my best experience of a living Christ. I don’t need to be back 2000 or 2600 years ago. In Thầy, I have a living Christ and a living Buddha.

Take a moment and think of Thầy. Remember, we’re here because of him. As you bring up your mental image of Thầy, breathe and send him energy. We might not see him here again but he’s back in Plum Village. We are his continuation. He’s a living Buddha, a living Christ.

One day Thầy asked me, “Where do you see your dad?” I said, “Dad’s dead and buried, gone for twenty years.” But Thầy has woken me up to better understand my blood ancestry and to make my dad present to me, every day of my life. Now I appreciate just how much I’m his continuation. I didn’t create myself. He and mom did it. They walk in me and they breathe in me, as does Thầy. I didn’t have that appreciation before I met Thầy, understanding and appreciating our ancestry - blood, land and spiritual ancestry. In terms of spiritual ancestry, Thầy was after me to help Westerners get in touch with our roots, the fallen-away Catholics and so on. I said, “Thầy, everybody I know is so happy and satisfied with this mindfulness practice and experience. They do not miss their old religious background.” He looked at me and he said, “I don’t believe it. It’s in your blood.” Then he told me of a Korean woman who was Christian and when she went past Buddhist temples, the music got to her heart, even though she was a Christian. Now Thầy has gotten me to pay more attention to that and there are ways in which I’m seeing that my old Catholic Christianity is in my blood. That’s the gift of the mindfulness practice.

Thầy said, “I didn’t come here to the West to convert you to Buddhism. I came here to help you to get in touch with your roots.” My understanding now is that if we don’t do that, we’re missing out on something big, very real and deep in our existence. I’m still continuing to be a good student. The best scholars have wised me up to the fact that the first Christians that followed Jesus and continued after he died, for the first 30-50 years, were remarkable in how they loved one another and how they shared

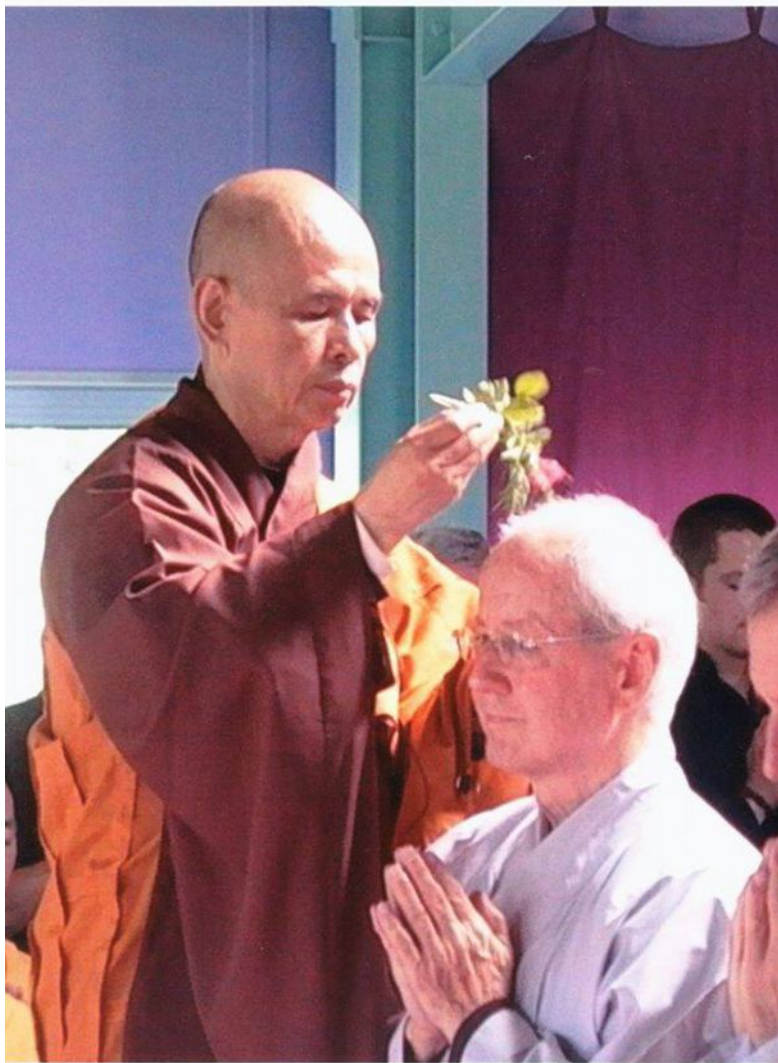
their wealth with one another. Some people with more wealth were selling it and making it available to others without a home. They were so good at loving and helping, but also in forgiving one another their grievances. They were outstanding on that. And a scripture scholar said that had they been the kind of Christians that most of us have been in the 1960-80s with beautiful liturgy, lots of masses, sacraments, dogma, theology and all that, they would have been a whiff in history. They wouldn't have lasted very long. Maybe that's what's happening with the Christian churches today. People are drifting away from them. What's very wonderful for me is now I am experiencing, in Deer Park monastery, what that biblical scholar talked about as the first generation of followers of Jesus. It has helped me to get back and connect with the treasure that is in my roots that I didn't know about.

So here we're talking about becoming part of Sangha. Sangha is not just something for us monastics. It's built by you too, lay men and women. It's following through on the teaching and example of the teaching of Thích Nhất Hạnh that our practice is not a solo trip. He has said several times that it is a practice of relationships. So we must experience in our local Sanghas, in our towns and cities.

The opportunity that is here for us is to look and ask, "In what way would I like to grow? What is there

about my life that could be improved over and above what I've been doing?"

I remember back in the 70s, I had some good buddies, businessmen and psychologists. These were guys I knew that I could count on. But when we got together we drank and we didn't really work on anything personal. We were there for each other but there was nothing about wanting to become more understanding with my wife or more patient, or less inclined to accumulate resentments. In my consultations I notice a lot of couples have that. They're sitting on a lot of grievances in their marriage and they're not clearing them up. So Sangha is really important but we need to be able to come into the Sangha with some willingness to grow, to identify some spots in our life that we're weak in and we can get help from. I think that's a very important piece to help us grow and to keep coming back to the Sangha.



The Four Noble Truths – 2012

I'd like to talk to you this morning in a way that helps you feel happy. To do that, I think we need to talk about the First Noble Truth. The First Noble Truth is "There is suffering." Are you feeling any suffering? Are you aware of any suffering? Can you get in touch with any suffering in your being and in your body at this time? So we'll stop and look deeply. Let's use the Buddha's technique. Get comfortable, sit straight, back straight, and close your eyes. We'll even get some help from the bell here. We'll do a little guided meditation.

Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out. In, out.

(bell)

Breathing in, I relax my body. Breathing out, I smile to my body. Relax, smile.

(bell)

Breathing in, I feel the joy of being alive. Breathing out, I smile. Joy of life, smile.

(bell)

(whispered – "I want to see more smiles.")

Breathing in, I remember once feeling hurt. Breathing out, I remember my anger. Hurt, anger.

(bell)

Breathing in, I hold my anger like a little baby. Breathing out, I calm my anger. Anger like a little baby, I calm my anger.

(bell)

So, were you able to get in touch with even a memory of any upset or irritation or hurt or disappointment? Many of us have learned to override these feelings and these perceptions. These unpleasant things in our day by getting busy or by eating, reading, watching tv, or even going out running. Have you ever noticed how some of us have these upsets and hurts that become resentments and grudges, and how we think we've gotten rid of them but we push them down? Then they go into the depths of our unconscious and pile up until something happens and then, again, our anger flares up. Have you noticed how often we can see who caused these sufferings, these upsets, hurts, and disappointments? Generally we think it's coming from somewhere outside of ourselves, that somebody else caused it. It was something they said or something they did. I'm inclined to say, "I'm angry with my partner because he didn't keep an agreement" or, "He didn't follow through" or, "I'm irritated with that co-worker. I don't think he respects me. He won't talk to me. She doesn't look at me."

These are all our perceptions. The Buddha tells us that our perceptions are mostly wrong and they cause most of our suffering. So that gets us to the Second Noble Truth, that we make our own suffering. Our very perceptions are the cause of most of our suffering. And as we look at our perceptions we see they're like a big river in our life containing things that are pleasant and unpleasant. They stay with us for a while and then they disappear. Our perceptions involve noticing and naming which gets us into concepts and ideas. This comes from our tendency to think, "I'm here, I'm me. You're you, and I can see that we are separate and we are different." We don't understand that as a thinker and a seer, there's only one. What is seen is all me. Basically, we tend to be confident that I'm here and you are all out there when in fact, all I see are all my perceptions and my mental formations. I don't easily recognize how often what I think I see is also something that I'm changing, distorting, and finding fault with. I believe that I'm seeing accurately and what I'm thinking is the truth.

It's not easy for me to realize that when I find fault with someone, I'm not only putting a barrier between us but what I've also put a projection out there onto the other person. I'm getting angry at you for my suffering. So we all need to learn how to look at our perceptions and to frequently ask the question, "Am I sure?"

The Buddha gave us a technique for investigating our perceptions that we did as a guided meditation. We jumped quickly from looking at the body to looking at the feelings. Did you notice the first feeling we looked at in step five was a happy feeling? Only afterwards did we try to meditate upon and look deeply at the hard, sad, hurtful, and painful feelings. When I did the guided meditation with you I jumped ahead to what, in the Discourse on the Full Awareness of Breathing would be more like steps eleven and twelve. This is where we move more deeply to looking at what's going on in our lives and investigating what's happening in terms of our mental formations, our perceptions, particularly our perceptions of the people in our lives. It's difficult for many of us to meditate that way, really sitting down and taking time to look into one's particular perceptions that cause suffering or anger. First of all, it takes time. Second of all, we have become so successful at suppressing them that they're no longer clear. It's all rather vague and it just sits down deep in our unconscious.

Recently in one of his talks, Thầy talked about how important it is to just just stop, sit down and breathe when we're hit with a big suffering or a deep depression or anger. As a kid I grew up with the advice, "Just count to ten." But for us, there's a bit more available than that technique. If we could actually count to ten breathing – ten in-breaths and ten out-breaths as we try to avoid exploding into an angry or a frightened reaction – we might get somewhere.

There is an ancient story about perceptions that I'd like to share. Stephen Mitchell brings out from the second book of the Dao this particular story. "If a man is crossing a river and an empty boat collides with his own boat, he won't get offended or angry however hot-tempered he may be. But if the boat is manned, he may flare up, shouting and cursing, just because there's a rower in that boat. Realize that all boats are empty as you cross the river of the worlds and nothing can possibly offend you. Realize that all boats are empty as you cross the river of the worlds and nothing can possibly offend you." Then he gave this commentary. "If everyone is your projection in the first place, if you see not them but who you think they are, how can you be offended? So it's like we're on a river, we're drifting along in our little boat and suddenly some jerk bangs into us, full force. But when you look, it's an empty boat. Since there's no offender, naturally there's no offense. You mean that that woman who broke my heart or my back-stabbing colleague, or the politicians who got us into this mess, they're all empty boats? Yes indeed. However, this is nothing to do with taking right action against greed or stupidity. But if we're offended, it means that we're not paying attention."

(bell)

This is the Second Noble Truth. We cause ourselves so much suffering with our own wrong perceptions. First of all, condemning another person is just condemning ourselves because we're projecting our own stuff. Secondly, it means cutting ourselves off from our interbeing. We fail to see that such perceptions are just a way of thinking and they're actually holding us prisoner in feelings of stress, anger, and hurt. Our perceptions poison our happiness and ruin our own day. I have to admit that I wasn't getting that insight with my first eight or nine years of mindfulness meditation. What helped me get that insight was my daughter. She took me through a practice of Byron Katie's inquiry, called The Work. Say I have this perception that this person is a slacker and is not contributing to the

welfare and the strength of the Sangha. The first question is, "Is it true?" Well of course I always think when anybody asks me, my perceptions are true. But then the next question is, "Can you say that it is absolutely true?" And that one stopped me. I had to look at that a bit. I guess I can't say that it's absolutely true. But even more important was the question, "How do I react? What happens in me when I believe my accusation?" So I was asked, "Does it bring you peace or does it cause you stress?" It was the first time for me to see that I sabotage my own happiness by being such a quick and clever judger of other people. They often don't even know how I'm judging them. They may not even be aware of it my negative thought or feeling about them but it poisons and contaminates my mood. It's so easy to not really be aware that we cause ourselves such suffering by our tendency to be judgmental, our tendency to believe our perceptions.

The good news is the Third Noble Truth. The Buddha taught us that there is a way that we can put an end to our suffering and restore our wellbeing and feel some joy and happiness. He gave us a method and we had just a little taste of it. It's mindful meditation - learning to stop, to breathe, and to concentrate to start looking more deeply at these mental formations, these perceptions, these judgements that we're so good at. In meditation, we look deeply into what it is about the situations and about me that is needing to be such an authority with these painful perceptions.

One of the things we'll discover is that in a reaction to somebody of irritation or anger there is a message from the ego. We're all committed, are we not, to transforming our egotism, moving from an egotistical mind to a Buddha mind or a Christ mind. It's a gift for us to look more deeply at our ego and how we are caught. So we can look at the person we are angry with and recognize that person as a teacher. As we are able to identify, to work with, and to let go of these upsets, we can also recognize that we've been caught in a prison of the past. As the Buddha says, our perceptions are not so much of a present moment assessment as they are generally reminiscences of the past that we carry with us. For the most part, then, our perceptions and our anger are based on the past and not the present moment. Does that make sense to you?

I also learned a bit more on this in the past year from the Course in Miracles. It made it very clear that when I judge my brother, I'm cutting myself off from the sonship with the father. Thầy's way of saying that is when I judge someone, I am cutting myself off from our interbeing. Here in the monastery for me with my fifteen other brothers and twenty-five other sisters, we are all in a classroom. We're all students trying to make our way through. I get to recognize that when I get critical of my fellow student, I'm just projecting my stuff on them. I also get to discover that my fellow student is there doing their best and I can open myself to their being a help to me. We're all just trying to making through. We either all make it through together or we don't make it through.

That's difficult for me after so many years of my life thinking as a rugged individualist that life was about competing and getting ahead. The Western philosophy that I grew up with said that to find success in life I had to be very competitive and not recognize our interbeing. Now this means making that shift to accepting, maybe even celebrating, that we're in this together. We make it together or we don't make it at all. I came to the monastery with a tendency to be very judgmental in holding people accountable. Accountability is a very important thing in the business world and so I would get quickly critical of somebody slacking or not doing their job. I needed to work on this, to let go, and to just recognize, "Here I go again. The judger is at work. My ego is at work. Let go." And I don't even need to go tell the person about it. I just need to let go and start thinking some more positive thoughts, maybe even finding an honest reason to compliment my brother or sister.

I'm finding the more that I let go and the more I forgive, the more I feel forgiven. It's a funny thing. And the more I let go, the more I experience joy. It's been a long learning but I'm really enjoying it and my life now reflects that joy. I'm finally learning letting go.

As we face up to our habits of being critical and judgmental, we need to give some space to being more understanding and forgiving of ourselves. Our ego will jump in and be very critical of ourselves and press us to shape up and be better. But we need to realize that for the most part, our way of perceiving, our way of thinking, our way of judging, and our way of criticizing, was inherited. For the most part, it comes from our ancestors. We didn't invent this personality that we're operating with. We had a lot to do with it but it's also the descendent of our moms and dads and all of our ancestors. It's been influenced by our environment, education, and all of our teachers. When we look at what we're dissatisfied in ourselves, our tendency to be judgmental, our tendency to believe our perceptions, and our tendency to be caught in a prison of past thinking, we need to give ourselves a little allowance to know that these characteristics are largely something that we've inherited and give ourselves some space, time and patience in transforming them.

In this, we need to connect with each other and help each other by way of our Sanghas. I don't think there's any way that we'll really carry this out unless we participate in a Sangha where we're both receiving support and also giving support to others. And lucky is the person who has a partner also committed to this practice. And lucky are the children who have parents committed to this practice. I feel lucky. Most of my life I thought I had a lot of the great ideas, the philosophy, and the theology needed for how to be a good and happy person. And yet, I have had to face the fact that I became very good at being very critical. One of the traps that many of us are also in is that of dualistic thinking. Dualistic thinking, very simply in terms of today, has us as separate beings. So dualistic thinking makes it very difficult for us to really connect and have communion with each other and to become life-giving helpers to each other.

So the gift for me in these past years is catching on to the Buddha's teaching and to this mindfulness practice. In fact, it's become a practice that has helped me to go back and get at the good stuff that I was trying to get at fifty years ago in the priesthood and let go of a lot of the complaints and the difficulties. To have the mindfulness practice is basically the Fourth Noble Truth. We start out looking at suffering evident by the unhappiness, the sadness, the irritation, and the hurt feelings that come from our way of perceiving and thinking, which is the Second Noble Truth. The Fourth Noble Truth gives us a path that we've come there today to grow and to learn in. So we have some things that really make it possible to carry through. The Buddha has given us the Four Noble Truths, Thầy has given us the Sangha. I don't know if any Buddhist traditions that emphasize as much as the Plum Village practice the importance of Sangha.

Something I've found to be helpful is the loving-kindness meditation. First of all, one addresses oneself. Here's how it sounds. "May I be peaceful, happy and light in body and in spirit." This is a meditation that we do first to ourself, then to somebody we love. Then we pick up a person that's been a problem for us and we're trying to break through, to lighten up and develop some sense of compatibility and affection. So I bring that person to mind and quietly I say, "May you be peaceful, happy, and light in body and in spirit. May you be safe a free from injury. May you be free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety. May you learn to look at yourself with the eyes of understanding and love. May you be able to recognize and touch the seeds of joy and happiness in yourself. May you

learn to identify and see the sources of anger, craving, and delusion in yourself. May you know how to nourish the seeds of joy in yourself everyday. May you be able to live fresh, solid and free. May you be free from attachment and aversion but not indifferent.”

I've found when I have somebody in my life that's been a problem for me, that I can identify that I do not love them the way I should or could, that I tend to be irritated or judgmental of the, I find that when I recite this for a few days, I notice my heart softening and my attitude shifting. It's transforming some of my negativity. I recommend this love meditation. Thank you for listening.



August 13, 2014 – Beginning Anew and Joy - DPM

Dear Thầy, Sisters, and Brothers,

For those of you who are new here, you might notice that I start by saying, “Dear Thầy” - Thích Nhất Hạnh, our teacher. I say that because I really feel deeply his presence. We who have begun to catch on to his teaching. For me, catching on to his teaching, his generosity, his love, his wisdom, which I experience as the wisdom of the Buddha. He's the continuation of the Buddha. Of all the men in the world that I've known, he's my best experience of Jesus. Fifteen years ago, before I was a monk, I once said to Thầy, “I think you understand Jesus better than all my great theology teachers that I had back in the fifties and sixties.” And I had very good theology teachers. He simply said, “That's because I have Jesus in my heart.” If you've read his books *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, or *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*, that will be clear to you. For me it's not just an idea. A lot of my knowledge of Jesus in the fifties was ideas. But with Thầy and his wisdom, the ideas have become more of a reality, a lived experience. In that I feel very lucky.

It was almost exactly eleven years ago that he ordained me a monk at 68 years old. You can't do that anymore. Fifty years old is the ceiling. When he names me Chan Pháp Đệ, everybody laughed. I wondered, “What are they laughing at?” Well, De, as you know, means young brother. I was junior at that moment to a fifteen year old monk that was a foot shorter than me. But it wasn't until 2008 that I heard him say his reason why he gave me that name. I had written an article, “A Day in the Life of a Catholic Zen Monk.” It was translated into Vietnamese and it was going into Vietnam and so he was speaking internationally and explaining to the people in Vietnam that the reason he gave me that name, De, young brother, is because I used to be called “father”. Thầy's got a good sense of humor. Great love, great wisdom, and great humor.

He has been the manifestation of many good things to me and today I want to share with you the Good News of the Plum Village practice of Beginning Anew. Thầy has very faithfully and very creatively transmitted the Buddha's teaching, and Jesus's teaching, so that it comes alive. But I give Thầy credit for inventing the practice as we know it of Beginning Anew in our Plum Village community. It is a particularly important practice for me. My first time to experience it was about 1998, 5 years before becoming a monk.

This also takes me back fifty or sixty years ago. I and many of us Westerners and Catholics grew up in a culture of honour and shame, in a kind of culture of guilt and fear. But we Catholics had an escape from that. We had the sacrament of penance, or Confession, so that Catholics could go and speak to a priest. When I was a young priest, I had the power to absolve people of their sins with the words *ego te absolve abicatus tuis. I absolve you from your sins.* We priests understood that we had the power of God. In fact, even now, my old Catholic friends and my blood brothers, they want to know if I've gone to confession to a priest because in their minds still, the only ones to have the power to forgive sins are the priests. And I used to think that until I discovered this practice and the Buddha's teaching.

While I'm still back 50 years ago, I began to be aware that a lot of what people were coming to confession didn't need to have some proof that God let them off the hook. God wasn't offended. I was hearing Catholic husbands come in and confess that they were just nasty and mean to their wives,

short-tempered, scolding, and unhelpful. So they would confess that to me, realizing that that wasn't very good. They wanted to get lifted from a sense of guilt for being that way. In the old tradition, for those of you who are old enough to remember, the priest would say, "Okay, you are forgiven. Now go say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys. That's your penance." In the last years as a priest I realized that that didn't solve the problem. So I'd send this husband home for his penance to take his wife out to dinner and let her know a few reasons why he appreciated her. And I would send the wife home and rather than give her ten Our Fathers and Hail Marys, I would suggest to her to bake a cake for her husband to celebrate their love and show some gratitude for being able to share life together. It wasn't until I came to the Plum Village practice that I began to see a very natural way of dealing with our mistakes, our meanness, our short-comings, and causes of unhappiness with one another. That's our practice of Beginning Anew.

The first thing about the practice of Beginning Anew is that before we start speaking to our beloved, our child, or to a friend about what we regret that happened, what we were irritated about or any complaint, we water their flowers. Actually, this practice begins by doing it with ourselves first. We look at what's been going on in our interactions but we also look at how we take care of ourselves, or not. A lot of us have a very highly developed sense of self-criticism. Many of us Catholics grew up with that. We had a practice that reinforced that called *examination of conscience*. In the examination of conscience your focus was to ask yourself, "In the past week or two, how have I done? What have I done wrong?" That's more the emphasis. This practice of Beginning Anew does not start there. It starts with watering the flowers. Ask "What are some good things that I have been able to do or think or say this past week? What happinesses have I caused?" so that we can do a little watering of our own flowers and help pick ourselves up a bit.

When I was 8 or 10 years old, there was a common phrase we'd hear. If we did something good, we'd have to announce it to mom and dad. I remember the time when I was in a summer school catechism class and on the last day we had a picnic and races and I won the race. I ran right over to my mother and I said, "Mom, guess what? I won the race!" Hers was a classic comeback. "Don't get the big head." You old-timers might have heard that. It's just the opposite of watering flowers. We had a very good family. I have great happiness out of my family life and my relationships with mom and dad, but we were not long on watering the flowers. We were short on watering flowers and fairly quick to say, "Don't get the big head." I survived that and somehow thrived and all my brothers and sister have done very well.

This practice of Beginning Anew requires that we're mindful. For instance, when we meditate, we stop. We're quiet and we come home to ourselves, aware of the condition of our body and then maybe of something that's been upsetting us, still sitting there. With mindfulness we quietly look at the upset or anger. Thầy talks about seeing our anger like a child and holding our anger. As a child, I received more of a message of, "Hmfff. Throw it away and stomp it out." But here we hold our anger as an upset little child. With this energy of mindfulness, gradually insights and clues come to us as to why we are so caught up in this anger. I remember very early in one of my stages here at the monastery, I was the work coordinator. I was the guy who, all my life had learned to get things done. As the work coordinator we had a big project going and we were redoing the circle garden with all sorts of new planting and Korean grass and some special turf. A brother came in with a load of dirt and dumped it and I disapproved and I let him know to get it out of here. I did it in a scolding way. He told me later, "I thought my dad was giving me heck." But it wasn't until the next day in as I was walking quietly that an insight came up. The reason I got so angry with him was that I was scared. I feared that what

he was doing was going to ruin the project. That was one of the first times in my life I began to see, “I think I’ve been a dare-devil all my life but down deep, I have to face up to the fact that there’s a river of fear in there.” It gave me chance to deal with that. The mindfulness in walking meditation led to the insight that yesterday’s anger came out of fear. And it helped me then to also straighten it out with my brother.

In the energy of mindfulness that we practice we have the energy of Thầy. That’s why I said, “Good morning dear Thầy.” When we’re living, taking in and experiencing the teaching of Thầy, we are experiencing the teaching of mindfulness. That’s also the energy of the Buddha. The energy of the Buddha that showed up two and a half thousand years ago continues in the teaching and in us. And we embody the energy. For me, in the past few years I’ve begun to catch on that this energy of mindfulness, well I have to give Thầy credit. Thầy said, “The energy of mindfulness is the energy of the Holy Spirit.” Now this is an energy that we can experience. Many of us went through big sacramental experiences like confirmation and ordinations for this and that. But sometimes it was more of an idea than an experience. So for me, today, is the Good News that we have this experience of the energy of mindfulness, the energy of the Holy Spirit in our veins.

About this I feel very lucky and very grateful. Another way of putting it is this Buddhist practice has helped me go back and become a much better Catholic, a much better Christian. This practice of Beginning Anew is a practice in which we will move with the energy of mindfulness, will unleash the energy in ourselves. I hope that you too like me can have an experience of insight.

In the year 2000 I still was a layman. My partner and I had formed a residential community of lay people like yourselves and we lived together on the mountainside near Santa Barbara, which is such an idyllic place to be living. There were about 7 of us together on this beautiful property up above Santa Barbara overlooking the city and the harbor and the islands next to the national forests. Every other Sunday morning at ten o’clock we’d circle up in our living room and we’d do Beginning Anew. My experience then of watching a 13-yr old girl watering her mother’s flowers was very inspiring. I see that same capability in these youngsters that are here on this retreat as they are learning this practice and beginning to move with the energy of mindfulness.

I’d like you to know about the four key points to Beginning Anew. The first one is that we Water the Flowers before anything else is said. Whatever complaints or heaviness we may have, we’ve got to find a way to identify two or three things about the other person, or ourselves, that merits a compliment. For sure, not just flattery or just saying something to smooth things over, but genuine compliment. Every two weeks we monks also circle up and do Beginning Anew. If we are doing it well, a monk or another person will mention two or three things about this person that they really admire or are complimenting. What happens is that most of the rest of us didn’t know what happened so it raised my appreciation of the person sitting over there. It’s not only refreshing but it helps to develop more appreciation in the family. This practice is one that can be done not just between myself and my lover or my daughter or wife, but it can also be done in the corporate team. The training of mindfulness has become “in” throughout the world but I remember 15 years ago a German businessman. His corporation broke the corporate members into teams and every two weeks they would do a Beginning Anew as a team, the managers and their subordinates, just to grow their connections.

After Flower Watering comes Sharing Regrets when you share something you did that you’re sorry

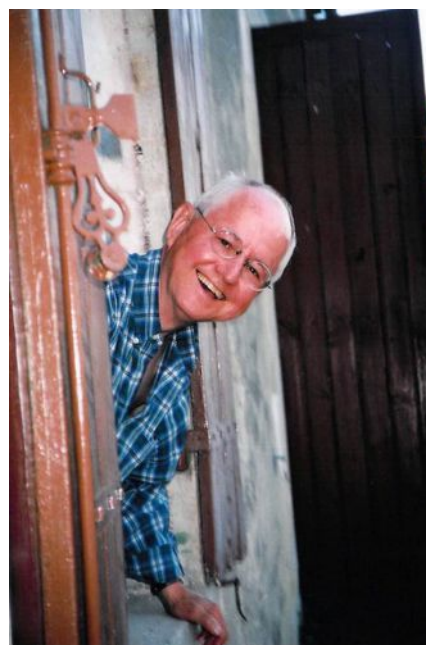
about. You can see that if you've set the stage and raised the mood a bit with somebody who sees that you do have some appreciation of them and some respect, then to come forward with the negative will be more acceptable and be easier. It will be important in sharing regrets that we get good at not saying it in a way that we're blaming the other person.

The third level is Expressing a Hurt. In Expressing a Hurt, it's important that we not express an accusation, like, "When you didn't show up the other day and stranded me there and spoiled the whole day for me..." That's an accusation. We need to use non-violent communication. We say, "When I saw you..." or "When I heard you make that comment to me, I felt hurt." That's a way of non-violent communication so that when we express our hurt, we don't make it into an attack and put the other person on trial. We rather express it as "This is what happened. This is you appeared to do or say left me feeling hurt, angry, sad..."

The fourth step is we share a long-term difficulty. We can say, "I have this tendency to lose my temper. I start talking too fast and I start blaming. This is an old habit. I've had it all my life and I'm still working at it. I want you to know I'm having difficulty mastering it." It's letting our friends and family know we haven't forgotten about it. We're working on it. But please, also we'd appreciate their patience and kind, creative support as we continue to grow.

To me, joy is the infailable sign of God's presence. Beethoven thought the same when he composed the Ninth Symphony. If we listen to Ode to Joy and look at the poetry, it talks about joy, that spark of divinity. Joy is that energy that comes from applied mindfulness. It's that energy of the Holy Spirit working in us. This is a very practical thing. And Beginning Anew is also a practice. Don't just go home with a few ideas about it. Make sure that you go home and practice it. If you haven't got a partner, a child, or a friend, to practice with, please go and find one. Learn to do the practice. But there's another way to do it too and it's safer. You've got to belong to a Sangha. All of you who are not yet in a Sangha, make sure you find out where one is that you can sit in with that Sangha. A Sangha itself should do this practice every two weeks. Thereby it becomes a training ground helping us learn the details of how to do it. I credit our eighth century patriarch Lin Chi, the man who once said, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." Lin Chi was the guy who wanted to cut down all the talk and the chatter, speculation, rumination, and imaginations. He was a teacher who basically said, "Just do it." I think Nike stole it from him! What I really want to emphasize is to take it home and just do it in a way that we begin to catch on and experience the joy that comes from having our flowers watered. There is joy in a family where the flowers are being watered. When we practice, our thoughts, our words and our actions create joy. The Buddha was good at it. Jesus was good at it. They've transmitted the energy to us and we need, also, to enjoy being good at it.

Thank you for listening, I hope that this becomes for you a life giving experience.



Healing Our Relationships – 2013 – Q&A Intro

I had the joy of spending a few years in a joint venture with Peggy and her husband Larry as we formed a residential Lay community in Santa Barbara. That was a big learning experience for me. I have to tell you own experience. I was still somewhat of a beginner in the practice and my partner was having difficulties with our refrigerator management. We had three to four different couples using the same kitchen. I thought it was my responsibility to support my partner with her concerns and to get everyone to do things the same way. One day I was by the refrigerator and I noticed Peggy's dad came to the refrigerator and straightened up a few things. I had identified Peggy as one of the people who didn't have my neatness standards for the refrigerator. So I commented, "How do you do that so calmly and put up with that?" I knew he'd been dealing with it for years. And he said, "Oh, I just love her." For me, that was a huge teaching. When I'm inclined to look at brothers and sisters here with whom I live and I have difficulty with, if I feel critical, irritated or impatient, that teaching of her dad comes back to me. No problem. I just love em. It's a learning that's still going on. I'm recognizing that the problem is me. There's a problem as long as I'm short on loving.

I have a hunch that there are a number of us here who are not celebrating the river of love, who don't have what we call a lover or a partner. Some of us may have not gotten there yet and other may be like I was 10 years ago, at a point in which my lover and I separated. In that separation I was amazed that after a month I felt relief. I couldn't believe it. After some more time, I felt a freedom. I got clear that I didn't need another romance but there's more in life. By that time I knew Thầy well enough that I thought, "He's my man." So I went to become a monk. The reason I'm telling you this is with the teachings of Thầy, I recognized how much of my life I'd been a caretaker in my relationships. Many of us need to learn for the first time to take care of ourselves. Until we do that, we'll never be the lover we would like to be. Until we learn to really take care of ourselves, we will never really be able to show up as a powerful lover for our partner, our friends, our children. To me, this is a primary feature of the Plum Village Practice; learning to come back to ourselves, to be quiet, to discover what's going on here and not so busy making sure that we're getting what we want from out there. That's been very much the wonderful experience that is helping me to be a happy monk, learning how to take care of myself. The first sixty or seventy years of my life I hadn't completed that. Now in the 78th year of my life, I'm having the best time ever. I'm in love. I feeling that as I engage with the people who come here and the people with whom we work. It's just wonderful. I feel able to give it away. I emphasize this for those of us who were not on the weekend of Partnership retreat, those of us here today who may be single or who are in a troubled relationship. A real gift of this practice is to be able to come and take some time. Not just today, not just to hear a talk, not just to read Thầy's books. Come and spend time here at the monastery learning how to just walk and eat and work, learning how to understand ourselves and take care of ourselves. That's an invitation. Treat yourself to some time here at Deer Park.

Listening to Children – Q&A – 2014

When the children try to talk to their parents, their parents mind are somewhere else and the children have shown sadness in not being shown attention. How to deal with negative emotions and how to talk to your parent about how you're feeling.

Br Pháp Đê – This question brought up something to me. Last week I had an unusual new experience. Washun Tara, who now practices with us, has a lifelong career in working with boys in transition to manhood and with older men. About seven of us guys sat down in a circle and the first thing we were invited to was to give our name, our health, our feelings, and something that is coming up for us spiritually. We went around the circle and shared. Then he said, “Okay, now we'll go around the circle again. What did we hear from each other?” It was quite a new experience to go back and remember what John or Henry said and to pick up where they were feeling some particular feeling or struggle. It is a practice he does frequently around the world and it was very good medicine for us monks. We monks, particularly we Western monks, are typical males. We've been trained in getting things done and being tough on problem solving, and underdeveloped in terms of awareness of our feelings and our feminine side. The thing that most of us have been brought up with is to be tough and macho. That sets us up in relationships so that our partners will often experience us as not present.

So I'd like to suggest for you families what I'm going to be suggesting to my brothers, that is this practice. A family should hold at least once every two weeks a Happiness Meeting. I wish I had known this forty years ago when I became a dad. But kids are going to come at you and you're going to be too engaged in something to really give them what they need. So a family needs to create a space, not while eating or working, just to sit down and to connect and share with each other. In the monastery we call it a Happiness Meeting. You sit down and you make sure that there's time for each little one to say what they need to say. But what's even more important is that the little ones hear an adult, a mom or a dad, show that they really understand how he feels or what she's worried about, what she's anxious about, and feels honored in that. This goes along with the practice of Beginning Anew.

Then there's the other part that you've all learned here of Beginning Anew. I'm sure hoping that all of you families go back home and every two weeks you circle up for a Beginning Anew. That also will provide a great deal of relief from what the kids are complaining about. You know, in the Beginning Anew practice we water the flowers. One of the things a family will discover is that when you see one of the members of the family watering the flowers of another, complimenting another, very often that's new information for the rest of us. It helps us have a new appreciation of the third or fourth or fifth member of the family that we didn't have. So please, do Beginning Anew when you get home, every two weeks. And the way to really get that skill down is to make sure that you're connected with a Sangha that does it because Sanghas should do it too. Thank you.

There was a first question about anxiety coming up in meditation. Maybe that's good news. My encouragement is to not let the anxiety deter you from sticking to your meditation. Most of us have been very well conditioned. How do you handle anxiety? We've all got little unconscious skills. We move things around to forget the anxiety. Some of us eat, some of us drink, some of us run and workout. Some of us just work harder. Some of us read a lot. These are all typical ways that we've

escaped anxiety. So when you sit down and begin mindful meditation and anxiety starts coming in, that upset over the anxiety is there waiting to take over. Usually when it comes up and takes over, other things come up too. Maybe anger comes in and exacerbates it.

It's like Thầy talked about the second arrow. But we need to do the hard work of learning the basic stages of meditation. The first four steps are going through the body. Then make sure you get grounded and celebrate a good feeling, something you feel joy and happiness about. You might be aware that anxiety is sitting there so you look at it. Like Thầy suggested in his talk, imagine holding the agitation and anxiety like a little baby and just giving it time. This is why the upset of anxiety is showing up in meditation might be good news. Take time to be patient with yourself to look at it and learn the steps of meditation to confront it so that ultimately, you'll get some insight as to why that anxiety is there. That insight will then help us be able to handle it and not be dominated by it anymore. That insight is the real fruit of good meditation. For old Christians, we used to pray to God to help us overcome our fear and anxiety. The idea was for the divine power out there to send grace to heal my upset over here. Then we called it grace. Here in this practice, we call it insight. The insight doesn't come in from our there. It comes from inside, using the energy of mindfulness. Then we get to discover that the energy of mindfulness that brings insight and relief from our suffering is the same as grace. It still comes from the divine source. The energy of mindfulness is the energy of the Holy Spirit in here, not out there. So I want to encourage you to celebrate the suffering of anxiety coming up during meditation.

In the DVD yesterday, Thầy asked a question of us. "Do I know how to suffer?" This practice is the one to help us learn to work through our suffering of anxiety, to transform it and to find that we can stand up in joy and freedom. Thank you.



January 25, 2015 - Engaged Buddhism

So many of you are back here because you know about Deer Park, which was the place in India where the Buddha first spoke to his five first monks in the Deer Park, and now here you are, tapped into the energy of the Buddha, the teachings of the Buddha in this Deer Park.

I'd like to start with a bit of a demonstration. I'd like you to prepare for a few moments of meditation. In doing so, a number of us are not comfortable sitting on a cushion, at least for more than twenty or thirty minutes. I want to share something that I learned with you in Tai Chi, especially for those of you back there on the chairs. Take a thin cushion and fold it in half then you sit on the front half of the chair. Like I've got myself here on this cushion, this raises my hips so that my hips are higher than my knees. As most of you are sitting there, your knees are on the mat and your hips are higher up. By getting your knees lower than your hips, then the pelvis tips forward. This is one function in the world where nobody's really watching so you can not look good. Let your stomach hang out and relax. The head is straight and the neck is straight – drop your chin a bit. That's the good posture and most of you will find that it's much easier to do that sitting on a floor on a cushion.

This one also works in the office or the kitchen. Take a few moments and sit and quiet down. Now if you are a person with a back problem you may want to put your cushion all the way back and use the back of the chair, but only for those who have back problems. Many people in sitting meditation in the mornings do not know how to do this and they end up sitting on the chair but they end up slouching. This can be an easier way to sit on a chair and remain straight and alert.

Breathing in, I know am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out. In, out. (bell)

Breathing in, I follow my breath all the way in. Breathing out, I follow my breath all the way out. All the way in, all the way out. (bell)

Breathing in, I am aware of my body. Breathing out, I relax my body. Aware of body, relaxing body. (bell)

Breathing in, I notice my feelings. Breathing out, I feel joy. Notice my feelings, feel joy. (bell)

Thank you. That's the beginning of a guided meditation. Up in the window of the meditation hall stained glass window is *smṛti*, stopping and being mindful. The next one is *samādhi*, concentrating. If I sat here for a little while and concentrated on my joy, I would have some increasing awareness of where my joy is coming from. I'm very clear – my joy is in seeing you, in being here with you and seeing your bright and smiling faces, knowing that you've taken time out of your week to come here today and practice with us. Other days, I might spend time looking at my anger. That's been a popular one for me for the past years, dealing with my age-old anger, using concentration to get at the bottom of it and coming up with insights as to where it came from. Growing up I thought of myself as a fearless boy and young man not afraid of anything, only to discover here as a monk that my anger come from fear. Being a practical farm kid from Minnesota, my fear was that we had a project going and a monk was going to mess it up so I got angry. As I looked at it more deeply and saw that this young man was doing his best job. I feared that our project was going to get sabotaged. As a boy I never learned how to meditate. In fact, I didn't begin meditating until 1994 in recovery from cancer. In that experience of meditation I went all out and did the 10-day Buddhist boot camp with Goenka and that was grueling. But on the sixth day, I hit a zone of such peace and beauty, of stillness and joy. It was

silent retreat but silently I said to myself, “Wow. This is what I was looking for back in the priesthood.” Back in seminary we got up every morning and from 6 o'clock until 6:30 we tried to meditate. I didn't know it then that our meditation was all up in the head. We were trying to get at the core of everything intellectually, not knowing how to get into the heart. It took Buddhist meditation and the mindfulness method to get me down into the heart where I got in touch with emotions.

There was an extra reason why I started with a short guided meditation on the breath. On June 21, 2016, at the retreat “What Happens when we Die?” Thầy said very clearly, “I don't die. I won't die. I will be found in your breathing.” At the same time he told us a story. Years ago there was a nun from Hanoi who came to Plum Village for three months who had terminal cancer. Apparently she didn't have very long to live. She discontinued her medications and stayed there practicing with the community and Thầy. At the end of the three months she finally acquiesced and agreed to go to the Bordeaux hospital get checked out. By then, they couldn't find any cancer and she lived another 19 years. Apparently she had some status in Hanoi. She told Thầy that she wanted to build a stupa to him. Thầy didn't give her any encouragement. She persisted and he said, “Well, if you build such a stupa, I want this inscription on the front. 'I am not here.' And the second line is, 'I am not out there.'” He proceeded to say, “I will be found in the way of breathing. I will be found in the way of walking in you, my continuation.” I'm still learning this myself. Hearing that talk by Thầy has challenged me to look a little more deeply. When I was the age that most of you I still thought that I have an immortal soul and I was going to go all the way to heaven to be there with everybody happily in heaven for eternity. Thầy has challenged me to look more deeply into that. So I lightened up on that and I used to say, “Well, I'm not sure about all of that.” But I do feel confidence that this life has been really good. Because of this, I believe that the next on is also going to be very good. It's kind of a fantasy. Now, like Thầy, I hope I can learn to say, “I will not die. I will continue in you as you breathe, as you learn how to walk, as you practice.” I also have the satisfaction of knowing that I will continue in my daughter.

Now I have a question. How many of you here have participated in a Sangha in the past few weeks? In the past few months? Thầy has said many times that this practice of breathing, of walking, this practice of mindfulness is not a solo trip. Bottom line, it's about relationship. Bottom line, it's about brotherhood and sisterhood. When we meet again in months ahead and I ask, “How many of you are participating in Sangha?” I hope to see a lot more hands.

Much of our lives and our gatherings with people are competitive events. We like taking care of ourselves and getting what we want. That's not Sangha. Sangha is not a competitive event. It's a cooperative venture. Given our culture, particularly us Christian and Catholic Westerners, to get this wrong. We have hundreds of years thinking that we go to church for an hour or two on Sunday and that's it for a week. You can do so without taking any risk of sharing of yourself or really listening too much to anybody else, not engaging in any kind of real relationship. That's our history. Somehow that was supposed to satisfy everything if we went to sing songs and participate in the sacraments and maybe take holy communion. That was it. Good for another week. But Thầy wants us to understand that this mindfulness practice is a brotherhood, a relationship practice.

Recently Ron Forrester, one of our Sangha friends here in Deer Park, mentioned to me about some research for those of us who don't understand the importance of communal relationships. I'll read some lines from this research. “It is relevant to all of us because it forces us to think differently about ourselves.” This is the story of the Rat Park study. They had two different packs of rats. One was very

healthy and happy group of rats living together. The other group of rats were lonely and separated from one another. Both rats had a access to plain water and a morphine solution. The rats that lived together and were happy didn't really go for the doped up water but the rats that were kept apart and not doing so well, they went for the doped water. What I'm reading now comes from the conclusions the study where they applied the research in terms of us human beings.

“Human beings are bonding animals. We need to connect and love. But we have created an environment and a culture that cuts off from connections or it offers only the paradise offered by the internet. The rise of addiction is a symptom of a deeper sickness in the way we live, constantly directing our gaze toward the next shiny object we should buy rather than the human beings around us. This condition is described also as an age of loneliness. We have created human societies where it is easier for people to become cut off from all human connections than ever before. Bruce Alexander, the creator of Rat Park, told me that for too long, we have talked exclusively about individual recovery from addiction.”

I didn't know how many of you are addicts. But I spent some time in AA recovering from that addiction and I also spent some more time recovering from the addiction of smoking. I recognize that back when I went into AA I found a fellowship, a practice that I did not experience in my priesthood and in all my prayer life. It was a brand new experience of fellowship and helping one another.

“We have talked exclusively about individual recovery from addiction. We need now to talk about social recovery, how we all recover together from the sickness of isolation that is sinking us like a thick fog.” So we're not just talking about alcohol or heroin but the other addictions that we have – being too busy accomplishing things, eating, working too hard to get ahead. This mindfulness practice that Thầy introduced us to is good medicine for us to move out of our loneliness. Back in those days, I remember how a good glass of scotch was the solution to upset and whatever was missing. Another thing that really helped calm the anger was a good dose of nicotine. That was my experience back then. Now I'm having the experience of being engaged in a Sangha that Thầy has formed. In these relationships, I learn, enjoy, and even get correction from my brothers and sisters. When we were all gathered at the beginning of walking meditation and Sister Man Nghiem gave us the instruction on walking, it filled me with real joy. In listening to her practical wisdom on how to walk like Thầy so the way we walk through the woods and under the oak trees is with that same energy of Thầy. It's also the energy of the Buddha that's available to us when we're really mindful.

The energy of Thầy also flows in the community. Thầy is the founder of Engaged Buddhism as we know it which got him into so much trouble in Vietnam and ultimately caused his being exiled. Engaged Buddhism is a practice that gets off the cushion at times and moves on out to deal with the suffering in the world. Thầy says, “I will be found in your way of breathing, I will be found in your way of walking, and I will be found in the way of your engagement to relieve suffering in the community.” In a Sangha, we can learn how to breathe, how to really walk mindfully, and then be able to experience that liberation from that various kinds of addictions that we suffer from whether it's busyness, chemicals, or something else.

The last portion that I want to touch on today is that we're coming up at noon with a brotherhood meal in which all the monastics will process in here and all of you following the monastics for a formal lunch. I want to encourage you to see this formal lunch as another form of mindfulness practice like breathing, walking, working, eating. Make this a formal lunch in which we mindfully serve up our

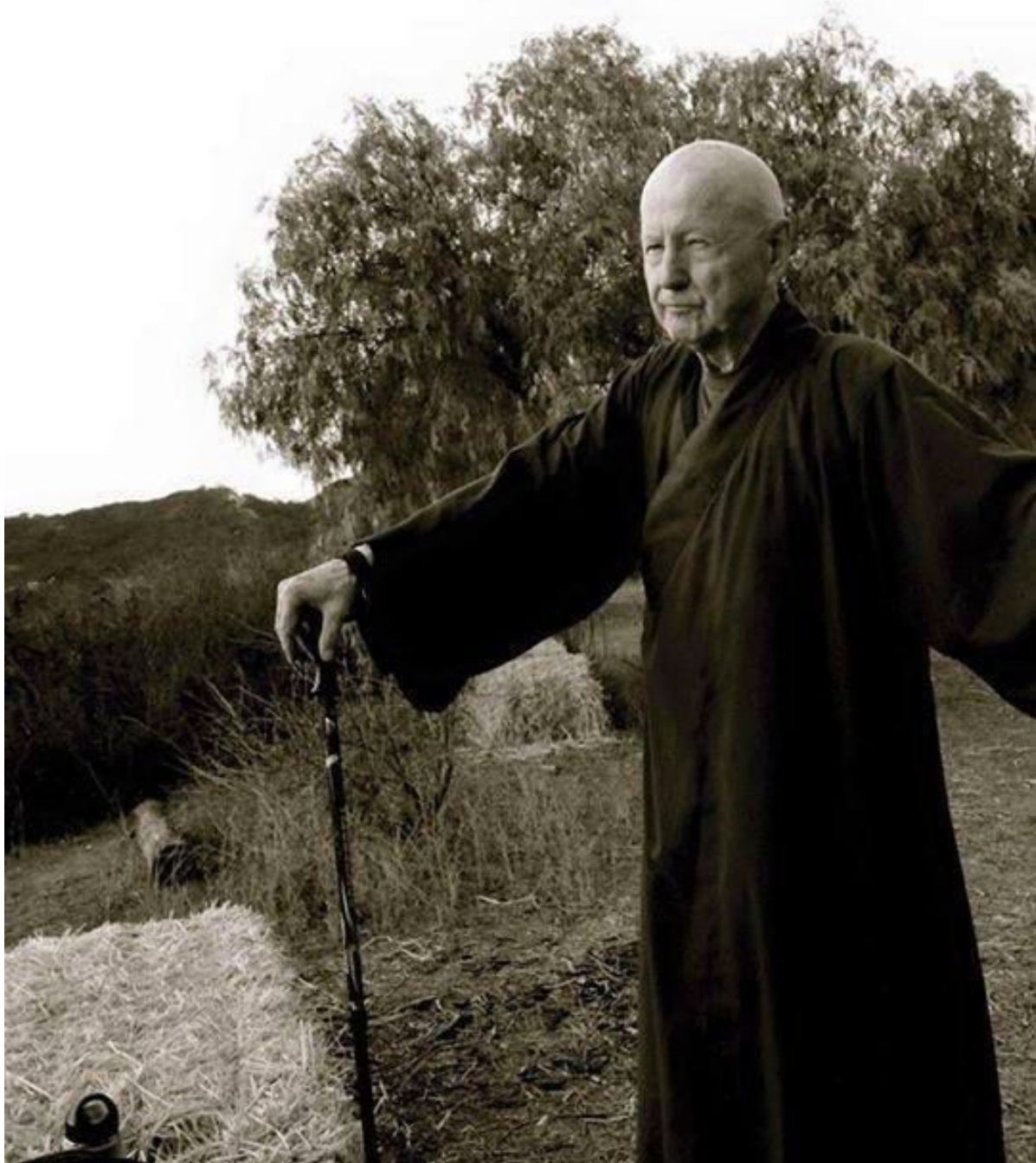
food and then very mindfully do a short walking meditation down here and then waiting for the reading of the 5 contemplations.

Coming back to Thầy's teaching, after he finished talking about the stupa and said, "I'm not here, I'm not out there. I'm with you in your walking, in your breathing." He talked about what was originally called *The Way* twenty centuries ago when Jesus gathered his followers for a brotherhood meal. Thầy did as Jesus did. Jesus made the symbolic action of breaking the bread and handing it to the brothers and sisters there with the intention, "I give you this bread. It is my life. I give it to you now. You are the continuation." So when we gather to eat together you will hear the fifth contemplation, "We accept this food in gratitude so that we may be nourished to be more understanding of ourselves and of one another." When we become more understanding, we'll become more loving and more compassionate. We eat to be strengthened, to be more loving to one another, and to provide more compassionate service to those who suffer whether it's in our Sangha or the homeless boys on the street, the deported veterans or whomever. This is our practice and this is our purpose. So let's go about this.

As we begin to learn this mindfulness practice we're going to find ourselves all over the place. We can just be patient with ourselves, coming back and saying, "A little bit of progress." The same goes in the walking down here and when we're sitting here eating. We have a tendency to get too focused on our plate. We can look people in the eye and smile, recognizing the brothers and sisters that are all gathered here in this lunch, this brotherhood and sisterhood meal together. Let's take the time to chew the food a lot and avoid hauling in water or a glass of merlot or whatever. Leave the drinks out and chew the food so that it is comfortable and enjoyable in flavor and easy to swallow it, chewing the food 30 or 40 times. We take the time to not be preoccupied with what we'll be going to do at two o'clock or four o'clock, being right there with the food that's in the bowl. At this very important time Jesus said, "This bread is my body. It's for your life. I give you my life. Be my continuation." That's what Thầy is saying to us.

They didn't get it even at that very important moment. They were still discussing who was going to be more important and that sort of thing. So Jesus got up from the table, put on a towel, and said, "Come over here. I'm going to wash your feet" which was a tradition back then. They said, "Oh no, you don't wash our feet. No way!" He said, "If I can't wash your feet, you can't be part of me." Basically he did it and then said, "Now catch on." He didn't use that expression but basically he was saying, "If you're with me, you're servants of one another." My sense of that is also with Thầy. If I'm his continuation, I give my energy in life to serve others and to help heal suffering. So as we gather to eat like that, hopefully we catch on that we're Thầy's continuation. We're nourishing ourselves so that we can become more loving and understanding of each other. And maybe like Jesus and the apostles, we're not going to wash each others' feet today. But like we did in one of our retreats, we washed one another's dishes. In a way, it's a new practice of saying, "I'm grateful about what's going on here and mindful of what I'm doing. I'll wash your dishes." That's an opportunity for us today.

I hope that I have given you some useful tools. I hope I have encouraged your motivation to find and come together in a Sangha and to work together to help others. And remember that a Sangha is a confidential community. There are other tools but here I'm inviting you to really look again at a way to participate or create a Sangha. Those of us here will be happy to be supportive as consultants in making this happen. Mainly, what we've been sharing about and how Thầy says "I don't die, I continue in you in your breathing, in your walking. This is it." Thank you.



2010 - Mindfulness and Education Retreat - Q&A

Could you talk about cravings and addictions a little bit?

What are your views on destiny? Is it something that it pre-determined or is it something that you make from your determination and your decisions in life?

We create our destiny by the way we think, by the way we speak, and by the way we act. Sometimes it's made more difficult because of the inheritance from our parents. But the primary or ultimate source of our existence is love. I think it is our destiny to be lovers and to love with the quality that understands that we are one. There's an illusion we live with that think *you're* different. The reality made by our egos is very busy making sure that I get what I want and it's me versus the rest of you. So I'm gonna to be successful, I'm gonna get the grades, I'm gonna make the team, and I'm gonna make the most money. That's how our thinking, words, and acting can take us astray from our real destiny as being lovers according to our source.

The ego is the one that really facilitates craving and addiction because the ego is what thinks, "My pleasure and my happiness is out there." It either comes up with sex or the booze, or it's with *you* – *you've* got the access to the drugs, etc... Chemical addiction or alcohol addiction, of which I have first hand experience, is a real saboteur of any kind of practice, whether it's marriage counseling, psychotherapy, religion, or buddhist practice. Being a Catholic, I was very strong in devotion and liturgy and prayer. But I didn't really have a practice. I didn't discover that until I did AA, the 12 Steps. Scott Peck has aptly described the Twelve Step Program as being the single most important contribution to spirituality in the West. I didn't really experience fellowship, support, love, and forgiveness until I discovered AA. It took me years to discover the Buddhist practice and I could see immediately that the teaching of the Buddha and our Zen practice from Thầy is a very practical way of dealing with our addictions and our cravings. But for many of us, even those of us who are Buddhist, I think that dealing with our craving or our addiction might require the Twelve Step Programs. As we travel around in our retreats we notice that there's a lot of drug and alcohol addiction. We also know that theres a lot of work addiction. That's where *vô sự* says to let go of our addiction to being active and having projects. But it's also to eating. Overeating is a huge addiction in our society. As we travel in America it's awesomely distressing to see the huge numbers of people, particularly children, who are overweight. Those are very serious addictions. I'm happy to be not only a continuing practitioner of the Twelve Steps but also to have this practice because there's no way that you can deal with cravings and addictions, or unwholesome habits like anger, by only having lots of prayer, lots of devotion, and lots of visits to the temple or to masses. It takes a practice. And the good news is, we've got a practice.

2014 – The Answers of Time, Space, and Acceptance – Q&A

~ About anxiety and being hooked on distraction or anger in meditation.

These things will come up and threaten us as too big of a problem to deal with so we'll run off to other things and not buckle down and stay with the meditation. It is actually good news to take this and look at it. It's also important to recognize that most of this stuff comes from our ancestors. When you look at this problem of anxiety or a tendency to be too distracted to be present to your lover, or the tendency to be explosive in anger, know that most of us did not invent these tendencies and energies. We inherited them. That means we've got to give ourselves a break and be patient as we deal with them and not get too self-critical and beat ourselves up for the difficulty or the slowness we have in transforming these unwholesome energies. We need to remember that we're just a continuation of our moms and dads and grandparents. What's showing up in us we got for the most part from them. We inherited most of our store consciousness, our unconsciousness, and it runs 95% of our lives. We need to be patient.

The other part is that as we deal with our anger, distraction, or anxiety and we make some headway in transforming them, we can know that we are doing quite a favor for our ancestors. We are taking them with us. My ancestors are in me. I get relief by helping my ancestors but more importantly, I help my children too. My children are going to benefit from what I do to transform these negative energies that were passed on to me by my ancestors. That becomes an exciting possibility, that the work we're doing will be passed on to our children as a gift and a grace rather than a burden and a suffering.

“If there's suffering in the family or ancestors, how to deal with that especially when efforts at reconciliation are not successful?”

The one thing we've got going in this practice is to be about the business of healing ourself. Like in Thầy's talk yesterday, we have to learn how to really come home to love ourselves and learn how to take care of ourselves. We let go of trying to get approval by taking care of others and realize the possibility of really becoming a true lover for our partners and our family. It's doing our own work.

“When I share, I fear having a negative impact on the other person.”

There may be a feeling of hesitancy to really share openly because it could stimulate upset in the other. That's one I'm working on here in the monastery. Given my style in the business world and my family background, Thầy could have named me brother Phap Blunt. I'm learning how to modify that tendency to be able to communicate without offending the other person, particularly if it's someone I really want to grow in love with and not jeopardize our progress. One thing that was helpful for me was that a group of us did an NVC workshop with Marshall Rosenberg and then came back here and continued working together on new communication skills with Non-Violent Communication. I learned that if I'm dealing with somebody I'm upset or angry with, that rather than to hit him up with what the suffering that they caused in me and come across like I'm blaming them for my unhappiness, to learn simply how to be descriptive, saying, “When I saw you do this, I felt hurt. When you didn't show up when I thought you promised to show up, I felt upset.” It's important to stay away from accusing the other person of a crime. That's Nonviolent Communication. We still reveal what's going on inside. We can use the Beginning Anew practice with family or a lover. If there is something that seems to be

dynamite and you have to be very careful about it, there is a fourth part of Beginning Anew where I share with you the fact that I have a real suffering and I want you to be aware of it so you can know that I'll make mistakes. I can say either a very jealous person and I'm working on it, or I'm a very paranoid person but I'm working on it, to let you know that I consider this my problem and I'm working on it. That can be a good sharing in the Beginning Anew. It will be more easily heard if you've just also previously watered the flowers of the person with whom you want to share. If there's something that's really distressing and you're either embarrassed about or it's a constant problem, if you'd like some patience with it, you can reveal it. Just like we brothers may share with each other a tendency to feel alienated. If we let the brothers know our triggers and our tendencies, they can be aware of it and more patient and more tolerant and more helpful.

“What do I do about judging the quality of my practice?”

We know that whoever asked that question is the only one who's got that problem (laughter). The awareness of this problem is good news. Saying, “I've needed to discover that I have a tendency to be dissatisfied and critical of my performance, which comes out then of a tendency to be critical of my very being” is very difficult. We're slow to accept and believe the teaching that comes from so many teachers that, “You're perfect the way you are. You don't have to change.” We ought to get it, that we're perfect the way we are. But it's difficult for us to really buy into that so we continue to work at getting better. The good news about this discovery of our tendency to be critical of ourselves and of our practice is that it's evidence of the ego at work. It's the ego that is preoccupied with looking good, with doing well, and being better than average. It's the ego that is running the show there so this becomes an invitation to recognize how much the ego is even dominating our mindfulness practice, and to then be able to look at that and go more deeply. What is it in my preoccupation with being perfect, looking good, or getting the results I want that brings up my impatience, my ego? We get to see that and let it go. Letting it go is a daily practice. For most of us it doesn't go all at once.

In my own experience here at the monastery, I'm getting a lot of joy in my life that I've never had in the first seventy five years. It's from in these last two or three years from more consciously letting go. It's not a one-time event. It's day by day. And sometimes it's like Thầy teaches, “Hello daddy, you're still with me.” I say it with the awareness that yeah, dad's tendency to be preoccupied with knowing the right way to get things done and quick to anger, not very aware of the harmony of the team, is there. I don't excommunicate him. He's in me and there are so many other things that he's given me that are very positive. It helps me to be appreciative that when I see, yeah dad, here's your anger again, but also then to stop and look at what are the four or five other things that are positive for which I'm grateful. These are the conditions of my happiness. So please look at the upsets, the difficulties, the frustrations, and the anxieties that seem to sabotage your meditation. Please learn how to see them as gifts.

2015 - The Ultimate Truth & Activism – Teen Retreat Q&A

“How do you reconcile practicing non-judgment and accepting reality for what it is with activism, the idea that something needs to be change. For example, the state that the environment's in. You could view it from the perspective and embrace reality for what it is but at the same time I feel that there are important changes and actions that need to be made. So how do you reconcile practicing non-judgment and the desire to change?”

The key is moving into understanding interbeing. The more we understand our interbeing-ness, the more we are going to recognize that in our tendency to be judgmental, whether it's of the fossil fuel industries or whoever are the biggest causes of the overheating of the planet – we're part of that. We look at how we can recognize that they are us, that we are them, and then how do we move into some intelligent action to do our part to reduce the destruction of the climate?

There are a couple of things that are available. We do simple things here like no car day. There are also a couple books. This afternoon you might go to the bookstore and buy “Love Letter to Mother Earth” by Thầy. For 30 years he's been on the cutting edge, attempting to wake us up to global warming and our responsibility for caring for Mother Earth. Also at the bookstore downtown, I'd recommend Joanna Macy's book called “Active Hope” because we are dealing with a tendency to get disappointed and not believing it's going to be possible, to give up, to think all the effort is futile. Active Hope. That should also be our basic attitude in our practice. Not getting caught in negative thinking and then giving up. Active Hope.

Then, become involved with a Sangha. There's an effort going on with the leadership in our Sanghas to take the teaching and the practice we have and come together collectively to help one another become more forceful change agents in helping to deal with climate change. This is the Earth Holder Sangha. There's also Campaign Non-Violence led by a friend of ours, father John Dear, addressing violence in our world. Those are ways we can begin to intelligently and meaningfully do our part and become part of a collective effort that will bring about a change and help to preserve this planet so that 100 years from now the little kids are going to have a chance. Keep in mind that we inter-are with the so-called villains causing all the damage, climate change, or the violence. We inter-are.

The question of the grandmother regarding teenagers, to me, is a very important question. It comes to the heart of what we're about and what Thích Nhất Hạnh teaches. This practice that you've tasted today and that we do here everyday, it's not a solo practice. This is a practice of relationships. If we're not experiencing this practice in the give-and-take of relationships, we're not yet doing it. The way we move into this is by connecting with a Sangha. There are many very good Sanghas. These are men and women coming together like us here and once a week, at least, they do sitting meditation, they look at a teaching or share a sutra but they discuss it. If I were out there with the rest of you, I would not only find a Sangha. I would look at this gang of people, the men and women, and identify one of them that I could feel more of a soul connecting with, maybe a co-mentor. I would ask that person to be somewhat my buddy so that I could ask my questions, maybe even over the phone or a cup of coffee other days to grow my practice and to deal with whatever difficulties might come up. I learned this 20 years ago as a stock broker, getting together with a fellow stock broker. On Monday we'd set our goals for the week, how many million we were going to do. On Friday we'd come back together and discuss

how it happened to look what worked and what didn't work. We did it in a way that we learned and didn't get into self-criticism and fault-finding. That's also what the Sangha really helps with because a lot of us have a tendency that the mind goes quickly to the negative and what's wrong. So then we have a tendency to find fault with our practice, to be critical and to put ourselves down. A Sangha can help free us and help open us to new doors and discover in relationships of kindness, of understanding, how to grow and to enjoy oneself.

I am finding here in my eightieth year more joy than I've ever experienced in the prior 80 years. I don't have a lover, though they can be good. I don't have any wealth anymore. There's a lot of stuff that's gone. But what I have is the brotherhood and sisterhood here with my brothers and sisters and people like yourselves coming here. I'm having a wonderful time sharing this practice. That's available in a good Sangha. We help one another to grow so that you learn to have these skills in the business world to not get sucked back into negativity or too much preoccupation with accumulation or dealing with the problems of the business or the distractions of the business or at home. The Sangha, the community, the group is a resource to help us move up in terms of becoming more peaceful and joyful and then maintaining that experience and dealing with the setbacks that tend to occur or the distractions that tend to occur. So in answer to two of your questions, you've got to be in a Sangha. You can come here week after week and sometimes even get inspired but you'll never really get in to the practice and get the practice in one's blood. That's what we really need to do so that we can experience a continuation of peace and joy and good energy. And if you really want to do Sangha all the way, become a nun or a monk, but it's more difficult if you're over fifty.

~ On Forgiveness

I was discussing with Phap Ho this week about forgiveness. He said that if you have understanding, you don't need forgiveness. That has challenged me to look more deeply at these situations in which I've been irritated or a tendency to hold a grudge or a tendency to be critical and unforgiving of self. The medicine for that is not like what I had in the old days. I had the power to do ablution back when I was a priest. I didn't know then that not only did couples *not* need a priest to give them forgiveness but they needed to speak to each other and to forgive each other. Learning to meditate and to come home to ourselves, thus understanding ourselves deeply enables us to forgive ourselves and stop expecting that we're going to be perfect people, having people recognizing us for how good we are and how well do we do everything. We then let go of our tendency to make judgements. Thầy teaches that letting go is the *crème de la crème* of the Buddha's teaching. We can let go when these issues come up, like our resentment, our grudges, and our observations that someone's doing something that we don't like. We need to learn to let go.

To support yourself in learning this practice, around eight o'clock at night when there's a tendency to sit down in front of the TV, bring out the computer and go on Youtube. Go to the Plum Village on-line channel and enjoy a half hour to an hour of listening to Thầy. The other day I was scrolling through the music of Verdi and I found an offering from Thích Nhất Hạnh on suffering. It certainly would have been very rich hour of getting his wisdom. So add that sort of thing to the evening at home on your computer.

~ Painful feelings that come from our ancestors

Learn this practice of mindfulness meditation - stopping, concentrating (samadhi), and looking at

what's upsetting us, what's hurting, our jealousy, our anger, our fear, our anxiety. If we work at that using the energy of mindfulness, we will come up with insights as to why we're in this upset and lack of forgiveness. Not only do we have the sitting practice but we have the walking practice.

As a new monk eleven years ago, I remember being the work coordinator. I got angry at a fellow monk who was doing something that was going to mess up a project. We were redoing Solidity Hamlet's garden and we were going to make it more beautiful. He brought in a load of dirt and put it in the wrong place and I got angry at him. I was kind of baffled. Why did I get so upset about that? It took me a while to figure it out. In fact, it was during another form of our meditation, walking meditation. The insight came up. The reason I got so angry and ticked off and scolded him is because I was afraid. I was afraid he was going to mess up the project. In the business world you run into that a lot. We react with anger because somebody's doing something and we fear it will mess up the project. I'm mentioning this to say that walking meditation like we just did before this session is a very important opportunity.

If we learn how to do it, we will enjoy insights that come up and help us understand what's been troubling us or upsetting us during the week. A good businessman should not only be connected with a Sangha but also should do not only daily sitting meditation but also walking meditation. At least a few days a week, get out where it's green and quiet and walk. A very important part of the practice.

This afternoon after lunch, you have another very good opportunity to learn another form of meditation – lying down meditation – deep relaxation. For many of us it will provide opportunities for insights to come up about what's troubling us. As we lay down and we look at various parts of our body, especially the parts of our body are complaining, we get to be lovingly attentive to that rather than just popping an Aspirin or something like that. For many of us, it will also provide us a better technique than we're using to relax and fall asleep at night. I bet I could see quite a few hands for people that have difficulty falling asleep at night. That two o'clock training is a good one for that. As you can tell by now, I'm an old salesman.



The Making of a Monk (why I become a monk?)

from Vivian Hermiz with editing by Brother Pháp Đệ

Can I experience Jesus as a teacher like I experience Thầy?

In February 1996, I did a 10 day Goenka Vipassana retreat in Washington State. When I returned, the manager of my stock brokerage office took me out to lunch to celebrate past good performance and to talk about my future goals---productivity. In response to his query, I “popped out” with “Dick, I’d rather be a monk!” Here we were dining at a high-end French restaurant in part to celebrate a successful year and to also discuss my goals and targets for the year to come. It was in response to the latter that those words popped out before I could even realize I was not answering his question, much less take them back. One would think that I was ready to pack my bags and head straight to Plum Village, but my future life path would open in its own time.

Prior to becoming a stock broker, I had served for 9 years as a Catholic priest. The call to vocation was a natural one, given my being the fifth of 8 children born to a very devout Catholic mother who had wanted to be a nun, but was rejected for ill health. Now, with Thầy’s teaching about ancestry, that is, I am the continuation of my mother and I have inherited or she has transmitted to me the aspiration to be a monastic, that is---the wannabe nun, transmitted to me the “seed of a monastic” and, during my boyhood, nourished that seed via many Catholic devotions, e.g., Stations of the Cross, Holy Hours, sacraments, daily mass.

In 1950, I thought my vocation was to be a priest---to preside over the Eucharist, hear confessions (forgive sins), preach the Gospel and experience salvation in the next life. I now see that my “vocation” ended up being a special person---part of the clergy ---clerical establishment instead of the laity.---caught in a culture in which many devout Catholics thought that “nothing is too good for the fathers.” Now, my sense of vocation is better described in terms of bodhicitta: a life of service reducing suffering.

As a young teenager, I had a deep relationship with my parish priest taught who I considered a personal hero. I accompanied him on sick calls and professional boxing matches. He taught us to be altar boys (mass servers), boxing and softball teams. Forty years later his widow told me that he said that I was the one altar boy who knew what he needed before he did. Experiencing the understanding and joy that he brought me, I always thought, “I want to be able to do this for other young men and women, too, someday.” The volition to serve people was at the center of my decision to ordain. So much so, that as my studies moved forward to be a priest, I was asked by the bishop if I wanted to continue my studies focusing on a more administrative capacity to eventually be appointed a superintendent of schools. To the bishop’s surprise, I declined this offer. As I explained to him, I had not become a priest to be an administrator for schools. There were lay people that can do that work. I shared with him that I decided to be a priest so that I could be there for people. And if I were to continue my studies, I would like to study in a program that would help me become a better pastor and teacher. The bishop agreed and I found myself studying in just such a program at Notre Dame University focusing on pastoral theology, pastoral liturgy, and catechetics. This focus put me on a different path--- service of the parish community.

1961 May - ordination to the Roman Catholic priesthood, assigned St. Francis parish & Lourdes H.S.

Disagreed with Habiger 1965 – assigned to Pacelli & St. Augustine parish; summer '67 falling in love - Sent her away Terminated relationship and recommitted to priesthood;--August 1967 psychotherapy, resigned teaching position, Nov 1967 Dan Berrigan & inter-faith study of Vietnam War. Dec 8, 1967 soloed aircraft; May 1968 Blue Earth

So where was Jesus in all of this? As a boy, I think I perceived Jesus as a very important person who was out there in heaven doing a lot for our sake and while he was away in heaven, he would be present to me if I was a good boy and went to communion. Fulfilling those outward formalities, I thought I was doing a good thing and it made me feel safe. But I do not remember a time in those years when I had a real communion with Jesus. Years later, as a young man and as a priest I had a more solid understanding of theology and scripture studies that would often be acknowledged by my students who would exclaim, “Geez, Father! You talk like Jesus is alive!” It was affirming to know that these students were experiencing Jesus in a wholly different way than they had previously known. The teaching, or Christology, set forth that Jesus through the Holy Spirit was bringing about a new creation. That, due to the original sin of man in the Garden of Eden, we were all in exile and that life was a veil of tears. The sacraments and practices were all efforts to move people out of that exile and to ensure that upon death we could be united with Jesus, the Father, and all the saints.

On Halloween 1969, I informed the bishop that I was leaving. He did not understand. From his perspective, I was doing a fine job as a priest and teacher. But over the years I had realized some divergences in my perspective from the Church. I was marrying previously-divorced people, which did not comport with official Church doctrine. I disagreed with the Church’s stance on birth control. And there was a “clericalism” that I found troubling – that, with our ordination, we believed we were better than everyone else---laity. My eyes were further opened in my interactions with Protestant pastors and brethren, true men of Christ, that also happened to be married with families of their own. At this time, I also came to realize I, too, wanted a partner and my own family.

Looking back, I now know that I did not have a deep personal communion with Jesus. And this insight was not something that I was aware of at all--- even as I made my way to step away from the priesthood. It did not come to me until many years later in 1978 as I found myself going through a divorce. I remember blurting out, “Jesus! Where the hell are you!?”

In 2000, I was joyfully celebrating my great good fortune: My beloved partner and I had collaborated with several others in buying a spectacularly beautiful home on the mountain adjacent to Los Padres National Forest and overlooking Santa Barbara. We became a residential lay community practicing the Plum Village Mindfulness Meditation Tradition, in which all of us had been engaged for several years. A dream come true---the Kingdom of God right here and now.

In summer 2002, I returned to the USA after doing a 3-week retreat at Plum Village in June with my fiancé of 7 years. During our retreat in June, I was aware of her having some suffering. I had not offended her or let her down---and, I remember thinking that I am doing everything I can to make her happy. She was the woman who had persuaded me to go with her to Plum Village in 1997, which led to our participating in numerous retreats in France, America and China, providing us many opportunities to spend time with Thầy, i. e. Thích Nhất Hạnh --- to really get to know Thầy. I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her.

But in August, 2002 (in the 7th yr. of our relationship), my fiancé broke my heart. She had also

returned from Holland and surprised me with the news that she wished to separate and had some personal difficulties that she wanted to work on by living separately. The news broke my heart. And with sadness, confusion, and anger, I agreed to move out as we continued to communicate and work through our relationship.

In deep sadness, I participated in the PV retreat at UCSD as well as continuing communications with my beloved. I continued my twice daily practice of sitting meditation, which enabled me to look deeply into my thoughts and feelings, into my experience with my beloved prior to the separation as well as our prior seven years together. Luckily, I had a strong brother in the residential community where I found myself living. I had also joined with him in a men's group that provided me with a great deal of support and opportunity to share my own suffering. And I was surprised by what I experienced. By September, even though I was still separated from my fiancée, I felt relief. I was stunned. How could this be? I am separated from my partner and I am feeling relief. A month later, I was surprised to find myself feeling freedom. And then, a month later, in October, I began to feel freedom. I could not understand or believe what I was experiencing, but I stayed and lived with it as life unfolded. As I look back, I think that these experiences reflected my letting go of clinging to the relationship. And it was also at this time that I happened to be reading *St. Francis* by Nikos Kazantzakis, a book on the life of St. Francis of Assisi.

Saint Francis had been important to me throughout my whole life. As a boy in confirmation, I had chosen St. Francis of Assisi as my patron saint. Then years later, a year before becoming a priest, I visited Assisi and explored the church and home of Francis. And once I was ordained in 1961, I was assigned as a parish priest in the Church of Francis of Assisi in Rochester, Minnesota.

Reading this book in 2002, on St. Francis's life, I understood something I had not realized before. I saw just what a radical man he was to dare start a new brotherhood in the 13th century that the Church had not experienced until that point. Then I thought, "He's just like Thầy! Thầy also has started a new kind of brotherhood in his exile from Vietnam!" And soon after that, the thought occurred to me, "Why not me?" I knew I did not need another romance. I did not need more money. I had just retired as a stock broker with lots of money. And I thought, "there is still more than this to life." It was clear to me that the man that most embodied that "more" was Thích Nhất Hạnh, whom I had gotten to know fairly well. And it was in that moment that I decided to go to Plum Village and check it out.

I canceled my standing plans to do a Goenka Vipassana Retreat and made arrangements to go to Plum Village. I arrived in Plum Village around December 8, 2002 and began the Winter Retreat. At this point, I made a conscious decision not to mull over whether I wanted to be a monk or not, but rather to just focus on doing the retreat itself. However, by January 15, a little over a month after my arrival at Plum Village, it became clear to me that this was it. I will become a monk! I remember waking up at night and looking through the skylight of that old room at Plum Village seeing the brilliant moon shining through and remembering the lines of Thầy's poem "Looking for Each Other."

And with that kind of clarity, I shared my intentions with Thầy along with a group of other aspirants who would eventually become the walnut family. When I shared with Thầy, "I want to be a monk" he replied, "That's fine. You give up your stocks, bonds, bank accounts, and houses." He knew I had let go of my partner already. And then he added, "and you will let go of your theology. And you will learn humility." Upon hearing my announcement of aspiration to ordain as a monk, I heard from the back of the room, "you better hurry up! You're getting old!" It was Sister Chan Khong and she had a good

point – on that day I was 67 years old.

After that I left back to the USA to let my daughter and my family know as well as my former fiancée. My daughter Jessica responded with great humor. I introduced my announcement with “Jessica, I have great news for you!” And she replied, “I know!” And I was struck and said questioningly, “you already know?” And she replied, “Yes!” To which, I asked, “What do you know?” And she replied, “You’re gay!” And we both laughed and laughed. I then met with my former fiancée who shared that she had changed her mind about our separation during my absence had come to feel that we were a good couple together after all. She wanted to resume the relationship. And I had to explain my newfound aspiration and spent several days with her as we navigated the difficulty and pain for her.

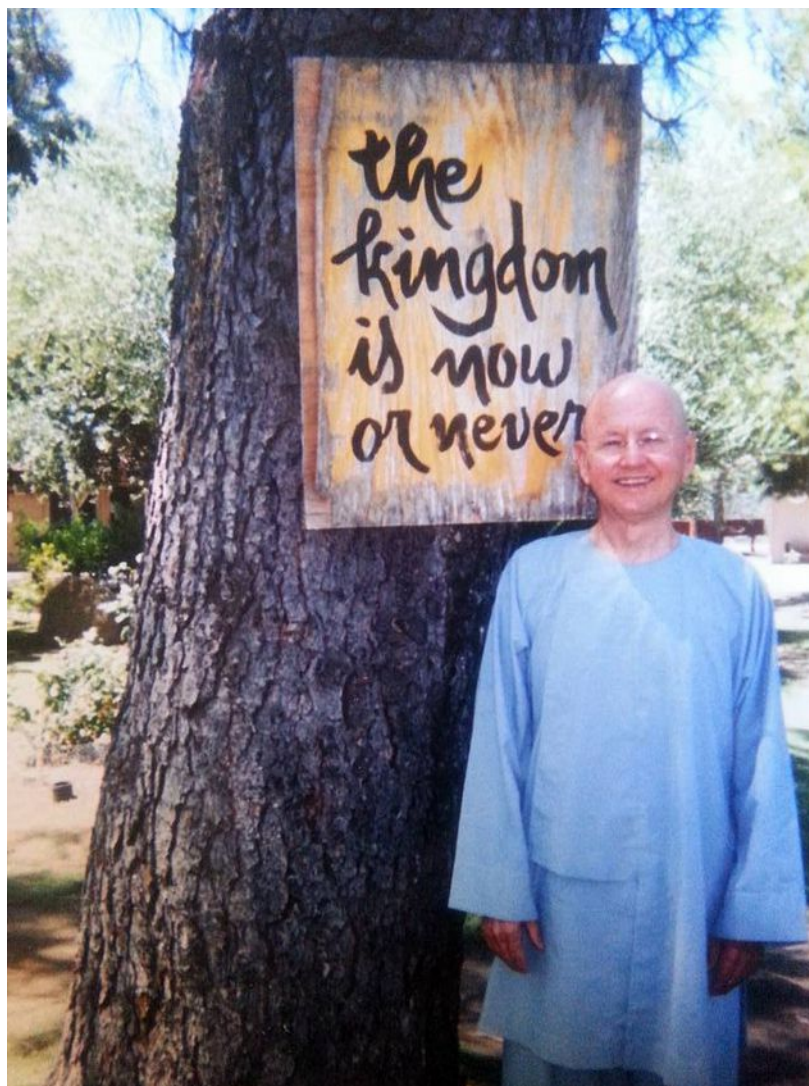
She and I continued to have good communications since then and several months after my announcement, she shared that she had undergone a wonderful experience of journey work and discovered that much of the blame and complaints about our relationship were rooted in suffering that came from outside our relationship and that she had also moved to a happier place in life. She also mentioned that my decision to become a monk was not a total surprise and recounted the story I had shared with her of going out to lunch with Dick back in 1996.

I now understand what Thầy had asked of me when he said to let go of my theology. He was asking me to let go of the dualistic thinking that Jesus was outside of me and to experience the risen Christ as it is perpetually manifested in my brothers and sisters. If I cannot see the risen Christ permeating all of reality then I am living in illusion and dualistic thinking. I often reflect on how the presence of the Buddha nature in all of us, the sangha body, is the same realization as the early Christian community of Jesus. Practicing is not about looking for Jesus or Buddha out there somewhere but to experience the energy. Thầy teaches that with mindfulness when applied with concentration brings insight and joy and are healing energies. As I experience it, the energy of mindfulness is the energy of the holy spirit. And Thầy’s teaching of experiencing this energy on a daily basis is a breakthrough in understanding the miracle of life and the transformation of our suffering and faults. If we can recognize that the energy of the holy spirit has been in us from the beginning, we can set aside any conception of separateness. And thus, I practice to develop a more continuous awareness of Buddha/Christ nature in myself and all that I come into contact in life each day.

The significance of this for me is deep and powerful. To have been raised from the earliest memory that there were certain sacraments and formalities that one had to undergo so as to make the proper deposits in this bank account in heaven. This mindset created a dualistic understanding of the nature of things. The gift of mindfulness practice and Thầy’s teachings has been to discover Christ. As I sit in nature enjoying the diversity of flowers and plants, this too is a manifestation of the risen Christ. Mindfulness practice is a daily practice in seeing that Holy Mother Earth is not a station of exile or punishment and life is not a vale of tears. Holy Mother Earth, as Thầy has shared, is a great bodhisattva.

Now looking back over these years from 2002 to 2013, it has been 11 years since that fateful decision. Looking back, I experience a real clarity in my own volition. Not just in cleaning up my own sufferings and afflictions, but I am here serving the needs of all the people that come, trying to be the best brother I can be to this monastic sangha, but also being available to people and providing consultations. In so doing, I am fulfilled and my volition is affirmed; this is my work, to serve people. When I think back on it, that was what I had hoped to do as a young priest, before the problems that I perceived and

disagreements I had with what was going on in the Church. And now in my 79th year, I am really experiencing the fulfillment of that dream of being there for people in the way I had always envisioned.



Interviews with Sister Hải Ân

June 2015

I was brought up in an Irish-German traditional Catholic family with all the prayers and the rosary, the Mass and the sacraments. I became an altar boy at 13 and the local priest was my hero. I used to do daily mass with him and go out to do sick calls. I became an enthusiastic participant in my Catholic religion so much so that I went off at age 15 to Catholic seminary and became a priest at age 26. Through the years as a priest I began to find difficulties – disagreements with Rome and the Vatican, and not experiencing the brotherhood that I was looking for, along with too much alcohol consumption. I resigned in 1970. Part of that was meeting Dan Berrigan who woke me up to what was going on in Vietnam in 1967. I left the priesthood and went out into the world to work with criminals, to continue what I saw as the work of Jesus.

In 1993 I was a stockbroker and in chemotherapy for stage IV lymphoma. On the bed-stand of my partner was a copy of *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. That was my first taste of Thầy and it had a good influence on me. For instance, I stopped watching TV while eating dinner, to drive the car without listening to the radio and to run along the Mississippi River without my walkman, just to listen to nature. Those were the early influences of Thầy on me. Then in 1997, with a new partner and fiancé, we went to Plum Village and we were very moved by it. We returned to Minnesota to begin Sangha building. In 2000 we moved to Santa Barbara and helped form a residential lay practice community there.

During this time I did have the good opportunity to sit in the orchard at Green Mountain Dharma Center in Vermont with Thầy and talk about many things including Dan Berrigan and my experience of the Peace Movement. I also had the good experience of going to China with Thầy in 1999. In that trip I had just finished reading Thầy's new book, *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*. I said, “Thầy, I think you understand Jesus better than all the great theology teachers I had in the 50's and the 60's.” And I had good ones. And he said simply, “That's because I have Jesus in my heart.” Since then, he has been for me the best example of a Living Christ in my life and he's the reason why I'm here as a monk.

In 2002, October, recovering from the separation from my fiancé, accepting the separation and reading the life of St Francis of Assisi, I thought, “He's just like Thầy!” Then I thought, “Why not me?” I had a sense then, I don't need another romance, I don't need any more money (I had just retired as a stockbroker). I said, “There's more and Thầy is the man that's got it.” I think we call that spiritual greed. I went to Plum Village for a retreat in December 2002 and I said, “Yes, this is it.” I asked Thầy to be a monk and he said that was fine. He said, “You give up your stocks and bonds and bank accounts and houses and cars.” He knew I had given up my lover. Then he said, “And you give up your theology.” I went back to California, we sold the property and everyone went their ways and I went back to Plum Village to ordain.

On July 3, 2003, I was ordained and Thầy said my name, “Chan Pháp Đệ.” Everybody laughed and I learned that it meant “Young Brother.” I was 68. Years later, I heard Thầy say, “The reason I made you 'Young Brother' is because they used to call you father.” He's got a sense of humor. I felt fully

embraced by Thầy and understood by him. I feel very lucky.

I'm getting clearer that I'm a monk not just for my own delight and happiness but for the work of building Sangha and helping to bring the practice to people who come to the monastery and when we go out to lead retreats. The experience of the community has been a very powerful training ground for me. Living in the world, my tendency is to get things done and to do things my way. If people didn't cooperate and go along with me, I'd write them off and move on and get stuff done. I'm learning in the practice to recognize my compulsion or addiction to be busy and to get results and to get things done my way. My brother-in-law once said that guys in our family tended to think that they did know a better way to get thing done. Being a monk has taught me about letting go. Thầy has even said, "Throw it away." I'm learning that, I'm experiencing more peace, more joy, and better health. For me, it's still a challenge to really embrace our interbeing-ness and to really be there for my brother or sister without being critical. I tend to be a high-energy person and through my life I tended to be a risk-taker – flying airplanes and black-diamond skiing. And now I'm learning to let that go.

My biggest challenge has been in the last three or four years. Thầy has asked me to help Westerners to get in touch with their own spiritual roots. I said, "Thầy, everybody I know is so happy with the mindfulness practice. They don't miss their old religion." He said, "I don't buy that. It in their blood." I'm realizing more and more that most of us don't really realize that. I'm having to get back in touch with those Catholic roots. One particular vehicle for that is the Gregorian Chant, the music. It is so rich and nourishing. With Thầy's insistence, I'm opening myself up and going back. Also with my discovery of what sabotaged my priesthood and early life and that's dualistic thinking. Thầy gets into that in his teachings on the Diamond Sutra.

I'm realizing that I was a very good salesman. I was a very popular teacher in the sixties but I was caught up in the notions rather than the real lived insights. I was caught up in good theology and the best of the latest thinking but not really experiencing an intimate connection with God and with Jesus. This practice and Thầy's teaching has helped me to discover what happened back there that I didn't understand. Now it's providing me also with the challenge to dig in and help others to go back and connect.

The parallel pattern is that a lot of us need to go back and connect with our blood ancestors, our moms and dad, and get off our criticisms. It's also about dualistic thinking and the same is true with our spiritual and religious background. I am discovering and appreciating more of what was there for me fifty years ago than I did then. Recently in Hong Kong, I said, "Thầy, I don't think that I'm up for this effort to help Westerners get back in touch with the Church." And Thầy just looked at me and he said, "You've got to be a revolutionary. We need a new Christianity." I'm still in the process of stepping up to that. So we've given retreats on "Double Belonging" at Blue Cliff and at Deer Park. The retreat is one in which we help people to deepen their mindfulness practice. And then to see how mindfulness practice can help them to go back to their root liturgy and find some connections. But I'm not into sending people back to the churches, mosques or synagogues that they've left.

Thầy's putting that responsibility on me has also made me look at the weakness in my own past connection with the gospel legacy of Jesus. As I'm looking at all of this I'm realizing how much of a beginner I am and I'm not very confident that I have something very useful to share with the Westerners. I'm just at an elementary level in understanding the parallels in Thầy's teaching on the Ultimate Dimension, like the relationship with wave and the water, and then seeing over here our more

personalized description of our relationship as “resting in the Father”, our relationship with our Brother Jesus, or the power of the Holy Spirit.

What I'm seeing now, that I didn't see ten years ago, was that Thầy has said many things but the most important thing for us is to build Sangha. Ours is a practice of relationship, so building relationships of understanding and love and compassion and service. That is essentially what the first Christian community, described in the Christian scriptures of the letters of St Paul, Acts, and the Apostles, and so on. They were a community of love and their love that they experienced made present to them the risen Christ. So they became a body of men and women bound together by a deep love, so powerful when there was poverty, the wealthy people sold their property and took care of the poor. That's the level of love and interaction of the first Christian community. That got lost in a few hundred years. The church that you and I tried to grow up in is a church that got caught in worshipping Jesus. The first Christians were not into that. The ritual of psalm and sacrament – that was not the early church. They were into living the teaching. In a way, our parallel is, “The Dharma Body is bringing morning light”. We have the energy of the Buddha. We are the body of the Buddha now. Thầy's energy is firing us as a community.

So I was thinking of Thầy's description of the wave and the water. You know, a big waves circles around the Pacific Ocean and the waves are coming in in a huge surf, beautiful and cheerful, and then it dissipates as it crashes on the shore and rolls back. This wave then goes back into the water. And I see that in a way that I didn't see before, thanks to Thầy, that the water loves the wave. The water can smile at this gigantic surf and lovingly bring back the water. And that's how I'm beginning to see what was there in our Christian roots. I'm still working on this. It's like learning to dance.

There's another thing in here as I see it. Thầy has given me an experience in the Sangha and in his teaching of what I saw as present in the early Christian community of how we love one another. That's not being experienced in the general Roman Catholic church though there are segments that do. Thầy has given me that and really taken me home there.

The other one is Thầy's teaching on loving Mother Earth and Earth Holding. That is a huge contribution. Others are recognizing it, say, at the UN and other areas. Thầy is teaching us how to love and understand who our Mother Earth is. As an old Christian Catholic, we saw, “the earth, it's gonna be gone after a while. The earth is here as a place of exile because our ancestors committed sins. The earth is a place that we are being tested.” Which is bad theology, not recognizing that we're here as a blessing. And God is not some being looking at us saying that we'd better get baptized or else – that he's somehow upset with us. Or she's upset with us. The earth, our Mother, gave birth to Jesus and to Buddha and to us. It's up to us now to really to learn practice on a daily basis how to cherish Holy Mother Earth, in the flowers and each other.

As a boy i grew up with the idea that, “The earth is profane. The sacraments are sacred.” The earth is down here and heaven is up there. But now I know that God is enjoying himself and herself in me and you. That is the wave and the water.

November 2, 2015

Here we are on the eve of All Saints Day and today is the second, All Souls Day. Do you know about All Souls Day?

Not very much. But living in Plum Village we did go around to put flowers on the graves of the different people and families that had helped the community a lot in Loubes-Bernac graveyard. It was the first time that I did anything to do with that in my life. It was nice. But I would love to hear more.

Well, the tradition and the practice is kind of, I guess, an assumption that nobody is worthy enough to go straight to heaven before they die therefore there is a time of purification like in the Tibetan spirituality when they have the Bardo period. So the clergy facilitated people getting the sense that if they're doing something loving, they'd take offerings for masses and give money to the church to pray for the deceased, so they had these stages of being cleansed and purified to be able to be ready for heaven. It was also kind of a reaffirmation that, "This isn't it. That's it."

It was also to somehow find more of a practice of realizing that we're just the continuation and how to find somehow that we celebrate their presence. Of course the more mindful I am about what's going on, more mindful of the legacy of my inheritance, that I am a continuation of the deceased, my mom and dad and ancestors.

So in someways our traditions, rituals, and practices from the old days kind of perpetuated or heightened our sense of separation. I think it even facilitated our not being very much aware, mindful. I'm wondering even about graveyards. They're expensive and a visual way of putting the dead away. It would be different, I think, if the son went frequently to the grave of his father and spent some time reflecting and connecting, using that like the things on your altar, a little statue of a little image, that would stimulate and nourish the inner awareness or consciousness. So, here I am after all these years, beginning to pursue this. It's the same problem of separation. It limits a lot of us in our love relationships.

So your question and invitation the other day started me on this trip. Also a very present issue now is to let go of and to switch from a dependency on the visual presence of Thầy and experience his presence in our Sangha. This retreat (US Tour 2015 at Deer Park) has been reassuring that the energy of Thầy is alive and well in the Sangha. Particularly all of you who are from away, not living here, contributing like you did for everything from the Dharma Talks to the Be-In. It's a great experience for the people to see the legacy of Thầy, the energy alive and well.

July 1, 2016

One of the things that has been holding me up is that I can get into telling a lot of stories about my five carriers, and I just realized the other day about my five loves. But in all of that is for someone to find something in there for someone reading it, to find some juice, about how to live life more deeply, how to live life more mindfully, how to find a real refreshment from it, rather than interesting entertainment like reading the funny pages.

On Thầy's encouragement to help Western people reconnect to their roots came up

He was talking to 3000 people in Singapore, 800 people at Nottingham University, England, and later in Hong Kong. Then he said, "Okay, you talk." He just handed me the microphone. He wanted me to share about my experience in the practice, with a Catholic background. Later on, I shared with him, "Thầy, all the people I know that are in this community are so happy with the practice. They don't miss their old religion." and that's when he said, "I don't believe it. It's in your blood." Then he told me the story about a Korean woman, Dr Chung who teaches at Union Theological Seminary in NYC. She was living in the USA. She (was raised) a Christian but she told Thầy, "Thầy, whenever I go by a Korean temple and I hear the drums and the chanting, I can feel it in my blood. I can feel it in my bones." That's what Thầy used as an example and I have to admit that that happens to me too. Most frequently now, I go onto youtube and listen to some gregorian chanting. That touches me.

He told me, "I didn't come to the West to convert you all to Buddhism. I came to help you get in touch with your roots." I am still catching on to the weight of that expectation. I haven't delivered on that, and I want to somehow follow through in a better way than I have. It's following through on a mission from Thầy.

And that was to renew Christianity?

That's true too. What I say to fallen away Catholics and who aren't very interested in it all, to try to wake them up to our task, is not to forget about but to connect and renew our Christian faith and the legacy of Jesus. That's a toughie because most of those whom I talk to, even my former priest friends, the damage that is going on in the Roman Catholic church with the pedophilia and the clericalism - clericalism in the Catholic church clergy. It is rooted deeply in the notion that once a man is ordained a priest, it's like he's ontologically changed and he is at least one step above what he was before, and therefore above all lay people. That kind of logic was at work when I was a young priest. There was a Monseigneur who wanted me to become superintendent of all the Catholic schools. I said, "I don't want to do that. Lay people can do that. You don't need to be a priest to be a superintendent of schools." His point was that priests can do just about everything better, even teaching any kind of class better than a lay person. We disagreed and got very angry with each other because we were drinking in the Chancery office. The next day I apologized for being so strong and angry but I still disagreed with him. That meant that the intention of my becoming his successor was withdraw. I was sent on to different assignments. This notion of clericalism that was so dominant in the Western church meant that now, for a priest or a bishop, when you find out that there's a guy who's been acting badly, as in pedophilia, we gotta find a way to protect our status as the sacred priesthood. We use clericalism as a justification to cover up. The interest is more in protecting the clergy establishment than taking care of the victim. That was one of the reasons that I left the priesthood 50 years ago. And I don't think the situation seems to have improved.

But then there are guys like Richard Rohr, but he's a monastic, not a priest. and there's Brian Pierce, who wrote "We Walk the Path Together." They're doing great work.

The way I see it, there was Jesus of Nazareth and there was the Buddha. Then there was St Francis of Assisi, and there's Gandhi, and then there's Thích Nhất Hạnh. My sense is that we are the living continuation of Thầy. Thầy always tells us that Buddha is alive in us. The Buddha walks, the Buddha talks in us. We are his living continuation. We embody what he's up to, the vision. That's becoming more clear to me. This is it!

It helps to fire me to be here, giving, working, and sharing with people. By reason of my age and my heart condition, I'm off the work rotation like cooking and cleaning, but I'm on for helping with retreats, dharma sharing, and consultations. I'm giving and I'm ready to burn out! To burn all out – to give everything to share the practice and to be of service of all living beings. Back when I was a priest, we did it because we would get a heavenly reward when we died. I don't think of that anymore. I'm not gunning for resurrection.



July 13, 2016

I am in this process of deepening my understanding of Thầy's intention and expectation of me, and gratitude to him. Just this morning I had breakfast with two old-time Catholics, Dr Joust the Dutch doctor whose father studied to be a priest and his mother studied to be a nun and who himself has some disagreements with the old church and mistrust. And the other man, about fifty, also Catholic. I shared with them how I told Thầy one day, "Everybody I know is so happy with this mindfulness practice, they don't miss their old religion." Thầy looked at me and said, "I don't believe it." So he told me a story about that Korean nun who teaches at Union Theological Seminary and now is a Christian. He told me her story and how every time she walked by a Korean temple and heard the bells and the drums and the chants, she said she could feel in in her blood, in her heart. Thầy's making this point. These guys admitted it when I brought that up that when they are back in touch with some good stuff and hear it, they know. It really touches them.

So I'm more clear than I was three years ago about the importance of following Thầy's request. Even at that time I said, "Thầy, okay. You told me the story. Given the condition of the Roman Catholic Church and the clericalism (you know like the film Spotlight and the pedophilia) I'm not interested in going back there and connecting with those guys." And he said, "You've got to be a revolutionary."

So I'm looking at really stepping up to that. We did, however, postpone the Double Belonging Retreat this year because of my heart fibrillation but I expect next spring, we'll do that. Like today, the drama is that I'm still going through a lot of change with the fibrillation and have a lot of discontent with the lack of energy.

Okay dear, let's go from your end. What would you like to know?

I'd like to dive deeper. So Thầy gave you this beautiful mandate, this mission, and it's been brewing in you for a few years and you feel like you're deepening your understanding. So what is the understanding that's deepening? Are there particular ideas that are arising, whether for you to manifest or not, do you have visions of what this could mean?

My understanding comes out of a deep conviction that is his. He has himself connected with the Christ energy just as he has with Buddha so he invites us to begin with the realization that now, we are the Buddha, we are the Christ. For me, it's to live with the realization that Thầy continues in me and to really manifest that in every step, every breath, every word. It also comes out of a deep respect, speaking from experience and inviting me, also, to be living Buddha, living Christ, Jesus and Buddha as brothers.

So I can interpret for myself what it would mean for Thầy to have Jesus in his heart and what it would mean for all of us to have Jesus in our hearts but I'd like to hear from you what that means for you in your life, your practice and as something to share with others?

That hasn't come easily, to be able to do that. With Thầy's help, I've come to understand that I was entrapped in dualistic thinking and that the paper that I sent you, the making of a monk, referred to that, that for the first sixty-some years of my life, I was very entrenched in dualistic thinking. That means I see things through discrimination. I am human and He's divine. I'm here and He's out there in heaven.

I'm the created one and He's the Creator. These are some of the notions. And the idea was that when I prayed, I was still praying to Jesus out there. I was an enthusiastic salesman. My students would say, "Geez, Father, you'd think that Jesus was alive!" But I was selling the Jesus that I got from Biblical studies and theology. These were notions rather than personal experience. So for me it's still a process of recovering and letting go of all that. In a way, Thầy speaks of the tendency of the Vietnamese to see the Buddha as out there for the Pure Land Buddhists. He's inviting us to let go of that. So that we don't have a Buddha statue on the altar.

Now as I see it with Thầy's understanding, even when we had holy communion, that was a temporary experience. Somehow, Jesus came and visited us, briefly, in the eating of the holy bread. That was something very special, particularly as Catholics, to have the real presence of Christ in the bread. Now *I* have *Him* come in to *me*. I'd be quiet and not disturb anybody else. I'd go to my place and maybe even meditate on the fact that I'd just received the holy body of Christ. He's present in me. And in doing that, we miss the real meaning that I think we the followers of Jesus had. We miss the experience of companionship. That word, companionship, comes from *com* – together, and *pan* – bread at the Latin root. And Father Brian Pierce, the Dominican monk who wrote *We Walk the Path Together: Meister Eckhart and Thích Nhất Hạnh*, he's the one that brought that home to me, the whole idea of that coming together and eating together is companionship. That's what was going on at the last supper and that's what Jesus had been doing every week with his followers. And yet we've lost that sense of companionship, the way that we do the mass.

When I go to a mass, I enjoy it. I also find that the preaching is dualistic and I find that the ceremony of the mass is a mass production. Hundreds of people come together briefly and come up individually then go back to their places eventually with the holy bread. Then it's not really an experience of companionship. Now, for me, my best experience of the companionship meal is our own meal. We eat in silence and the fifth contemplation, "We take this bread gratefully to be nourished and strengthened. Sorry – we take this food, not bread. We have more tofu than we have bread. We take this food in gratitude that we may be nourished in our understanding and compassion, with our brothers and sisters, and to be willing to serve all beings. That's what the Eucharist really is. So the heart of Jesus's intention, what he really had in mind, I think, at the last supper, we continue in every meal by our coming together and our eating together.

When I'm sitting at the table down there, I look around at who's with me and if there's somebody there I had a grudge against or a problem, I would feel that I need to do a Beginning Anew with them before I eat with them. That's where I'm at with that now. Thầy has woken me up to that possibility and I'm looking for a little Christian community, like I found back in Minneapolis, that I could go and together celebrate the eucharist in the old fashioned Catholic way and still come back to my Buddhist community. You've heard me say that through this community and in touch with Thầy's teaching I have come to experience that love, that brotherhood, that open-heartedness to forgiveness, to helpfulness and to really sharing whatever we've got in terms of resources. That is what was present in the first generation of Christians with Jesus.

It's said repeatedly in the Acts of the Apostles and in the letters of St Paul that in coming together they must love each other, they must forgive each other, and they must share their wealth with each other. So the richer people were giving up some of their wealth and their property for those who were homeless, and that sort of thing. And they were such an inspiring manifestation in that world back then that they continued to draw so many people into the community. Even after Jesus died there was a

quality of fellowship that was remarkable in those areas, along with the teaching and preaching of the Apostles, it really drew people in. There is a Biblical scholar of today who said that had they, of that first generation of Christians, been Catholics like we are with the big time Sunday Mass and the liturgy, all the great ritual and the song, had they been like us, the Christian community would have been a brief whiff in history. What they were doing, at least for a few hundred years, and then gradually the church got very absorbed into theology and control, liturgy, and worship.

One of the things I am specifically grateful to Thầy for is that he has shaped us into a community in which it's not a solo trip. Ours is a practice of relationship. There is even a belief that Maitreya would show up, that would be the Buddha manifesting in the world today. Thầy went on to say that as he sees it, Maitreya will show up as a Sangha, a Sangha that is a fellowship of love and support. So what I am experiencing here in the Plum Village practice of mindfulness, I'm experiencing that kind of community that is like that first generation of Christians. To me, it comes out of our embodiment of Thầy's teaching. That's another piece that's important. Thầy continues in us. His vision, his heart, his wisdom. He said in one of his talks a couple years ago to answer "What will happen when you die?" He said, "I won't die. I will continue in your breath. I will continue in your step. And for us, we Christians, that first generation really got it. They were the body of the risen Christ. The energy of Christ existed in them. As I see it, we are to be the embodiment, energy, love, and wisdom of Thầy. And he, himself, is just the embodiment, the wisdom, and the love of the Buddha and of Jesus. That presence needs to continue to manifest in us.

Now, is that enough on that?

I want to ask you about Christ. I've been listening to a lot of Richard Rohr's teachings which is definitely opening up my heart-mind to understand his refrain, "Christ is not Jesus' last name." How do you describe what Christ is?

The word Christ, Kristos, means *the anointed one*. For hundreds of years, the Jewish people lived with the expectation that there will be a special one that God will send to help the community so that when Jesus came along, many quickly picked up that he was manifesting as an *anointed one*. I think it was Peter who said, "I know who you are. You're the anointed one." They saw Jesus as being the long-awaited, special person.

Could that also be the term Messiah?

Yes. And another word is Immanuel, God with us. O Come, O come Emanuel.

They obviously had the notion that it's one and that's it. He will be the one. With that logic you see that *He is the one*. He is no longer visible here. He's waiting in heaven. The anointed one leaves here and goes away. Thầy has the intention, if we could catch on to it, that "Now each of you are an anointed one. Each of you have the energy that you recognize in me as being the Messiah, the anointed one." But in our individualistic tendencies, we lose that. We have these grand notions for the glorious risen Christ and all that stuff of someone that is distinctly different. We have a hard time catching on to that energy that manifested in him, making him the anointed one, *a* Christ, not *the* Christ. That energy is transmitted and flows on in us so that when I meet you or another person, and easily in Thầy, I have a sense that I am meeting the Christ.

Jesus has said basically, “I and the Father are One. When you see me, you see the Father.” He was basically going on to say, “And with me, you and I are one and that will make you one with the Father.” That's part of that specific Christian language. Then there's the one at the last chapter of Matthew, the story of Jesus telling about how death and people go up to face judgment and the divine judge says, “Welcome to the Kingdom of Heaven. When I was hungry, you fed me.” and this guys said, “Whenever did I feed you?” or “When I was in prison, you visited me.” so, waking up to say, “When you visited that poor guy in prison, you were visiting me. When you fed that poor person on the street without any supper, you were feeding me.” Catching on to the interbeing-ness of the anointed one, of the Christ. Now it's to us to continue catching on that way so that as I deal with you, I am dealing with the anointed one. When I am dealing with these lay people coming in from Oceanside or San Diego, I am dealing with fellow members of the body of Christ.

Now, Thầy never quite speaks of it that way but we do speak of interbeing, how we inter-are and therefore what we do to another we do to ourselves. The other part is to be able to be a life-giving presence, a life-giving force to one another. For me, today, it's a basic reason for my continuing to stay alive is, to do some studies and some teaching and maybe even roller blading, for me to do that is to recognize that it's in me to show up as a Bodhisattva, to show up as the Christ present in the community and to help people become a Bodhisattva and to, above all, build Sangha.

I read an article the other day, reflecting how many people think that Buddhism coming to “the West” is about connecting with psychology and science since that's what we value most in society. But this article said that to think it doesn't involve some blending with Judeo-Christian roots is absurd because that is much deeper than modern science, even though we love and worship modern science. For buddhism to merge with the culture of Europe and north america, it's bound to blend with the religious traditions, not just our obsession with science and rationality. That really struck me. it's not so much for you to predict the future, but have you thought about this aspect and of Thầy's mission for you?

It's not just something in your head. In this, hopefully you and I can help lead the way to becoming a more complete monk and nun, the fuller manifestation of the wisdom of the Buddha and of Jesus, and of Thầy. You mentioned Richard Rohr. I'd like to go down and spend some time with him. He's my catholic Thích Nhất Hạnh. Our mission is to be the kind of monk and nun that helps our community grow in its ability to be more open, more collaborative, more loving, and more engaged.



July 20, 2016

I'm having these days some good reflections that are helping me to better understand my ancient religious background and perceptions/understandings of what it all means about God, and if I'm getting free of my dualistic thinking. I'm sensing that an awful lot of what we got from the scriptures, especially the Old Testament, is very dualistic, projecting on to the God all these human emotions. The most recent one I'm looking at is, "Why do I pray? Why should anybody pray?"

And what are you coming up with?

Well, if God is God, my prayer doesn't tell him anything he doesn't already know, or doesn't inform her of anything of which she's unaware. And if she is God, she's already doing what can be done to alleviate suffering, destruction or whatever, and that she is not somebody that you persuade to change her mind and treat you differently. The bottom line, I'm thinking, is that the only reason to pray is to just become more aware of the presence of the Source and of my tendency to get forgetful, to blame, to feel desperate, or my tendency to think that the source, she doesn't even already know so I've got to inform her and until I inform her of my suffering, she can't help me. I think a lot of us pray that way. I guess I'm seeing more and more that prayer is reflective meditation, becoming more aware and mindful of all the turmoil that's going on inhere and in that process, mobilizing the resources the Source has already put here and realizing too that if I'm practicing mindfulness and learning to use the energy of mindfulness, Thầy says the energy of the Holy Spirit, if I'm mindfully at work using the energy of mindfulness to look at my suffering and whatever's going on, I will then find my way to transformation, to freedom. So that's a little bit of what I've been stumbling around with the last few days.

I would like to ask you more about prayer through your life. What was prayer for you when you were a child? I assume that you prayed as a child. How did you pray? What did it feel like? Was there meaning or was it just what you had to do? And then through seminary and as a priest...

As a little child, every day I was taught to recite when I went to bed at night, "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." You know, I haven't recited that in fifty or sixty or seventy years. And even that one, "I pray the Lord my soul to take." The dualism is in there. Then as a boy, I was trained in the catechism, going to church, learning how to say things like the Our Father. Even as a child, the family circled up in the house around the dining room table and we prayed the rosary after supper. And the neighborhood kids would come in while we were praying the rosary so they'd sit in the kitchen and wait for us to get done praying the rosary. Then as I grew older we were then taught about holy communion and going to mass and in the mass, saying all the prayers to become more holy. Before going to communion, we went to confession. We had to make sure that we didn't go in and take the holy bread if we had some sin in our hearts so we had to get free of whatever we thought were sins. Then as a boy I continued praying by myself and one way was saying the rosary before going to sleep at night. This was certainly true by the time I was fifteen, going into the seminary. In the seminary, again, the prayer life was the prayer of the mass and the rosary. We did things like compline, the end of the day prayer that included some of the Psalms from the Old Testament.

As a child, was it mostly reciting what you had memorized or did you pray for help on a test, etc...?

We did pray for passing a test by saying the Our Father. We didn't get into a freestyle dialogue with God. Then I remember in playing basketball, we would silently say a prayer to succeed in shooting a shot and making it or winning a game. So we would say some Hail Marys. They were the standard request for divine help to get what we wanted, to score the basket, to win the ballgame. We did that in the family. I don't remember the priest being part of that.

Then when I was twelve, I learned how to say mass. Back in those early days we'd have to memorize some Latin expressions which would then switched into English after the Vatican II council. The Mass became a half-hour or forty-five minute prayer service. Another one was in the church, we'd do the stations of the cross. Around the church there were fourteen sculptures sequencing the hard trip that Jesus took when he was arrested, taken and tried and then made to carry the cross. It would be a way of reliving that and a meditative prayer, standing up and kneeling down.

What do you remember of the inner experience? Was it mostly following a form? Did it bring you joy? What inspired you to become an altar boy? Was it because you enjoyed church? Was it your mother's encouragement?

It was all of that. But it was also the idea that as you got old enough as a boy and a good Catholic, to step up and to learn how to be an altar boy. However, I suppose that I and my brother got more training in that because then we were there and available to go help the priest as altar boys every day of the week for daily mass. Now, that was kind of like athletics, the satisfaction of doing it. I don't recall as a boy experiencing joy from that. It was more an experience of, "I've done what I'm supposed to do, a good thing to do." You know, I haven't thought about this. We did what we were supposed to do and what was expected. There was a sense of accomplishment in doing it.

I think that my prayer was quite dualistic and that sabotaged me in terms of having a heart-felt experience. Even when I got most enthusiastic as a teacher and a preacher, as a young priest, I was confident that I had the best theology and was able to enthusiastically teach it, the Jesus that I taught was somebody who was heroic in his life but was now out there in heaven and that we connect to him mostly through holy communion. So he becomes present in the holy communion. I didn't have a sense of personal relationship. That dualism affected a lot of my relationships because as Thầy teaches, dualism means even amongst us, I'm me and you're you, and good luck. I didn't grow up with a real sense of hearts. That is also one of the big reasons that I resigned from the priesthood, not really understanding the problem, not understanding how much being caught in dualism sabotaged my ability to have a sense of intimate relationship or connection.

In seminary, what did they teach you about prayer and what experiences led up to what you were just talking about?

The first stages of seminary were in high school and college. You have a pretty heavy load of studies and in addition to that you have the liturgy and the daily prayers which were similar to those in a monastery. I do remember there was a specific priest that was in charge of shepherding a particular group or a particular class, but no individual mentorship per se. So there was somebody who was available if I had questions and difficulties to go to. Then there was also the practice of daily communion but weekly confession. The confession box offered the possibility to get advice in dealing with one's mistakes because mistakes were perceived as sins. Then in the last four years I must have had an individual mentor but I don't have memories of that particular person. These are questions I have never gone back and thought about. I should have been journalling about this back then, but it never occurred to me.

Can you tell me about your experience of communion as a child and in seminary?

I'm reflecting on that today because we Catholics thought we were very lucky because we were the true church. We had within our church a priesthood directly connected with the apostles. We had the holy communion, the eucharistic bread that became, with the words of the priest, the body of Christ. Then we'd go up to the front of the church and receive the little piece of bread in our mouth. Only later did they put it in our hand. For the first thirty years of my life we put it directly into the mouth, not into the hand. Then we would become very pious and go back to our seat and make sure that we did not distract anybody else. On the way back from communion, to stop and to whisper to somebody would have been very taboo.

It was a discipline that really kept us separate. There was no real sense of camaraderie. You were close to each other, rubbing shoulders, but it lacked what I've now come to understand the sense of companionship. Companionship is made up of *com* - which means together, and *pan* - is the Latin word for bread. So, bread together. Companion. It's only now in the past few years with the help of Brian Pierce, the Dominican monk who wrote the book *We walk the path Together: Meister Eckhart and Thích Nhất Hạnh*. He's the one who helped me understand that the celebration of holy communion in the mass is celebration of holy companionship.

We didn't have that understanding as we grew up. It was simply that we were very lucky that Jesus, who became present in the holy bread, has come to me individually, through this piece of bread. And so do you and all of the other people who go. It was very quiet and serious and somber. It was not

until years later that there was an effort to make it a joyous event and maybe sing a song celebrating our experiencing of the presence of Jesus. But in the early days, it was just me and Jesus. It communicated a sense that I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. It was a sense of safety and a sense of being okay, a confidence that "I'm doing the right thing." There were times in later years that I could be together with others and with the mass and the sharing of the bread, have the sense of comradeship or companionship but for the most part I didn't have that as a priest. And now I look for opportunities to come together with a few others and to share the eucharist, communion, companionship.

But even now when I go down to the local church with the pastor whom I've met and I like, and I go to mass, it's still a mass production of individuals taking holy communion. I still don't get a sense of companionship. I'm still looking for some kind of a Catholic community in which I can get that. Meanwhile, I have here at DPM, we have at every meal the Five Contemplations. In the fifth contemplation we come to "I gratefully accept this food so that I may be nourished, become more compassionate and understanding, and serve all living beings." The companionship notion is in there for me so as I'm sitting at the table, I look around. I make sure as I look at the faces around me that there's nobody there that I have a grudge against or that I have an obstacle to companionship. So every meal for me is a simple, quiet, experience of companionship. We share the food together.

Are you also thinking of the body of Christ in a conscious way?

No, I don't think of that that way but I don't not think of it that way. I have a sense that we are, as the community who has embraced the teachings of Jesus or the Buddha or of Thầy, that we are one body. Whether we are the Buddha body, or whether we are the Christ body, or we are the Thích Nhất Hạnh body, for me it's all one. Thầy says, "When I die, I don't go away. I continue in your breath and in your step." An interesting thing in yesterday's mass liturgy of the Catholic church, I'm going to email this to you because the story was Jesus was teaching in a house and he was doing a miracle. Everybody was cramming in standing around and even climbing up on the roof. A messenger came in and said, "Jesus, your mother and brother are outside and she is waiting for you." And he said to them, "Who is my mother? Who is my brother? I tell you, you who take my teaching and live it, you are my brothers and you are my mother." To me, it was a clear kind of teaching that Thầy has tried to get across to us that we are the Buddha. The Buddha lives in us.

Whenever now we don Touching the Earth, we typically start with the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, then we go to Shakyamuni Buddha, then we go to the various bodhisattvas, Avalokita, Mother Earth and Father Sun, all of those are ways in which to meditatively grow in the realization of our oneness, free of our separate-self identity. So I touch the earth with the Buddha, and with Thầy, and also with Jesus as all one in the same. So that hopefully we monks and nuns as we walk about our community, we have a realization that that is now on us, to be the living buddha, the living Christ, the living Thích Nhất Hạnh, to the others in the community and to the lay people who come.

So these are days when I feel I'm lacking energy. I have some problems I think are related to the medicine. I hope it's the medicine and not my body because if it's my body then I'm really getting old. If it's the medicine then we might be able to make some changes. It's all cluttering up my life. But amidst that, it's being able to continue to walk with that sense that I embody Thầy, I embody the Buddha, I embody Christ.

Yeah.

So then I imagine that communion doesn't have the same importance as a singular act of unifying with the body of Christ because it's not just in the moment of an official sacrament. It's a life-long practice.

I'm glad you bring that up because our old fashioned way of doing communion, of me receiving Jesus, helped to keep Jesus out there, away, in a dualistic way. That way of going to communion entrenched the dualistic view. It also, I think, sabotaged a sense as we got back on the street, back in the alley, and back into life, that now, we are the living christ. The person who went to communion should be able to go back into the street with the sense that Jesus walks here. I think the church is now paying the price for that. There are something like 68 million fallen-away Catholics. They are the second largest denomination in the country. When I look at that I see that we also can do that as Buddhists. So watch out that when we do a ceremony or offer a teaching, there a difference between being all fired up about the teaching but then not living or embodying the teaching in the way we walk.

An extension of this is the way we Catholics did death. We have a great ceremony and many prayers. We buried my dad in the cemetery and we would remember him and every now and then we'd say a prayer. Particularly because we had the idea of purgatory, the notion that he didn't go straight to heaven. He may be suffering in purgatory before he goes to heaven therefore we pray for him and we send him prayers that will get God to accept him more quickly. But for the most part, when we buried somebody was to step back and they were not part of our daily consciousness after two or three weeks, let alone two or three years. That way of handling life and death left us Catholics very dry in our awareness of how much we are just the continuation of our dad and that dad is not buried in the cemetery. He lives in me. I have all his genes. Here's where Buddhism brings an important understanding that I am just the continuation of my dad and my mother, and my blood ancestors as well as my spiritual ancestors. So that's one of the gifts I see in the mindfulness practice and the teachings of Thây, how to recognize that My dad is still undergoing transformation in me.

And also with that teaching is that I'm also recognizing that the fact of me being a monk here in a monastery has been very directly caused by a mother who transmitted to me her desire to be a monastic. Who did it to you?

I don't know. It was definitely not a direct message from my parents or anyone that I knew in any direct way. But I certainly got my core values from my parents and ancestors.

When you look at the core values of what you're doing it isn't the robe, it isn't the convent.

I'm looking more and more at how my Christian upbringing, for all that I rejected it for so many years, is still in me and it informs the foundations of me and my direction in life, which is very good to see. This also fuels some of my questions because I never really came into the rituals of the church so I still feel that I don't know what the big deal is about communion but I'm very curious...



Here we have the opportunity, we're learning with our sitting meditation, is to really experience prayer, contemplative prayer, a sense of inner connectedness, whether with the source or with the Father, to have a sense of experience of that energy that we call the source or god, that energy is present here and it's present out there as I look at all the beautiful trees and the flowers and the plants and these people walking by. That energy is here and with that, to be able to enjoy this. Like the last couple days, to deepen my sense of this, following Thầy's guided meditations in the *Blooming of the Lotus* book, I think it's #24-27. Thầy says that you pick up the leaf from the earth and recognize that it's not a matter of birth and death, that it's on the ground and it's on its way to the continuing life of the forest. Then to be able to see myself that way. The thing is that I've grown up with seventy-some years of Catholic thinking, that this individual, unique me with my immortal soul, when I die I'm going to heaven to sit there with Jesus and have a good time. That's the old thinking. You probably never had that so much.

There's another thing that comes up for me as I've picked it up. Those first followers of Jesus, probably like the first followers of the Buddha, were outstanding in being a community of love and sharing. The wealthier people giving and buying things for the poor, of forgiveness, forgiving one another and accepting one another. They were so outstanding in that that they became very attractive to other people. That's the reason that there were a lot of converts. The biblical scholar who brought this out said that if they'd been like us Catholics with all the liturgy and sacraments and ritual and dogmatic

theology, Christianity would have been a brief whiff in history. Now what I am so grateful for, I feel I'm in touch with that experience of that first-generation of Christians is now available to me here in the Sangha. The forgiveness, the love, the sharing, this is what it's all about. I feel that in the past 30 years that I resigned from the priesthood, wandered in the world and did all this, that I finally found what I was looking for without being clearly aware of it. I didn't intend to talk about all of that.

When you left the priesthood, did you still pray? Did you still go to mass? What was the role of prayer and communion through your years as a chaplain, a stock broker, through marriage and family?

It was in 1970 that I resigned. and I continued to find a eucharistic community that for me was alive. I would participate in that every week. It was Christian community, the Catholic community the Spirit of St Stevens. That community in Minneapolis also existed to help the homeless, in the city centre and that was their social action. So I participated with them through the seventies and in to the eighties. I was still Catholic. My wife-to-be, Patricia, she and I were married in the cathedral church chapel by the assistant to the Bishop and our intimate family of about forty people were at this. We had a Catholic wedding and then we continued to participate in the church of St Stevens on a weekly basis. When my daughter was born after she was one, we had a Catholic baptism in our home. We baptized Jessica. She continued to go to Catholic school. When it came time for her first communion, her class was doing posters. Jessica's banner was a picture of her cat called Weddy. In her banner was, "God loves my Webby." I remember her poster was brought forward to the pastor of the church and he raised his eyebrows on that one. That was different.

She continued in the Catholic school. Catholic community and mass were part of our life. I remember going forward. However in the 90s, I began to sometimes to not go to church. I remember being aware that it was sometimes more fun sleeping and being in bed with my lover than getting up and going to mass. But I remember when I had cancer in 1993, it was august 15, the feast of the assumption of Mother Mary. I went to the basilica in Minneapolis. By this time I was a stock broker. But I went to mass at the basilica with the beautiful choir. I surprised myself that as I was at the mass, chanting and signing the music, that it really touched my heart and I had tears in my eyes. I thought that I needed to get back to this.

Now I'm reminded of Thầy when I said to him, "We fallen-away Catholics, we don't miss our old religion at all. We so much enjoy the mindfulness practice we don't miss our old religion." And Thầy said, "I don't believe it." So that stayed with me and I continued there in the 90s. I got in to Centering Prayer – Father Bede Griffiths. I found it on my own, staying in touch with the people at St Stevens. There was also St Olaf, a big city church. And I continued with that into the 90s but also in 1994 I did the Goenka Vipassana retreat. So increasingly my meditation was not so much centering prayer as it was Buddhist and Zen meditation. When I go back and look at it now, the centering prayer, again, lacked the power it deserved because my mind was still very dualistic. So the process was still quite an intellectual attempt at meditation. You deal with a text and be quiet and try to be contemplative with that.

So that brought be to Goenka in 1994 and Thích Nhất Hạnh in 1997. Once I got connected with Thầy then this practice became the dominant practice in my life because we came back from Plum Village in 1997 and the retreat in November of '97 in Key West. My partner Betty and I were into Sangha building. Sangha pretty much too the place of church. I don't have any clear memories of my

participation in the Catholic church in the 2000s.

I think it's time for me to come to an end. I really appreciate you and being available to work with me on this because I also have more and more of a sense for a loyalty and gratitude to Thầy, to do something. There's another piece of it. We get like 250 people on a Sunday here for a Day of Mindfulness. The majority of them are former Christians, American and white. The majority of them have also basically walked away from their spiritual roots. So whenever I have in the past years dealt with our ancestry I get a lot of feedback from them, how they appreciate it. On the other hand, we don't really have a whole lot that nourishes those roots. We've got it here in the life of the Sangha and our practice centers. Even me, I'd like to be able to at least once a month, get out and connect with some of our old fellow Catholics, that we share and we celebrate our companionship. Was that new to you today, the source of the word companionship? Together with bread.

Thank you, brother. I feel very inspired.



Autumn 2011 - Interview with the Walk With Me film creators

Q: Thầy asked you to do some writing. Was that about the comparison between Christianity and Buddhism or was it something completely different?

Even four years ago, I remember him asking me to look at how I can speak and reach out to fellow Westerners to help them get in touch with their roots. I didn't do much because we're so busy. I was here with the projects we had: landscaping, working hard, getting tired out. And then again, he reiterated the comment. And then again, in Hong Kong in May. I had decided to have a conversation with him about it, and I said, "Thầy, most of those I have talked to have such satisfaction with just learning the mindfulness practice. Our lives are so enriched that there doesn't seem to be a sense of loss or a need to go back and reconnect with or tap into our ancient roots for what might be there."

But his asking me to do this has brought me to look more deeply at own experience, and recognize how I had let my old traditions go. Fifty years ago, the Roman Catholic liturgy was big for me. I was a young priest, and the bishop wanted me to go and study to become a school superintendent. I said, "Bishop, I didn't get ordained to be a school superintendent. We can have laypeople doing that. There are other things." And he said, "What have you got in mind?" And I said, "Well, I'd like to go down and study pastoral liturgy." I was a parish priest and a teacher. I thought, "I want to study what will help me be more effective in helping our people." And so he said, "Okay!" I went to Notre Dame University and got my graduate degree in Pastoral Liturgy, which meant becoming more deeply understanding and skillful in helping the community assemble and celebrate the Eucharist. We did it with very excellent music. Back in those times we were coming out of the old days and the Vatican II Council with the new music and so on. So it was pretty exciting.

After five or six years of doing that, I realized: One, with all of this wonderful liturgy, these wonderful Eucharistic celebrations—I'm not experiencing us as participants being drawn close together and tightly woven together as the body of Christ, as a Christian community. I also didn't find that my own personal habits—and I didn't realize it then but I was a budding alcoholic—my own personal habits of anger and all that busyness were not being transformed. Nor did I find that my community—the parish community of thousands of people—there wasn't that significant of a transformation there either. I also did not experience the brotherhood I was looking for. Here, now fifty years later, I am experiencing the brotherhood I was looking for. And with Thầy's encouragement, I've gone back and looked at what happened; what happened to me.

I'm recognizing now and understanding what I did not understand then was that my thinking and my theology was very dualistic. It was the best theology of the time, but it was like, "We're here and we Catholics, we've got the franchise. We've got the great liturgy. We've got the Eucharist." But it was still a notion that the Christ, Jesus, was away, and we were somehow caught in this world.

This practice is encouraging me to come back, to pull up my sleeves and make an effort to both write and speak with Westerners. It has helped me look more deeply at my own history: how I was caught in dualism and how much it was a factor in my giving it up. Because when you're into dualistic relationships, there's no real, true intimacy, and a true entering into a solid "we're one." And so now, in Colorado, I decided to go more public about this and said to the people, "Thầy is encouraging us to

look at, to get in touch with our roots. He's not here to convert us to Buddhism. He's here in the West to help us tap into our ancient spiritual roots and connect with our ancestors."

A good elementary experience of doing that is his teaching of looking deeply. He begins with a question: "Where do you see your father, your dad?" And most of us say, "Well, he's dead; he's buried, he's gone, he's in heaven." And with that Thầy helps us to understand, "No, your father is in you. Every cell of your body has core genes and his chromosomes. And your whole way of being has his habits and his energies." That has become a simple elementary tool for helping my fellow Christians as well as myself stop and say, "Oh, I'm not unique; I'm just a continuation of a long line of ancestors." But in particular, when I look in the mirror, I see my dad. When I look at my behaviors around my brothers, he's present. That energy—both the good stuff as well as some of the negative stuff—is something for me to work at. And likewise, if we look deeply at our spiritual ancestry, then we should be able to tap into a sense of experience, a connective-ness. It's also getting at the roots for whatever life-giving juices that are available there.

And with this now to look at, I made a comment to him. I said, "Thầy, my blood brothers said, 'Aren't you going to mass anymore?' And I have to say, 'No.' They worry because they think if a Catholic misses mass, that's a bad sin; you're going to hell. They don't understand how I find the elements I was looking for in the Christian Eucharist; I find them present here in the community."

So now I'm rolling up my sleeves and looking at: How is it that my experience of this community and the way we eat together actually puts me in the experience of the fundamental elements that were there in the Christian Eucharist for me? Fifty years ago, I used to gather the community and give a talk on the scripture. And then, we would take the bread and the wine, and I would speak the words, "This is my body, take and eat it." Now, as I gather with my brothers, I'm no longer the one who presides like I did as a priest. We sit down and we share the food together. And together we say, "This food is the gift of the whole Universe. The gift of the Earth, the sky, the sun, and the rain. And a gift of a lot of loving work, of a lot of people." Or as Thầy says, "This bread in your hands is the bread of the Cosmos."

Now I can understand, as I get free of dualism, that this food contains the energy of the creative God that I've lived my life with, the energy of the Holy Spirit. This assembly of my brothers and myself, we have the Christ nature, that spirit. It is in the spirit, then, that we speak these words. And in the speaking of these words, we aren't changing this food into something other than it was, as if it's profane and now we're going to make it sacred. It's recognizing that this food is already holy by the very fact that it exists. And this community of brothers is holy. There's not a sacred and profane dualism here.

I don't need to have that sense when I start speaking and sharing with the brothers or when we say, "We accept this food so that we may be strengthened in our bodies to more effectively understand each other and have compassion on each other." Again, it's not what we used to think of as a priest: an event of transubstantiation, changing the substance here. It's mainly celebrating the awareness of its holiness and of its life-giving character. In that, then in sharing together as brothers, those who did all the work of cooking it and bringing it to the table and our being there, we then are aware of an energy: the energy of brotherhood. That to me is the energy of the Holy Spirit.

A big piece of this is not throwing out the notion that there is a God or God is our Father, God is Almighty or things like that. Rather, it's letting the notions be, but moving on to a sense it experientially. There's an energy here that's cooking in the belly of the Sangha in its presence, in its

sharing of the food. This energy is the energy of the Holy Spirit. In that sense, then this becomes for me a new Pentecost. Well, let me back up: Twenty years ago, there were times I'd stop and say, "What happened?" In the 1960s, I was on fire with teaching and preaching on the New Creation and how this world is going to be transformed. And my fellow priests were, too, but most of us left. Some [became] psychologists and some went into all different professions now. I happened to be in the profession of a stockbroker at that point. But I just wondered: "What happened to all us that were so on fire in the '60s?" We believed we were onto something in the Vatican II reform of the Church. And it all just kind of blew away.

Q: On that specific point, what were the critical differences with Vatican II? What was this huge dip that so spoke to you at that point?

Well, what was exciting about Vatican II was that it was a recognition within the Church and the Church leadership, by listening to some of the best of the scholars, that we needed number one to recognize that the Church is the people of God. It's in its people, not a hierarchical, institutional, well-run, ecumenical kind of organization. And that the Eucharist, number two, is to be done in the language of the people, no longer just in Latin. Latin is very beautiful to sing with, much better than English. But doesn't communicate the essence of what is going on. The third thing that was very important was going back to the origins and recognizing that the mass was originally a simple brotherhood of Jesus with his apostles and friends. It was a meal around the table. In the centuries that followed, it became a drama that lost the meal sense. They took the altar and put it up at the end, and had a gorgeous apse with the big crucifix or whatever and stained glass. And then they put the priest up there with his back to the people.

There was a drama going on, saying, "Friends, we're going to take this bread and turn it into body of Christ." At was a dramatic moment, when these words were spoken, the priest would raise his hands and elevate the bread, and bells would be rung to wake up the people and say, "This is a very sacred moment." Vatican II said, "This is not what the mass is to be. The mass is to be the people gathered around the table and sharing bread together. The holy bread that will help to bring us together more closely knit in our commitment to live the life of the gospel all together." And finally, recognizing and attempting to show respect for other forms of Christianity. The Ecumenical Movement began which brought me as a young priest into now collaborating with my fellow Protestant ministers in ways that we had never done before.

I remember joining a Lutheran minister at the Lutheran church and helping to do an ecumenical ceremony. It was a discovery for me that these Protestant ministers were in many ways, I thought, more deeply committed to Christ and to teaching the gospel than to a lot of my fellow priests. Whereas I had grown up being told that we Catholic priests are the premier legion of Christ. It woke me up to the fact that I have very deeply committed friends amongst the Protestants ministry. I began to build friendships that were deeper than with my fellow priests. Especially, the older priests and the more conservative ones who tended to be in the more authoritative positions. The protestant ministers could be so fully committed to the people, and they were married. It was at that time in my graduate studies that I learned that the origin of celibacy required for secular priests - I was not a monk - originated in the eleventh century. The Church was having some difficulty with their married priests, losing property to the descendants of the priests. Therefore, one way to get back control of Church property was to make sure that the priests presiding in the particular churches were not having children that ultimately could inherit the property. And so [the] celibacy requirement for secular priests was

installed at that time.

In 1968, I didn't like that anymore. And yet, celibacy stayed. So my solution to that was that I resigned and moved on to do the work of Christ in the world. I thought I was really doing that, too. I went out to work with criminals, and I ended up helping to design and get funding for indirect projects bringing criminals out of prison for their first time after ten, twenty years and helping them get adjusted to life in the city. The second project I developed was to intercept criminals who were convicted for the first time and who were going to hard time prison. We thought we'd screen in some of those and keep them in town, and work with them and help them turn their lives around. So I did that for several years.

Q: And you were no longer as a priest?

No longer as priest. No. It was going quite well but I knew we were not in control. We did not have competent people to really deal with these guys. There was a murder. After the murder investigation in which I helped the sheriff, he told me, "You know, Mr. Stier, my detectives and I for quite a while during this investigation thought you were just the front man with a suit and tie, running a three county burglary ring under the shadow of the court."

With that, I knew I was out of my water. I replaced myself with a big professional heavyweight boxer, a six and a half foot guy who had just finished a drug program treatment. He took the program and morphed it into one for juvenile drug problems. Because the city wouldn't let them have a house in town, they ended up going to a seminary in a church that was running out of seminarians. It was the very seminary I went to when I was sixteen years old! It was no longer seminarians, but now people in the program that I had started in the city.

Q: We can pick up at the point: the leap between you being at that point a slightly disillusioned priest and working on projects with convicts. This is much more understandable, to me logical, than really to stockbroking. Can you tell us about that?

I didn't know what I was going to do. When I was working with people in the organization for these halfway houses, there were business people in town. One of them recruited me to come to work with him in his company and help him form a new real estate company serving people and finding homes. And at that point, I was thinking, "I'm married and I have a child. I have a home and I have a mortgage. I need to find work that I can have some control of the results of my efforts." I decided to train and go into residential real estate work. I did that and I became very successful, but there was often a thought of, "What am I doing here?" I would look around at my fellow brokers and realtors and say to myself, "My God, I'm a priest!" This was my own neurosis that we priests were special. We were special. But I got bored with the real estate, and therefore, I decided, "I still need to make money to take care of my retirement." I was now fifty years old and I needed to get my daughter through college.

I cast around and looked at things to do, and I recognized that I'm a salesman. My dad was a salesman. I was beginning to recognize that I am a chip off the old block; I'm the continuation of my dad. I thought, "Okay, I'm not a psychotherapist type; I lack the empathy and all that sort of thing." I mean, I wanted to be a psychotherapist, but I just did not have that kind of emotional maturity and sensitivity. So I decided that the way to handle this and finish up and make good money was to be a stockbroker. And that's what I did until I retired in 2000 at age sixty-five.

Q: But just on that point in real estate realizing that you had a neurosis that the priest was more special. This was bothering you because you had a sense of ego invested in that idea of being a priest. Aside from that, I'm guessing you must have finally felt a lack of spirituality in real estate? And then, presumably stock brokering as well. Was there not some sort of emptiness? Because you started with this vision, and now you've come full circle to that vision, though it's translated itself significantly. What about the middle bit, and your very emotional feelings towards life and why you're doing this?

Yeah, there were twenty years in there that I had some big learning. Seven years after I was married, my wife complained enough that I went through the twelve-step treatment program, of AA (Alcoholic's Anonymous) in which I discovered, "Wow. This is the fellowship that I was looking to build when I was a priest, and didn't succeed." That was one step. There continued to be for me a fair amount of work at growing up emotionally. I became engaged not only in Alcoholics Anonymous, but also the Landmark Foundation in California. I kept going in various things: mens groups, inter-marriage counseling once or twice, and I stumbled into what is called Holotropic Breathwork. But there was still a sense of living in a desert. In 1993, I was diagnosed with Stage IV lymphoma, and entered into a four month treatment; their strongest program of chemotherapy. In that program, I also began to look at my life, and I stumbled again into a center in Minneapolis called "Pathways" with many alternatives to dealing with life-threatening illness.

There was a young man there teaching sitting meditation: Vipassanā. I started that. A few months later, I did the ten-day Buddhist boot camp from Goenka. Ten days with no talking and nine hours a day of sitting Vipassanā. That led to a wonderful breakthrough on the sixth day. I entered a place I thought was like a miracle, a sense of peace and quiet and calm. I knew that this was what I was looking for back when I was a priest, and never got. I continued doing that and using stockbroker awards to fly around the country to do the ten-day Vipassanās. I don't know of any other stockbrokers who would take ten days out of the office to do Vipassanā meditation. But that ultimately led to two things: I was moving more and more spiritually, and I felt that the woman who was my partner wasn't sharing that journey. I was in the process of leaving her and dealing with my anger about her.

Q: We've moved on from your wife...

Yes, I divorced my daughter's mother eight years after we were married; back in 1978. Years later, I was complaining to a friend. He said, "How's it going?" I said, "I'm dealing with my anger toward my partner." He said, "I got just the thing for you." "What is it?" I said. He said, "Well, Naropa people are here, and we're doing a retreat: 'Bodhisattvas in the Making.'" He said, "It'd be good for you."

I went to it; I liked it. And in that, I met somebody else who struck my fancy. And a month later, we connected. We eventually went to Holland to celebrate our engagement to get married at a little castle and she persuaded me to go down to Plum Village for a week. We so much enjoyed the experience of Thích Nhất Hạnh and the community in Plum Village in '97 May that ended up coming back to America to form a Sangha. We did the psychotherapist retreat in November in Key West, and we followed the next year with a three-week retreat in Vermont. And then by the year 2000, we joined several others to form a residential community in Santa Barbara where we as laypeople lived like the monastic practice.

But there were clues. I was becoming very successful as a stockbroker. In fact, the manager took me to lunch to kind of reward me in '96 and to say, "What's next?" And I said, "You know, Dick, to tell you

the truth, I'd rather be a monk." And I took that back, I said, "Whoops!" But there was a moment of candor, and I had just come off the ten-day retreat. So there we were then in 2002 October, and I was in a separation from this new partner reading Francis of Assisi by *****. I thought, "Wow! Francis was radical! He's like Thầy. He formed a new kind of brotherhood that the world had not yet seen amongst Catholics with no hierarchy and no power positions." And I thought, "Radical. Like Thầy." And then I thought, "Why not me?"

It was in October of 2002 that it first came up to me consciously. I said, "You know what? I don't need any more money." As a stockbroker, I had a lot. "I don't need another lover." I had done enough of that. And I said, "There's more in life." The man that I saw as having it is Thích Nhất Hạnh. So I decided, "I need to go to Plum Village to check this out." That's what I did. I cancelled the trip to China in 2002, went to Plum Village in December, and spent a month trying not to look at that question. But at the end of the month, I would wake up at night and it was clear.



Q: What did Dick think?

My manager? I never gave him a chance.

Q: He can stand for your colleagues; what did your colleagues in stockbroking think at that point?

Well, he and I were having a private lunch in a wonderful French restaurant there in Minneapolis. And he's the only guy who heard it, and as soon as I said it, I just said, "Whoops." And I thought that this is not something that would be helpful in my relationship with him. Because I was a stockbroker; you were always wanted to keep the door open for the opportunities that the company can provide you or the manager might have somebody who says, "Here's a new candidate, could you take this customer?" So I didn't want to eliminate myself from those possibilities. And that was in February or March of '96. I still had another four years to go. I was coming to the end where I knew I wanted to get ready for retirement, particularly with this new relationship I had cooking then.

I didn't know this until I read his biography but St Francis's mother wanted to be a nun. They grabbed her out of the convent and married her off. And she became his mother. But he ultimately became the monk. She and him. My mother wanted to be a nun. She was rejected for poor health and married my dad, had a boy and then spent two years in a tuberculosis sanitarium. After two years at the TB sanitarium, they said, "You can go home, but no more children." She had seven more of us. She was a very strong influence on me becoming a priest. And now she's smiling because she made it to the monastery in me. I think there's almost some sort of joke in that. But you know, two of my brothers think that I am crazy doing what I'm doing. And when one of them goes to mass every day and prays that I don't go to hell.

Q: How does that make you feel?

Well, it is at least a sign to me that it's his way of loving me. There was a time earlier, two years earlier, that he started in on it, kind of like lecturing me—he's my older brother, was my hero as a kid—and putting me down for what I was doing. And I stopped him. I got angry. With his wife there, I just laid it back on him. It's not for him to go around putting people down because I knew he did that with a lot of people. So I really socked it to him in anger and got up and walked out. I walked down to the football field I used to play on as a kid, just to kind of walk. It's like I still have—it still happened last week—my family habit of anger is still very strong. I'm still having to deal with the times when something can happen, and I feel so strongly. It sometimes comes when I feeling disrespected or insulted. Boy, the urge to throw a punch is still very strong. I haven't punched anybody, but it's still very much a part of my learning to not react in anger. Simple practice: Stop. Breathe. Walk. I feel like a beginner. Maybe that's why my name is "Young Brother."

Q: Pháp Đệ means Young Brother.

You know why I got that?

Q: No.

Okay. In 2003, the day of my ordination, Thầy announced, "Your name is 'Pháp Đệ.'" And everybody laughed; I couldn't figure out why they were laughing. Then I learned, it was only three years ago in his Christmas Eve talk [that] he was talking about an article I wrote and he said, "The reason I named him Pháp Đệ, Young Brother, is because he used to be called 'Father Adrian.'" Right there, at that time, Thầy was letting me know, "You are a beginner." Young Brother. And I have appreciated that. It's been a daily learning for me. I'm engaged in something I love; I figure I'll be doing for the rest of my days.

It's my sixth and last career. Now to go back, when we talk about the young people, interestingly, when I finished prep school and I was a priest, I discouraged parents from sending their boys to the seminary at age fifteen, sixteen, seventeen.

There is something in Thầy that came up to me, as yesterday I was thinking about him. Here's this eighty-five year old man. World famous. And for two and a half hours, delivering the basic, simple teaching to simple people. Who of his reputation will be found putting out that much? There is in him a passion for the work. I put it as, like Jesus, the passion for the Kingdom of God. Thầy has that. And I look for more of us in the community to start showing up with that, too. That passion to really bring the practice to the people. And I'm having to learn to be patient because I think the community is very patient. This community is one of the most patient that I know of to allow people lots of time to work through.

Now, there's one other factor here: the real power that's in this practice or in the Plum Village mindfulness community is the practice. And an example of that was two years ago, Thầy ended up sick in the hospital in Boston. A thousand people came to Estes Park to see Thầy. We were very clear with

That's what it's about. It's like tennis or football—you can read the good books and the game plans and all that kind of stuff, but it's getting on the field and playing the game. Maybe we call it practice. But golfing, tennis, football, it's in the practice. And the real joy is in the execution or in the practice, again. The real joy isn't sitting there and getting good new ideas. So at this point, I am confident that as long as this community will continue to be authentic in our practice—not be a bunch of monks and nuns who are speeding around anxiously worried about this and that—as long as we do what we've been taught to do, not to worry about the future.

Q: Why do you think there is this clear distinction between a monk—the male practice—and the female nun's character traits almost? It seems to me quite reductive.

Yeah. A short answer to that is because the ego is still very much with us. Thầy doesn't spend much time talking specifically about ego, but the ego is the solid basis of our dualism because the ego is: "It's me versus you."

The ego is: "It's me versus the source or God." As we got it in our Bible story—I don't agree with the details of the story—but the ego is: "We are the victims, God has punished us, and we are out of sorts with God. We're divided and we're going to run our own show; we're not going to be bossed around." Well, there is all of this that is part of our nature. The ego is a very important part of our growing up and developing a sense of individuality. We call it "individuation." It's important that that happens, but what we get caught into is the ego keeping us going into complexes: "I'm better than, I'm superior, I don't want to be inferior."

And so, there's a competition that's very much a natural part of our condition of living in this body. That aspect of our mind—the ego-mind that is now versus the Christ-mind or the Buddha-mind—we're like a split personality. And that mind of the ego comes in very strongly I think in the cultural, reflected in the cultural values of Vietnam and how nuns are to be, and in the Asian [culture]; even in the West, too. The monks are above the nuns; priests are above the nuns—it's part of our ego-mind and preoccupation with getting ahead. So what it amounts to is that even in the convent of such an enlightened practice as this, with such an enlightened teacher as we have, down deep, the ego is very

much present. And conformity becomes a way—again, the ego can use the behavior of conformity to protect itself. Why do we conform? It's because we think there's a pay off in conformists.

If I ever get asked someday, I think that would be a subject for us to look at: How much are we submitting ourselves to being conformists? And what's behind that? What's underneath that? What are we afraid of? That's all ego. It is one's own vulnerability to criticism, to being caught into the ego.

Q: As parent, just trusting that my son is happy, that's good enough. Often, the son may be doing something for a career that doesn't make the dad happy.

In the final stages of my priesthood, I was teaching a college course on the New Testament and Jesus coming out of the waters of the baptism of John and being stopped. The story goes that the spirit of God spoke from above, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

And I was into wrestling with my decision about the priesthood, and at that point, my seventy-year-old dad. It was in that understanding of that scripture that I came to the conclusion: "If there's one thing that is important for a dad, it's to know that his son is his own man, a free man who stands on his own two feet." I felt that that fitted with my sense of what I was up to doing. I knew I was going to bring home a horrendously tough announcement to make to them, but I had that sense, that trust: Dad can appreciate that his son is his own man, can stand on his own two feet, and follow his heart.

Q: Do you sometimes, just as a human being when you're there chanting on stage—either in front of five thousand people or just in the monastic community—see outside yourself wearing these robes with your head shaved, and just have this kind of moment to really question, "What on earth am I doing?" Or is it so totally in your understanding of yourself and your path that the question never comes up? A question like that, "What am I doing here?"

There were times in the past the question would come up, "What am I doing here?" But that was in moments in which I was in criticism of my brothers and sisters in the community. And so, that was a moment for me to look at my own ego. But in those times, like when we are there in public, the question doesn't come up anymore for me like that. Sometimes I'm a little inconvenienced by the dress, the robes. After eight years as a monk, I've become at ease with this. And also, there's a sense of joy that what I'm doing now, I set out to do when I was twenty-five, thirty years old as a young priest, and was not satisfied with back then. So there's a joy that what I'm doing now is the highest and the best use—this is what my heart and joy is doing. And as a consequence, I am able to also really make myself available for lots of private consultations. And just be there with people. And it's more and more an experience of falling in love with people, of just really enjoying these moments together. And a sense that we're all family.

And I'm having that more and more with, again, my brothers and sisters; particularly like on this tour. My brothers and sisters from France and Germany and New York, when we're pulled together and working together, I get a real sense of joy. And I don't know really what I look like except when I see a picture of myself, particularly with the bald head and all that kind of thing. Or a picture of the back of me—I guess I get reminded of, "Oh, gee. It looks like my old relatives I saw seventy years ago."

But overall, I'm feeling an enthusiasm for what we are doing. The hardest moment of the day for me is getting up. To get up at four thirty and to study a bit. Or these days, the privilege is I got up this

morning and went in and had tea with Thầy. He comes up and we sit and have tea with the Venerable and his attendants. And I have that sense, and I think the young monks and nuns to do, that we're now about the business of continuing the work of Thầy. We're not hunkering down into the comfort of a quiet monastery. We're taking it to the world.

And I find a real joy in that. Probably when I was seventeen, it was getting on the field and playing a football game. Or a basketball game. There's a bit of that in it—just the joy of the engagement.

Q: Why tea with Thầy? What sort of exchange is that? Is it kind of progressive intellectual or is it actually just relaxation?

Well, interestingly, this morning—what happens is that you sit quietly, the tea is poured; everybody takes a cup. And the first thing he does is he lifts his cup and holds it out to you. It's like a toast. I'm going to send you something I've been writing about: the ancient, very ancient habit of taking a drink to seal the agreement of solidarity amongst us. It's the ancient covenant cup. So we have tea that way like this morning. Then, he engaged pretty much in Vietnamese with the Venerable. So I don't know, unless I have one of them translating for me. You never know. Then, he stops, and he may say something to me in particular.

This morning, he told me that he had read the two pages I sent him last night about how it is that the brotherhood meal we share in the monastery here has the elements of the great Eucharist that I used to share. He suggested that I bring in the Five Contemplations more clearly on that. So that was it. I'll be addressing that and writing something new on the subject before he leaves town. And in that, for me I guess I feel a little bit of an extra mission and that is taking it to my fellow Westerners to truly tap into their roots. I'm realizing that for most of us, there's not much awareness of anything there.

But I also have a sense that as I'm sitting there, it's very simple, nothing special. And for me, this is a rich moment to sit here with this man. But again, he handles it in a way that there's nothing special happening here. And for me, my practice of being a monk is learning to be that I am not special. That's ego: "I'm special."

Q: When you know that 1000 people are coming to retreat, based on your experiences of retreats generally, what are people bringing into your monastic space?

It shows up, what people are bringing shows up in many different ways. The ways that I see, or what's deepest is they come for consultations. And so they will come to sit down, on a private interview or a sharing, and those, we get we hear more of the clear pain that people are bringing to the retreat. The pain of feeling lonely, the pain of being in a marriage relationship that is maybe not only not fulfilling but is painful and hurtful people feeling hurt and angry. Looking at the broad population like a coming I see most of them are hoping to get some nourishment that they were looking for in their churches, in their communities from which they come, sometimes from the organizations, people who are feeling hungry for more.

In particular the Christians that come I think they have had a frustrated sense that they looked for salvation in the Christian communities and it didn't turn out to be, what they got didn't turn out to feel like salvation. A lot of that comes from the fact that they understood that the salvation they were looking for comes after you die so they did not have a current experience on a day to day basis of being

joyful and free and solid in their daily experience. And so they're coming hungry. I think many of us looked for or were told, particularly in our Christian communities, that you do these things and you're going to be ok and you'll have salvation. There was no real experience of what salvation might mean and part of that was also the sense that you don't get it now, you have to wait. And what's, some of these people have had a little bit of an experience of, and which brings them back here is I think they discovered that there's the possibility of salvation, or healing, and joy and happiness and freedom can be right now. And of course that's the teaching of Thầy, and the practice that er, if your practice is not bringing you a sense of freedom now, a sense of joy, if it's not an experience of love, there's something wrong with your practice.



That's what we're to be experiencing and that's what's available. I think a lot of people spending time with us, they begin to let go of their trained tendency to figure things out, and to use our minds to be like scientists who can use logic and all that sort of thing to cut through the suffering and find happiness they discover that the process is do the simple practice, be quietly awake, and coming to enjoy the moment. So in order to enjoy the moment, to let go of the past, like resentments that we talked about earlier and grievances that people tend to be carrying with them and or the preoccupation with, we got to get this figured out, and then tomorrow, we will soon some day feel happy and good. I

mean it's like, like the joy and the happiness is in the future. So I believe that people who come, like the thousand people that are coming here, many of them already have a sense that this is the dance that brings the joy. So they're coming to learn how to dance. The dance of mindfulness. Yeah.

Q: How do you monastics find that? Is it challenging for you to hold that space?

There's a lot of projections that go to you guys isn't there, that you've arrived, that you're.....

Lot of projections and assumptions that we have, that we are awakened and enlightened and spiritually very deep, accomplished people. And those are mostly projections. And from within the community, I'm finding that our, the Plum Village mission, and it's a mission, is to be, to open up and be available for people to come in. and to really put out. and therefore to be, to be generous and free in giving our time and energy to the people.

I have an advantage over most of my brothers and sisters because I have so many years of experience of people in the world as a preacher, a teacher, a criminal justice corrections officer, sales person. For me, what's happened is that I have found increasing joy in just being available for people like yourselves. People that are coming in and, I feel very comfortable in initiating a lot of contact and then very quickly making an offering as to what else I see that they could consider doing to continue to grow in the practice, and then the other piece is I am also very available for doing consultations some which will run for not just 35 minutes but an hour in which it helps that I think I've learned how to be a good listener. More so in having become a monk with Thầy in this practice my ability to be a good listener is much better than it ever was. And so I'm able to be there and to spend the day getting tired out being there for people with a sense that this is the work. This is being a bodhisattva. And getting, and feeling real joy at spending some moments, some time, an hour with people to look at and see what else they might do to, or not do, to find more joy and more peace in their lives.

And in that I think Thầy has helped us see clearly that the process is one of helping people come home to themselves. In these very simple things such as learning to breathe, and letting the breath attention, bringing attention back into the body, and it's like, becoming aware of my body, I breathe in, And in that coming home, really learning how to come home, stay home and learn how to take care of oneself. And in that letting go of being a busy body who is taking care of so many other people. Hmmm.

Q: Could you repeat that one point about listening? It was very profound. You said that since becoming a monk you've learned how to listen, would you mind repeating that again?

I think my old self used to be quite analytical and quick to figure out what I might have to say that's going to fit this person. And my old tendency on doing that I think I had really developed because I was a good salesman and in becoming a monk it has been more of a training of staying quiet and just listening. And not feeling an obligation, or maybe resisting the urge to jump in and provide solutions. And so in that sense I'm more comfortable now with just sitting with people in their suffering and being with them and just listening rather than feeling an obligation, or giving way to my tendency to provide quick solutions, and quick answers. I'm learning to just be, quietly, with someone, in their agony. In that, having more possibility to help them see that this is a, they're into making a good discovery and what has been such a painful or unacceptable, undesirable kind of moment is actually a gift. A gift in which they can wake up to the fact that there is a problem there's a suffering and there's a way through it and a way to transform it. And in that to be able to take the time to be with them in the process that isn't always very quick in carrying off the transformation with learning how to do the

mindfulness practice of stopping, breathing, concentrating and being open to insight.

Q: thank you. Do you ever question why you're a monastic?

Do I ever question why I'm a monastic? Not really. I'm surprised that this is one of the first commitments in my life that I've never afterwards begin to look back and think what have I done here? I think it's easier for me to answer that today, that this feels, like I feel very lucky and this is the perfect engagement for me at my age, at 78, I'm aware that what was very strong in me thirty/forty years ago that left me very desirous of a love relationship versus a celibate lifestyle, um, it's easier for me to let that go now, at this age, 78, sometimes I've wondered, thought, I could be doing the work that I'm doing by living in the world, I have pretty good skills. I know I could go out in the world and have a pretty comfortable place to live and would be able to probably set up a centre and develop enough of a following that I could also do the work but here I think I have a more optimal conditioning surrounded by my brothers and sisters, and also, like I see in these retreats, being with Thầy, and listening to Thầy continue to develop his teaching, it's a real gift. So my sense of satisfaction, and my joy, in doing what I'm doing leaves me very comfortable comfortable, secure, that this is the most worthwhile way I could be spending my life. and now I see it as the main purpose of my life is to be available to help relieve suffering, and to bring joy. And I don't know that I could find another way out in the world to do that as easily and as much as I'm doing right here.

Q: what about other monastics. do they tend to leave?

I don't, I see many monastics that I think are inspirations to me, along this line, and they're the ones that I'm most appreciative of. And I also, with my old critical eye that's there, as the businessman, the manager, I have a tendency to look at monks and I think my tendency is to be judgmental of monks that I don't think are stepping up, putting in or really committing, pitching in, and I'm beginning, getting better at recognizing that my perceptions may not be accurate, that these other monks and nuns that I tend to be judgmental of have their own sufferings and limitations and that if I really saw the picture totally I'd have to say, credit them with doing a great job of coming out of some very difficult backgrounds and that they're in their own way really blossoming. I've found very clearly that in the past two or three years, I've let go of a lot of my tendency to be critical of my fellow monks and nuns, and I'm finding that it leads to more joy, and it isn't that they change, it's that I've changed, and I'm letting go of my need to be in the know and to have some kind of influence or control and just let go and let be. It's strange, when I went away to school to become a priest, at 16, there was a common understanding that only 10% of us would make it. here we have a tendency to think that 90% of us who come into the monastery as monks and nuns should be able to make it all the way through.

Q: why do the monks or nuns leave, what's their, what can you talk about to.....

When I look back, and why I left the priesthood it was in that that I began to have considerable disagreements about what's going on, and dissatisfaction with the operation. But usually, then as well as now, for particularly young monks and nuns, I think a falling in love or a coming to recognize both the need or the desire for a marriage relationship is a rather normal phenomenon and although I don't see an awful lot of this happening

Q: how do, on that note about falling in love, how do monastics deal or handle sexual energy?

It would be better to be asking a 35 year old monk that or a 25 year old. Ideally, it is to recognize that one has this energy, and to take, direct that energy into really delivering service as a monk. It seems really clear to me that in the case of two or three monks there in Plum Village who are deeply dedicated, with high output and high creativity, they are also monks who have very clearly harnessed their sexual energy and put it into being creative and productive. And I think we can use more training and inspiration on the part of all of us to look at that, and to really focus on that. and of course one of the disciplines of developing and maintaining that is to really be very skillful in managing one's connections with beautiful women. So I respect when I see younger monks basically turn away and not be available to some hungry, I mean spiritually hungry, people. They're just saying, "I'm not the one." They're not available. And of course a guy like me at my age is kind of handy because I can spend more time with and sit with women who want consultation and attention without it becoming a distraction or an allurements to me. It's that monk or nun's commitment to really be a Bodhisattva and to burn out, to burn themselves out, to spend their energy being of service to people. Helping people break free of suffering.

Q: To the average member of the audience I think the question comes up, why this prohibition of sexual relationships and love in the monastic life? It sounds like the worst excesses of Catholicism as opposed to a good thing, so why is it a good thing if it is?

I think it must be understood that this commitment to celibacy is a free and clear choice that I am now choosing to give of myself, all my energy in service of those who are suffering. The Bodhisattva commitment. It gets clouded when the celibate commitment is looked upon as mandatory, and that we need to do away with. Now, it's mandatory only insofar as it wouldn't work to have a couple of pretty nuns living in the same room with me, or this monk over there happens to not be celibate and his partner. To share the space in the monastic community, that's gonna be pretty difficult. so it's a matter of if we need to have a love relationship, a love partner, then we need to do that outside the monastery. Although I think there are some monastic communities in the world that live together communally

Yes, I see that as possible. I don't know of any personally, but I see it as a possibility. It's just that here, with the monks and nuns of the ages 16,17, to my age 78, but particularly in their 20s and 30s, having a non-celibate community would be pretty disastrous. Not disastrous, unproductive. And that's the other piece is that, I've found that when I was in a marriage relationship a lot of my energy and attention went into taking care of the relationship and I mentioned to you earlier a bit about being a caretaker and how as a married man I was not as free to be out there and available. To help men and women in their own spiritual practice. But you're asking the question, I haven't thought about it that much lately, I have to think about that further.

In the 60s I became aware that mandatory celibacy of secular priests, not monastics, but secular diocesan priests which I was, I became aware that historically the origin of that was the difficulty they were having back in the 9th, 10th, 11th centuries, with married priests. Married priests tended to have families and it got complicated in terms of protecting church property, you know, because in the society of law families and marriage and so on have, their developed real estate rights. And so the requirement of celibacy as my understanding back in about the 11th century was a lot of that was to protect church property. That awareness was one of the things that also was a piece of my own deciding ultimately to leave the Catholic priesthood and move toward marriage. And that was not an option that was available, I couldn't possibly continue being a priest and married at the same time. In getting married and going out into the world, I now have the experience of how much time and energy

was no longer being put into helping people deal with suffering. It was time and energy into taking care of our relationship, taking care of being a dad, and all the other stuff – house, mortgage, professional career buying and selling cars and houses. This celibate commitment that we have here in the Plum Village community frees up the energy that a young man or woman might have that normally goes into all these engagements in the world and to be on high output, almost like working overtime.

Q: what is your defining issue that you've been trying to resolve? Is it in relation to your family background?

I don't know that I have a defining issue that I'm trying to resolve other than, if anything it has to do with my own Catholic heritage and how it is that I experience on a daily basis, the ultimate dimension. In the old days I would say a brother of Christ, a son of the Father. What's my experience of that? Now, that's still a work in process. This practice is a work in process of my learning to deal with my dualistic thinking that I grew up with and spent most of my life caught up in. It is very much a part of Western spirituality and our philosophical scientific methodology.

I have learned to let go of my efforts to convert my blood brothers and sisters as well as my old fellow priests to converting them to the wisdom and the richness of this practice. My blood brothers and sisters, of which I had seven, some of them have had a limited stay and have had some of the joy of what happens at a retreat. But overall I'm letting go of my need. I wish they would show more interest, so it's more a matter for me of letting go.

Q: well, I remember you once telling me that your family had quite an angry reaction to your decision of being a monastic

Oh yeah, for some of the family this was a betrayal, like it was almost being an apostate and somehow a rejection of my heritage of being connected with Christ through Jesus. And the two that were most vividly outspoken about that they, one of them has died and the other one I think has probably softened up a bit but overall this is not, what I'm up to and what I'm doing is not something that I get any sense of interest from him.

Q: how did you feel when they were angry of disapproving of your decision?

Oh back then I was a warrior and I'd do battle with them. I'd take them on and argue. This was years ago but my one brother got on it. I stopped him and I went back after him. I know that this has been his pattern for too many years not only with me but with other people. I kind of confronted him or put him down, and then eventually in that moment I became aware of what I was doing. I remember I finished, got up and left his home and drove down to the football field that we all learned to play football on and just did walking meditation. I let it go and since that time which was about five years ago, I haven't made that mistake of becoming combative or whatever and persuading them that I'm doing the right thing. It's been more just quietly showing an interest in them and their lives and not getting into promoting the mindfulness practice. I've been consistently inviting them to come and spend a week here, or there in Deer Park, come out and play with me but that's it.

I more frequently and quietly let go of my tendency to be critical. I've found myself realizing that I see a lot of things in this community I don't like. A lot of shortcomings in monks and nuns that I don't like but I've been able to say I don't think I see anything that Thích Nhất Hạnh hasn't been seeing, for a much longer period of time. Yet he doesn't give up. He keeps inviting us to grow up. With that, it's

also been one way of in the past couple of years I've said to myself I will not let these observations, which are perceptions, undercut my own commitment. So, I feel very lucky that way. To be up and doing these things that we're doing. Compared to where life would've been for me had I stayed with my tribal birth and burial ground of Minnesota this is a radically fresh change.

And it's like even going and chanting on the big bell, there's a part of me that's just the playful kid that gets to go out there on the big bell and wail away, the chanting. I suppose that 60 years ago, we'd have done that by going to the local Hollywood bar and getting around a piano. That gave us a chance to demonstrate our joy of singing. Now I have that here up on the big bell. I've been doing it for almost ten years, and still as I chant the gathas. I find that they're still a source of inspiration in the deepening of my practice.

Q: I just wanted to very quickly come back, about when you were talking about your brothers. Has there always been an anger energy in your family? (Yes) Do you mind touching on that, because anger's a big thing and Thây's written a book about anger, how does that relate to your experience with your family, your upbringing, that emotion of anger, how has it affected you, and your relationships with your loved ones?

The culture of the family I grew up in was 'don't get too emotional' and as a boy, the macho thing, I mentioned that to you earlier I think, feelings are for girls and sissies. And that set us boys up in our family of being tough guys, rugged, and able to handle lots of hardship. But not very good then at intimacy and relationship. And I learned anger, particularly my father. I have memories of my third grade teacher scolding me for my anger. I took my anger out on another kid.

Q: People come on retreat and they work on something, they become aware of something in themselves and they want to work on it. But some people are really hard on themselves, I've done all this meditation and I'm still angry, what's wrong with me?" Isn't it about accepting the imperfection and the beauty of the imperfection of who we are, not having a goal of trying to get somewhere. Could you speak to that?

Well that has been happening for me, is learning to be more patient with myself and less critical, and that means letting go of the ego's tendency to 'this is not me, I'm above this' and, or the ego is what will also help a person being super critical and impatient with oneself. To learn that it's taking me time, and also to learn that this is still coming out of my own roots, my inheritance. So I'm dealing with an ancient ancestral inheritance here. And so yeah, eventually to be able to breathe and smile at it. And recognize that, and accept one's imperfection, to be humble about it.

But the, to go back to the point, this is a practice for me of learning to get free of dualistic, discriminative thinking. I think that's been very much a part of my life both as a Catholic, because we Catholics were always better, being a person that compares and make sure who's in and who's out in winning. That's all very much a part of the discriminatory thinking that is built on the assumption that I'm a separate self and I am unique and distinct and maybe even superior and the main job then is to get me what I want – too bad for the other guy. Winning. Winning not losing. And so I suppose when you come right down to it my behavior or treatment of the ants is a reflection of, possibly, my behavior or treatment of other human beings. And we have a history of seeing that we human beings are better than other living beings. That's discriminative thinking. And that kind of thinking is also what has set us up for very bad ecology and destruction of the planet. And so we've been very arrogant and

ignorant of destroying vegetation, trees, forests, as well as animals. That's been part of our ignorant, arrogant way of handling the world.

Q: for those of us who know nothing about what dualistic thinking is, what does that mean?

You gotta ask me that next year. I'll be better at it. I feel like a newcomer, like a sophomore, just catching on to how much dualistic thinking has dominated my life. It was a part of my priesthood and it's only in recent years of getting at it and I'm beginning to understand how, what it is, but then to really live it, to really live non-dualistically. And I'm just a beginner. Young Brother, at that.



Appendix

*** The Blessed Virgin Compared To The Air We Breathe**

~ Gerald Manley Hopkins

Wild air, world-mothering air,
Nestling me everywhere,
That each eyelash or hair
Girdles; goes home betwixt
The fleeci-est, frailest-flixed
Snowflake; that 's fairly mixed
With, riddles, and is rife
In every least thing's life;
This needful, never spent,
And nursing element;
My more than meat and drink,
My meal at every wink;
This air, which, by life's law,
My lung must draw and draw
Now but to breathe its praise,
Minds me in many ways
Of her who not only
Gave God's infinity
Dwindled to infancy
Welcome in womb and breast,
Birth, milk, and all the rest
But mothers each new grace
That does now reach our race—
Mary Immaculate,
Merely a woman, yet
Whose presence, power is
Great as no goddess's
Was deemèd, dreamèd; who
This one work has to do—
Let all God's glory through,
God's glory which would go
Through her and from her flow
Off, and no way but so.

I say that we are wound
With mercy round and round
As if with air: the same
Is Mary, more by name.
She, wild web, wondrous robe,

Mantles the guilty globe,
Since God has let dispense
Her prayers his providence:
Nay, more than almoner,
The sweet alms' self is her
And men are meant to share
Her life as life does air.
If I have understood,
She holds high motherhood
Towards all our ghostly good
And plays in grace her part
About man's beating heart,
Laying, like air's fine flood,
The deathdance in his blood;
Yet no part but what will
Be Christ our Saviour still.
Of her flesh he took flesh:
He does take fresh and fresh,
Though much the mystery how,
Not flesh but spirit now
And makes, O marvellous!
New Nazareths in us,
Where she shall yet conceive
Him, morning, noon, and eve;
New Bethlems, and he born
There, evening, noon, and morn—
Bethlem or Nazareth,
Men here may draw like breath
More Christ and baffle death;
Who, born so, comes to be
New self and nobler me
In each one and each one
More makes, when all is done,
Both God's and Mary's Son.
Again, look overhead
How air is azurèd;
O how! nay do but stand
Where you can lift your hand
Skywards: rich, rich it laps

Round the four fingergaps.
 Yet such a sapphire-shot,
 Charged, steepèd sky will not
 Stain light. Yea, mark you this:
 It does no prejudice.
 The glass-blue days are those
 When every colour glows,
 Each shape and shadow shows.
 Blue be it: this blue heaven
 The seven or seven times seven
 Hued sunbeam will transmit
 Perfect, not alter it.
 Or if there does some soft,
 On things aloof, aloft,
 Bloom breathe, that one breath more
 Earth is the fairer for.
 Whereas did air not make
 This bath of blue and slake
 His fire, the sun would shake,
 A blear and blinding ball
 With blackness bound, and all
 The thick stars round him roll
 Flashing like flecks of coal,
 Quartz-fret, or sparks of salt,
 In grimy vasty vault.
 So God was god of old:

A mother came to mould
 Those limbs like ours which are
 What must make our daystar
 Much dearer to mankind;
 Whose glory bare would blind
 Or less would win man's mind.
 Through her we may see him
 Made sweeter, not made dim,
 And her hand leaves his light
 Sifted to suit our sight.
 Be thou then, O thou dear
 Mother, my atmosphere;
 My happier world, wherein
 To wend and meet no sin;
 Above me, round me lie
 Fronting my froward eye
 With sweet and scarless sky;
 Stir in my ears, speak there
 Of God's love, O live air,
 Of patience, penance, prayer:
 World-mothering air, air wild,
 Wound with thee, in thee isled,
 Fold home, fast fold thy child.

**** The Raft is not the Shore – Chapter 8**

Thầy - "I always think that to be able to look into the eyes of one true master is worth one hundred studying his doctrine, his teaching. In him, you have a direct example of enlightenment, of life, while in others you have only a shadow which may help you also but not directly. As the Buddha says, My doctrine is only a raft helping to bring you over to the other shore, not ultimate reality. You shouldn't worship it."

Father Dan - "Well, how do you look into the eyes of Jesus or Buddha?

Thầy – How, well, there's no how. It's like asking, how do I look at you? How do I look at a branch of a tree? The problem is not how, but the subject who does the looking. Because if you put in front of people one thing and you have many people look at it, they see different things. It depends not only on the thing you exhibit but on the nature and the substance of the one who looks. So, when you are in direct touch with reality, you have more chance to break into it rather than when you have just an image of reality; that's the map and not the city, the shadow and not the tree, the doctrine and not the savior, life. There are those who look into the eyes of the Buddha, of Jesus, but who are not capable of

seeing the Buddha or Jesus. I think that is quite hopeless.

We have a number of stories in Buddhist literature of the many people who came from very far and hoped that they might be able to see the Buddha but they could not see the Buddha because of the way they reacted to things they had seen on the way. One such man met a woman who needed help but he was in such a hurry to see the Buddha that he neglected the child of the helpless widow. Of course, he could not see the Buddha. So I say that whether you can see the Buddha or not depends very much on you.

Father Dan – It is amazing how many of these insights there are across different lives and cultures and traditions. One thinks of that shattering scene of judgment at the end of Matthew's gospel when the Lord says, “So long” to some people because they didn't feed him and clothe him and visit him in prison. They all say, “How come?” And he says, “You didn't do it to my brothers. Too bad. So long.”

It's a deep question to me. How do you meet the eyes of Jesus or the Buddha? Probably the question of a dumb novice, still, I think that if people could breathe with the silence of Jesus, something would happen. He spent a lot of his life silently. If only one could go into the desert with Jesus, or be in prison with him during Holy Week, or penetrate His silence before Pilate and Herod, when He refused to answer, as another way of answering. It seems to me these are profound meetings, moments which go beyond the necessity of a lot of palaver. I often think of the meaning of a monk, like yourself or Merton of the young monk whose death we heard about today. These are people who have met the eyes of Jesus or Buddha through some understanding of silence.

Thầy – When I spoke of looking into the eyes of Buddha, I was thinking of the Buddha as a human being who is surrounded by a special atmosphere. I noticed that great humans surrounded by a special atmosphere. I noticed that great humans bring with them something like a hallowed atmosphere, and when we seek them out, then we feel peace, we feel love, we feel courage.

Maybe only an image can explain this. The Chinese say, “When a sage is born, the water in the river and the plants and trees on the mountain nearby become clearer and more green.” It is their way of talking about the milieu that is born at the same time as a holy being.

In Buddhism, we talk of karma as a fruit or as a seed. The karma seed is action-being and the karma-fruit is what you get, the concoction of all your deeds and all your thoughts and your being. So *karmaphala* is the fruit of karma. It consists of two parts. The first is yourself and the second part is the milieu that surrounds you. When you come and stay one hour with us, you bring that milieu – a kind of *rayonnement* which comes from yourself. It is as though you bring a candle into this room. The candle is there. There is a kind of light-zone you bring in.

When a sage is there and you sit near him, you feel light, you feel peace. That is why I said that if you sit close to Jesus and look into His eyes and still don't see Him, that's hopeless, because in such a case you have much more chance to see, to be saved, to get enlightenment, than when you read His teachings. Of course, if He's not there, His teaching is the next best.

When I read and hold the scriptures, whether Buddhist or Christian, I always try to be aware of the fact that when the Buddha or Jesus said something, they were saying it to someone or to some group of people. I should understand the circumstances in which they spoke, in order to get into communion with them rather than merely take their saying word for word. If I have a story to tell an adult, I can

tell it to a child too. But I would tell the story differently to a child – not because I want to do so, but because I'm facing a child. So my story naturally takes another form. I believe that what the Buddha said, what Jesus said, is not as important as the way the Buddha or Jesus said it. If you are able to perceive that, you will get close to the Buddha or to Jesus. But if you try to analyze, try to find out the deep meaning of the words without realizing the kind of relationship between the one who spoke and those who listened, I think that you very easily miss not only the point but the man. I think that theologians tend to forget that approach.

Looking for Each Other

by Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh

I have been looking for you, World Honored One,
since I was a little child.
With my first breath, I heard your call,
and began to look for you, Blessed One.
I've walked so many perilous paths,
confronted so many dangers,
endured despair, fear, hopes, and memories.
I've trekked to the farthest regions, immense and wild,
sailed the vast oceans,
traversed the highest summits, lost among the clouds.
I've lain dead, utterly alone,
on the sands of ancient deserts.
I've held in my heart so many tears of stone.
Blessed One, I've dreamed of drinking dewdrops
that sparkle with the light of far-off galaxies.
I've left footprints on celestial mountains
and screamed from the depths of Avici Hell, exhausted, crazed with despair
because I was so hungry, so thirsty.
For millions of lifetimes,
I've longed to see you,
but didn't know where to look.
Yet, I've always felt your presence with a mysterious certainty.
I know that for thousands of lifetimes,
you and I have been one,
and the distance between us is only a flash of thought.
Just yesterday while walking alone,
I saw the old path strewn with Autumn leaves,
and the brilliant moon, hanging over the gate,
suddenly appeared like the image of an old friend.
And all the stars confirmed that you were there!
All night, the rain of compassion continued to fall,
while lightning flashed through my window
and a great storm arose,
as if Earth and Sky were in battle. Finally in me the rain stopped, the clouds parted.
The moon returned,

shining peacefully, calming Earth and Sky.
Looking into the mirror of the moon, suddenly
I saw myself,
and I saw you smiling, Blessed One.
How strange!
The moon of freedom has returned to me,
everything I thought I had lost.
From that moment on,
and in each moment that followed,
I saw that nothing had gone.
There is nothing that should be restored.
Every flower, every stone, and every leaf recognize me.
Wherever I turn, I see you smiling
the smile of no-birth and no-death.
The smile I received while looking at the mirror of the moon.
I see you sitting there, solid as Mount Meru,
calm as my own breath,
sitting as though no raging fire storm ever occurred,
sitting in complete peace and freedom.
At last I have found you, Blessed One,
and I have found myself.
There I sit.
The deep blue sky,
the snow-capped mountains painted against the horizon,
and the shining red sun sing with joy.
You, Blessed One, are my first love.
The love that is always present, always pure, and freshly new.
And I shall never need a love that will be called "last."
You are the source of well-being flowing through numberless troubled lives,
the water from your spiritual stream always pure, as it was in the beginning.
You are the source of peace,
solidity, and inner freedom.
You are the Buddha, the Tathagata.
With my one-pointed mind
I vow to nourish your solidity and freedom in myself
so I can offer solidity and freedom to countless others,
now and forever.

The benefits of gratitude

With science supporting the idea that being grateful is good for us, three personal stories illustrate the importance of the gift.

November 17, 2012|By Mary MacVean, Los Angeles Times

<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/nov/17/health/la-he-gratitude-20121117>