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Dear readers,

a new year, a new spring, a new newsletter. Once
a year, we look back on the important events from
the past year in the EIAB and its surroundings.

Since August 2012, we are enjoying the renovated
ground floor in the Ashoka Institute, with its new
bookshop, the exhibitions of Thay's Calligraphy,
books and Dharma Tools, the Healing Hearts exhi-
bit, as well as the new Solidity meditation hall, three
new guest rooms and bathroom for the disabled.

In this issue you will read how the teaching of the
Dharma is evolving at the EIAB and how partici-
pants are applying the teachings at home. We in-
vite you to enjoy excerpts of Dharma Talks from
Brother Phap An and Sister Annabel (Chan Duc)
as well as reflections from course participants.

A Dutch friend offers his insights from the retreat with
Thay. A school teacher shares her experience with
mindfulness in primary school. We explore the new
kinds of methods and tools sprouting in our teaching:
like Dharma Drama, Interplay, and a sound boat, built
especially for us by a lay friend. There are accounts of
life in the monastery, by a nun and by lay friends.

Last but not least, please enjoy the heart-
felt stories of practicing mindfulness alone at
home or in a local sangha. Our hope is that these
articles will inspire and support you to apply
what you learn at the EIAB in your daily life.

Full of gratitude, we thank all of our friends and
guests for your support, for your faith, and for stay-
ing connected to us. Together we can manifest the
transformation we wish to see in the world.

The nuns and monks of the EIAB

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Giving each other space

Excerpted from a Dharma Talk by Thay Phap An
A retreat on Living and Working in Harmony, April 4-7, 2013

We've been talking about the importance of space; how to understand our relationships with other people in terms of space.

Each of us has space within us. And when we have blocks of pain and sorrow, they reduce the amount of space within us and outside of us. But the moment that the block of pain, the block of sorrow within us is reduced, then we have more space within us, and we have more space in our relationships.

In the last few days we've been talking about transformation, we've been trying to melt, to resolve this block of unresolved energy within us. Because when it melts, when it is resolved, we can fill our life with wholesome energy. This is the technique of the practice. There must be two processes; the process of reducing, transforming our pain and sorrow, and the process of cultivating joy and happiness, the wholesome qualities. If we only cultivate wholesome energy but this block of pain is not resolved, then there is no space for the positive energy to come in.

One of the ways we can create space within us is through the practice of having a Lazy Day. In our community, every Monday is a Lazy Day, with no scheduled activities except meals. And on that day I don't have contact with anyone. I wake up whenever I like. And then I schedule my day the way I like it. But the principle is that usually I don't go out of my room. I remain in my room and I just sit there and enjoy being. I might do sitting meditation or some practice I really

enjoy that I couldn't do during the week. I do anything that makes me happy that day. What I like the most is just to sit there and have some tea, and I can sit there for hours, for the whole morning, watching the clouds, the birds, or the sunshine and feeling the energy of life entering me. I do anything that helps me to be in touch with the goodness and beauty inside.

This practice of cultivating joy and happiness by offering ourselves space is very important. Because we have space within us and the other person also has space within them. As we begin to get to know each other, we may become friends or partners and slowly as we move toward each other a black hole can form, a collapsing of space. It seems like the more we come close to each other, the more we enter a black hole. We don't have enough space for ourselves and we don't give the other person enough space for themselves either. So this practice of having a day off, being by yourself, on your own, is very healing and nourishing. In this way, you move away a little bit and it brings equilibrium in the relationship.

Build a wall between you

An Indian teacher once said, "If you want to have a life-long friend, you need to build a wall between you." This is the wisdom. This is what prevents the collapsing of space between us and the other person. A best friend is the one who knows how to build a wall between you. Building

a wall means you are aware of the limits of your space and the limits of the other person's space, and you try to protect both. It is very important to be aware, to have this kind of sensitivity. Most of the time we get into trouble because we lose this sensitivity. And sometimes we feel that we love that person very much, and we need to help that person out when he or she is in a difficult time, but perhaps the best thing we can do is to let him or her sort things out alone.

The biggest mistake we make is to try live the other person's life. We do not only live our life but we want to live the other person's life. That's how the space between us collapses. We want to take on his emotions, his anger, sadness and worry, because we think that then we have true love for him. This is a very wrong perception. We invade the other person's space and we assume our life is his or her life. We get confused. If that person is drowning in the ocean, we want to jump down, bind ourselves to him or her and drown together. And we think this is love, this is a relationship.

Monks and the nuns shave their hair as a symbol that they will not be caught in this kind of attachment. In India, when a couple marries, there

is a ceremony in which their hair is bound together in a knot. And in former times, both men and women wore their hair long. This ceremony is to make sure that when one person drowns, the other person drowns, too. You cannot drown alone once you get married.

So when monastics shave their hair it is a way of showing that we are not bound anymore. There's no hair to tie together, nothing can bind us. So the moment we take on someone else's life we get into trouble. In fact the only way to get out of difficult situations like this is to be happy when your partner is suffering. It is not that you don't love him or her, but by being happy, you give him or her support.

Living our own life

Through the practice of mindfulness, you begin to be aware of your space, of your needs and of the other's needs. A need is something essential. If you can't satisfy it, you cannot be happy. The moment we violate the needs of the other person, or the other person violates our own needs, conflict arises. So we need to identify our needs, we should make a list. This is a meditation exercise, to be very clear about our needs.

In my case, I have always been very straight-forward and direct and sometimes this causes people a lot of pain and hurt. I try to be more skillful in the way I express myself. But this is my need; I need to tell people exactly how I feel. Often in my Dharma talks I share my personal experience, because I feel that I need to tell people about my life, directly, clearly, so that people don't make assumptions. Growing up, this is the way I was trained to be. But when we are too direct and straight-forward, people feel like their space has been invaded. We are attacking their space. That is why it is dangerous to be so direct.

I ordained as a novice monk on May 24, 1992. A week later, we had the first ever 21-day retreat in Plum Village. During this retreat Thay transmitted many Dharma Lamps to new Dharma Teachers. When there are practitioners who have practiced for many years in the community, who know enough about how to transform themselves, how to take care of their suffering, how to cultivate a spiritual life, then the teacher acknowledges that they now have the capacity to teach. The teacher then organizes a Lamp Transmission ceremony so that these students can be empowered to go out and help other people.



"Through the practice of mindfulness,
you begin to be aware of your space, of your needs
and of the other's needs. A need is
something essential."

Before I became a monk, I read many Zen books, and in the Zen tradition, there's no attainment, you don't attain something called the Dharma, you don't achieve anything. So after being ordained for just a week, I witnessed all of these Lamp Transmissions, and I thought, "why did Thay do this? In the university we need a graduation day, but in the spiritual life, why do we need a graduation day? It is not necessary to confer a title on someone." Something didn't seem right to me. Some of the other brothers and sisters in the community had the same idea but they didn't express it. So I decided I needed to speak out clearly what the others felt. Sometimes we feel we need to be the hero, we carry someone else's weight, we assume responsibility for them, we carry their suffering and joy.

So, the hero moved forward. I waited until the end of that 21-day retreat, and I wrote an eight-page letter to present my case to Thay. The night the retreat was over, Thay was extremely happy because the retreat was so successful. Several hundred people had attended. Thay invited a few of the monks and nuns to come and to enjoy tea with Thay, to be private with Thay, and share about the happiness of finishing the retreat.

And in the middle of all that joy and happiness, Thay asked me, "What do

you think Phap An? How was the retreat going for you?" I was less than one month old as a novice. I said, "Thay I really liked the retreat, but I wrote something for you." Thay was very happy as he thought I wrote something very beautiful, joyful and positive. I wanted to give it to Thay. Thay didn't know what it was so he asked me to read it out loud, so everyone could hear it.

What happened then was terrible. I read the letter and the whole energy in the hut went dead. Others were extremely upset that a newly-ordained monk could write such a thing to a teacher, a master. In the Asian tradition, you cannot do that. You need to respect your master wholeheartedly. So there was a reaction from some others in the hut. Thay was not very happy either. But Thay embraced his emotions very well and calmly poured and served tea for everyone. He said we shouldn't talk anymore. We should stop and go back to our rooms to rest, so we ended the meeting there.

Thay took good care of his happiness and his emotions. He didn't assume responsibility for what I felt. So Thay was able to see that my thoughts were just how I saw reality, and they did not necessarily have anything to do with him at all. This is how we should practice, not to assume responsibility for another person, for their thinking or emotions.

We maintain our space. We need to live our own life. That is the wisdom, to protect our space. He or she may think like that, but it is only his or her way of thinking. Don't be trapped into that thinking and identify with it.

This is the practice of non-self. Non-self is not a theory but a practice to free ourselves from assuming the responsibility for someone else. The moment you assume someone else's suffering, you are caught in the idea of self. The moment you can free yourself from this responsibility you touch the domain of non-self. You are completely protected.

So Thay was doing very well. He was shocked by his student but he didn't react. He was fully aware of his body and his emotions, and he returned to protect himself and just calmly invited us all to back to our rooms to sleep. There was no need to talk about it, no need for discussion. Because the moment we begin to discuss, we get trapped in each other's space, identifying our life with someone else's life.

The next day I was sick and Thay came to visit me and brought me some medicine. I shared with Thay that I needed to express myself the night before because I wanted him to understand me, even though I knew it might be wrong. Then I asked Thay if we could practice hugging



meditation. Thay gave me a hug and then said to me very gently, "Don't think like that the next time."

By this he didn't mean that there was something wrong with me, but only that the way I was thinking was wrong. So he knew I could still be trained to be a monk. Because only a part of me was wrong, and there were other parts that were not wrong. So we can do the same. When we have a conflict with someone, we have to identify the good qualities in the other person and not pay too much attention to their shortcomings.

A Social Contract

So our first task is to protect our space and the second is to learn to identify our needs. Then we need to communicate them in our relationships, but we need to do it skillfully. In situations of conflict, in which our needs are different from our

beloved ones, we try to come to a compromise. This may take some time and skillfulness. When we live together with others, we cannot have everything we want. We need to be willing to make some sacrifices. Perhaps we can only satisfy a part of our need.

The next step that blossoms from our compromise is that we create what we can call a Social Contract.

Living together harmoniously requires us to form a Social Contract, which is a reflection of our own and the others' essential needs. In the Buddhist tradition, we have the Five Mindfulness Trainings, a way of life in which we can be happy, the other can be happy, and we can satisfy our basic needs.

The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing are another kind of Social Contract. They have a different orientation than the Five Mindfulness Trainings, which

more or less concentrate on ourselves as individuals. In the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, we concentrate on how to make other people happy; we focus on our community, our society. Both are Social Contracts, but with different emphases.

From time to time, we need to review these Social Contracts, because life is impermanent. A contract was created, but we cannot keep it the same for the rest of our lives. As things change, we need to review the contract and update it, so it continues to satisfy everyone's needs. Reviewing the contract allows for growth in us and others, it creates space for our potential to manifest and for our transformation to flower.

Thay Phap An is the director and Dean of Studies of the EIAB. He was ordained in 1992 and still continues to learn and grow, offering new dharma doors combining Chi Kung (Qigong), Tai Chi and meditation, among many others.

As the sun slowly lifts the fog...

In his courses, Thay Phap An teaches how we can lovingly embrace ourselves and our inner blocks of suffering in order to transform them and attain freedom.

The first time I practiced such a meditation I was overwhelmed. Thay Phap An gently guided us to look more and more deeply into ourselves through awareness of the movement of our breathing, awareness of our bodies and feelings. Resting deeply in ourselves, we observed our suffering and embraced it. Feeling deep love for ourselves, our inner child and its suffering, a process of transformation slowly began to evolve.

At home, I continuously practiced this ‘embracing meditation’ according to Thay Phap An’s instructions. One year passed and then another. I was able to embrace my suffering and inner child but only as something outside of me. When I tried to embrace myself with love, I experienced merely an odd emptiness and aloofness that seemed insurmountable to me for a long time.

I thought to myself: If I cannot look at myself with love, is there something I could regard with gratitude? So my hands became the focus of my attention and I started to observe them constantly. I was surprised at how essential my hands were for my everyday life. They were the keys to many things I did. They held the books I enjoyed reading and cut the flowers that delighted me. They opened the door when my children visited and

embraced them with love. They made the tea I liked to drink, lit the incense sticks for meditation and were indispensable for many everyday tasks and innumerable other things.

In meditation I slowly realized that I could regard my hands with gratitude and love. So over the month, my hands became my mediators, connecting me to myself. This gratitude was the first step to inner reconciliation and the first step to looking at myself with love. In looking deeply, I discovered in them the hands of my mother, my father and my grandparents. When I practice the embracing meditation today, I feel embraced by them and together we hold my suffering, which is also theirs. They help me to hold my fears, restlessness and concerns which constantly arise in my everyday life.

As the sun slowly lifts the fog and the beauty of everything that is and always has been unveils, my feelings of emptiness and aloofness start to clear away. More and more often I experience a feeling of inner spaciousness and connection with myself and my surroundings. In this spaciousness a feeling of being able to embrace myself in compassion arises. These are moments of deepfelt happiness and inner peace.

As children we loved to write in one another’s autograph books. One of the phrases we often wrote went: “With people and animals, have com-



passion with all. Compassion with yourself: a thing to let fall.“ („Mitleid habe mit allem, mit

Mensch und mit Tier, nur eines lasse fallen, Mitleid mit dir.“) This was the thinking of a time that left very little room for emotions. It is also a heritage of a generation of parents and grandparents who, having gone through war, learned to be hard on themselves and often on their children as well.

The process of transformation may be a slow one, but in the end it is the transformation of suffering into love, which we find not only for ourselves but also for the generation of our parents and grandparents. This transformation is a wonderful gift that we can pass on to the next generation.

When I am able to, I visit the EIAB several times a year. There I experience a great support and encouragement to continue my practice of patience. The talks, the smiles, the chanting of the monks and nuns, the dialogues with dear people and the lived mindfulness are a big gift to me. Every time I drive home I have a feeling that I carry with me a treasure chest that enriches my life.

Barbara Mühl (Große Klugheit des Herzens) lives and practices in Berlin.

Growing Flowers Out of the Mud

Question and Answer with Sr. Annabel
From The Power of Silence Retreat, March 20–24, 2013

When I have an unwholesome thought, it is not possible for me to make a transition to a wholesome thought. My unwholesome thought is influenced by my unwholesome emotions. Similarly when I have a wholesome thought, I cannot imagine what it is like to have an unwholesome thought.

Sr. Annabel: It is true, when there is darkness, there cannot be light. The darkness is the non-light and if you turn the light on, you can’t have darkness. So you can’t have darkness and light at the same time. You have to have one or the other. But darkness is only possible because there is light. And light is only possible because there is darkness. And I think that the practice that the Buddha wants us to do, as far as I understand from the Sutras, is the practice of mere recognition. We are first of all aware that this is an unwholesome thought, a kind of thought that is making us suffer. And when we recognize that it is making us suffer, that unwholesome thought loses some of its power. It doesn’t carry us away. And it doesn’t necessarily mean that we have a wholesome thought straight away. But that our unwholesome thought is not so powerful anymore. We have mastery over it.

And when we have a wholesome thought, we recognize that the wholesome is only possible because the unwholesome is there. If there were no unwholesome there would be no wholesome. So we need the unwholesome.

lesome. Having a wholesome thought doesn’t mean that we discriminate against an unwholesome thought. We just see that wholesome thoughts are what our world needs and what we need to nourish and to heal ourselves. Something that nourishes and heals is what we call wholesome. So we want to keep our wholesome thoughts going, to keep them active in our mind. We try not to allow them to become lost under a whole layer of unwholesome things, where we can no longer get in touch with them anymore.

In our life we should make sure there is a balance between happiness and suffering, so the happiness doesn’t get completely covered over by the suffering, because we need happiness to nourish us and the world needs to be nourished by our happiness, our true happiness, our deep happiness. But we never discriminate against suffering. We never discriminate against the unwholesome and say, “Go away, we don’t want you.” We just see that we need the mud, but we don’t need too much mud and we don’t need only mud.

There has been a tendency in theistic traditions to make a big divide between good and evil and we think we have to get rid of all the evil, destroy the evil. This is why we can go to war on behalf of our religion because the other side is evil, so we have the right to destroy them. But in the Buddhist practice, we don’t discriminate like this. The evil or the unwholesome is there for us to embrace it.



"And when we have a wholesome thought,
we recognize that the wholesome is only possible
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If there were no unwholesome
there would be no wholesome."



It is just like the situation in the EIAB; seventy years ago some tragic things happened here and some people were very upset with Thay when he bought this place. But Thay sees that the sangha has the strength to transform the difficult things. And that is all we want to do here. We want to make the best use of the mud to grow the flowers of the practice. And that is the best we can do for places like this. And there are not only places like this in Germany, there are places like this in all countries. So to make a practice center in a place where there have been unwholesome actions in the past is not a bad thing. It is just showing that we can grow flowers out of the mud.

We shouldn't think that when we practice, everything will be roses. There is an expression in English, "Everything is roses." We forget that the rose needs compost, cow or horse manure, to grow. So everything cannot be roses. If everything were roses, there wouldn't be any roses. It is only because everything is not roses that we can have roses.

Last night I couldn't sleep; there was very heavy energy in the room. I didn't know why or where it came from. And I told myself, "Oh, this is not right, you have been practicing, you should be able to have a very nice energy in your room. You shouldn't have a heavy energy in

your room." But saying this doesn't make it go away. It is still there. The best thing to do is accept that this is how it is, and as soon as we can, we come back to our breathing, to take care of ourselves, to take care of the energy. And we know that everything is impermanent.

I am an academic and I cannot avoid thinking in the context of my work. How do I practice not thinking while writing an article for instance?

Sr. Annabel: There is necessary and unnecessary thinking. What we want to give ourselves a break from is the unnecessary thinking, the thoughts that repeat over and over. Sometimes when I have an unnecessary thought I ask myself, "How many times have I thought this?" And you know it may be 50 times I've thought it already, so I say, "Why do I need to think it again?" And I think that we can have these little conversations with ourselves. Our Buddha nature can come up and can remind us that we don't really need to think this; we can give ourselves a break.

However, when you are writing an article for your work, you think but you really enjoy that thinking, it takes you somewhere, it nourishes you and you know it will nourish other people. This is completely different from the unnecessary thinking,

that you've thought hundreds of times already. Usually I say to myself, if this is necessary, I just need to think it once and I will do it. If it is unnecessary I will keep thinking it again and again. There comes a time when you have to ask, 'where is this taking me?' and stop going down that path. But by all means continue your intellectual work, bringing joy to yourself and joy to the world in this way.

But as an intellectual working in academia, we also have to be careful to not get caught up in the competition. Because academics compete a lot with each other, over who publishes the most, who gets promoted, who has more status. These things occupy a lot of their time and energy and they are not wholesome. The competition is based on the ego and it causes us to suffer and make other people suffer. So we have to try to live without the inferiority, superiority and equality complex. Because if in our thinking we are always comparing ourselves with others, that is not a useful kind of thinking. And we have to learn to recognize it, mere recognition, "now here I go again comparing myself. It is not good for me, it is not good for the other person". And if we keep recognizing like this it will weaken that kind of thinking. But concerning your research, please continue to engage necessary thinking for this.

I have a question concerning the practice of interbeing and our capacity to set boundaries. I learned to feel the interbeing between me and other people, including people I have a difficult relationship with, like my parents.

Sometimes I feel that this relationship takes so much energy from me. And I have experienced that it is also important for me to set boundaries, especially with my parents. It is very challenging to stay connected and feel the interbeing with somebody, and at the same time to set boundaries when it is necessary. How can I learn to bring the two practices together?

Sr. Annabel: With the insight of interbeing, we know that we interare with our parents, and with other people. But this does not mean we cannot set boundaries, or that we allow our parents or other people to encroach on our boundaries.

So we know that all of us are made up of five skandhas, or five elements: body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. Our parents are also like that. We are made up of so many things. Our perceptions come from our education, our upbringing. And each person is impermanent, changing at every moment. We have a perception about another person, that he is

like that or she is like that, and when we deal with the person, we are not actually, directly dealing with that person, but we are to a large extent dealing with our perception of that person.

So we have a perception of our parents. We have a perception of our parents as they are outside of us, and our parents have a perception of themselves, an idea of what they are like. And then we also have our parents within us, in every cell of our body, because our parents are there. They gave themselves; we come from their genes, so they are in us. So it is like there are two different realities of our parents available to us. So the parents outside of us are the outer reality, and the parents within us are the inner reality. Normally the inner parents and the outer parents have some kind of overlap. There is always a little bit of separation.

So if you have a difficulty with your parents, if you lose a lot of energy in the relationship and it doesn't nourish you or them either, then you have to set boundaries. But at the same time you have to practice with your inner parents. You can put distance between yourself and the outer parents. This is what I did when I was young. I was very angry with my father. My teacher instructed me not to see my parents for at least two years. And during that time I had to

meditate. I practiced the meditation on seeing my father as a five-year-old child. I did it often for two years. Somehow this meditation changed my perception of my parents.

So when I did get in touch with them in person, I had a different way of looking at them and somehow because I had a different way of looking at them, they also had a different way of looking at me. Something changed. Now I love my father very much, I could not get angry with him. But we do need time and space to do this kind of work. And we have to give ourselves that time, it is very important to know our limits and to set our boundaries.

This doesn't mean that we haven't understood inter-being, we have, because we know that when we transform, our parents also transform, but it takes time to transform, both the inner and outer, they interare. Sometimes we haven't worked hard enough on the inner, so we need to separate to give ourselves time to work on the inner.

Sister Annabel (Chan Duc) is the Dean of Practice in the EIAB. She originally comes from England, where she was a teacher for 15 years. In 1988, in India, she was the first Western woman to be ordained as a nun by Thich Nhat Hanh.



Watering seeds of goodness

At the end of July 2011, I visited the EIAB for the first time, to take part in a course on Mindfulness for Teachers. Sister Jewel drew a picture on the board showing how the store consciousness holds all its seeds and how an emotion grows up when one of these seeds is watered, breaking into the everyday consciousness to manifest.

In my class, we have a students' council, so every child is experienced in methods of problem solving, but I was missing a way to show them how to look more deeply into themselves. When Sister Jewel drew the sketch on the board, I found what I was looking for.

After the summer holidays, I invited my 3rd grade class to create a 'mindfulness notebook.' I made a large drawing of the mind and store consciousness diagram and then we brainstormed together which kind of seeds we wanted to water. I wrote down all their suggestions and hung them up together with the drawing.

The children copied the drawing into their 'mindfulness notebooks', and wrote down which seed they had selected from the list we made. The point of the exercise was to water the chosen seed for one week, and to write next to the drawing the situations where they succeeded.

I work at a small country school, and many of the children garden at home, so the image of seeds and plants was already familiar to them.

I often walk around during the lesson to help the children recognize what's happening in the moment. Once, a child was spontaneously complimenting another on her success and I asked him how he felt at that moment. He paused: "...good?"

"Isn't it wonderful that you feel happy just by helping someone else and giving a compliment?" I asked. Afterwards, the child ran around busily helping others for the rest of the lesson.

I must say, this was never his strong point in the past. Acting this way was a startling discovery for him.

Even for me, there is so much to discover. I have my own 'mindfulness notebook.' It makes a real difference if I give a loud and angry child a warning to be quiet, or if I ask him or her, "Which seed are you watering at the moment?" All other children help to think about it and the angry child stops reacting and listens to her feelings, "The anger-seed?"

"And which one have you chosen for this week?" "Happiness." A smile. There is nothing more to say.



From time to time, we read to each other what we have experienced so far with watering our seeds.

Once a child said, "Nothing!" So I asked, "Which seed have you selected?"

"Freedom." "And was there a time when you've felt free recently?"

...with a shrug, "During the break."

"How was it, when you felt free?"

"Well, I just played whatever I wanted to. Nothing special about that."

"But that is wonderful! There are other children who are in a bad mood when the swing is occupied during the break. Or they get into a fight with somebody. They might think, 'I hope the break will over soon. It's so boring!' Yet you can experience freedom by playing whatever you

Embracing the Impermanence of the Body



This will be a short text. Although it filled my diary for six months.

Once the issue became bigger and bigger and took more and more space in my thoughts, I decided to write an email to Sister Jewel:

"I'm going to gradually lose my sense of hearing. I don't know when and how fast it will happen, but it will happen – that's what my doctor tells me."

The previous six months had been dominated by internal conflicts with all of my fears. Anxiety over losing the capacity to communicate, friendships, the ability to work and to enjoy music. And many questions: would I have to change everything now? What would I do next?

How to react to the news in a preferably constructive way? How to prepare myself? And prepare for what exactly? How to give space to the different kinds of emotions? How to deal with daily life with all these scenarios of what-will-happen-if in my mind?

And then the response arrived. Compassionate and wise. It distilled the hundred diary pages to a single sentence: "Danimarie, this is a strong lesson on impermanence."

A strong lesson on impermanence.

My eyes were caught by that sentence. The entire mountain of questions, the whole burden, excitement and chaos of emotions – for the first time in months my mind could rest.

Right! That's exactly what is was all about. No more, no less. It took a hundred pages of my diary as well as the emotional roller coaster I had experienced. Now it was fine and time to let everything go. And to see that it's nothing but one of the constant changes in life. One among many.

A lesson on impermanence.

With this sentence I could arrive back to the now. A very pleasant way of being. Always coming back again. To the breath, to joy.

Danimarie Dappen lives and practices with her family in Cologne. She comes regularly to the EIAB.

like during the break. Not everyone is able to do this. Congratulations!"

In situations like these, the children learn that they are able to choose their way of looking at things, to have an influence on their own attitude. They are not just the victim of external conditions.

For children that have difficulty writing, I created a slightly modified worksheet, which I handed out three weeks later. They drew the diagram of the seeds and a flower growing from one of them.

They were again asked to name the seed they wanted to water in the drawing. From time to time I asked them to write down a key word in one of

the flower's petals and to color it in. Sometimes I would play relaxing music and there was a wonderful, reverent atmosphere in the room.

After a while, flowers began to bloom in the notebooks. We talked to each other frequently and showed each other our drawings. The students who were weak in writing were especially skilled in illustrating their growing flowers with wonderful colors.

At one parents' night, I shared about our 'mindfulness notebooks'. Only after they promised not to criticize their children back home for misspellings or mistakes were they allowed to take a look at their notebooks. Of course I had asked the children's permission beforehand.

The parents did not comment directly on the work, but there was a respectful and contemplative atmosphere in the room.

Everywhere, seeds of goodness are being watered, from the teachers at EIAB to the students, to their parents and friends who will pass it on.

In addition, I received the five mindfulness trainings during the retreat which helps me greatly to take care of my collection of seeds!

Anka Hoberg, Liebevoller Kraft des Herzens, lives in Worswede. She is a primary school teacher and practices with the Sangha in Ottersberg.



The Sound boat ... a new "Dharma vehicle" at the EIAB

Sister Jewel interviews Elmar Vogt



Sr. Jewel: Elmar, we are happy that two years ago you moved here from Würzburg to practice with us. You also brought your sound boat, and constructed another one for the Institute. We are very thankful for this and want more people to have this healing experience. Maybe you can tell us something about your boat and your work.

What is a sound boat and how does it work?

A sound boat looks like a simple wooden boat. It is approximately 2,15m long and 60 cm wide. Underneath, along the length of the boat, there are strings all tuned to the same tone; a monochord. The boat then hangs on ropes from a stable frame, so it can gently and freely swing.

A person lies down in the boat. I sit next to the boat and play the strings

underneath with my fingers. The person in the boat feels the vibration in their whole body. He or she, lying in the boat, becomes part of the sounding body. So the boat sounds very different depending on who is lying in it.

What happens to the people when they are in the sound boat?

The first thing happening is that the boat, as it connects to the person lying inside, starts to move: Mostly left to right, sometimes backwards and forwards, in rare cases the boat stands still. Due to this regular swinging motion, a subtle body work begins in the whole body. All the cells begin to harmonize and to move in the same rhythm. And each part of the body that is holding tension receives the information to let go and

relax. The blockages can then slowly start to loosen and release.

During this process of releasing, there are often inner images coming up. They can help us to understand what has led to the blockages. Often the inner pictures come from the person's childhood: for example a traumatic stay in hospital as a child, separation from the parents... there can also be strengthening, encouraging images coming up: for example from happy childhood days or symbolic pictures, like animals or images from nature.

"What I enjoy most is when a connection develops. When we both arrive in the here and the now. In that moment there is a deep inner silence, and it feels like the here and the now are beginning to carry us."

Do you talk to people before the boat ride about the images, or does it just come up naturally?

It depends. If a person is very tense for example, I don't mention it. In this case my intention is more to relieve the pressure in the person. For example I say, "It is okay if you are tense in the boat. You don't have to relax." Surprisingly it often happens that the person can relax, and sometimes he or she even falls asleep. Most times it is not the person in the boat who is seeing the inner pictures. He or she often completely relaxes and disengages during the ride and it is me who sees, as in a film, images that can offer some insight into their situation.

And do you talk about what you have seen after the session?

Yes, afterwards I ask the person if they want to hear about it. If they do, I share the images with them. But what I see are images, they are not exact representations of reality. For example, during one boat session I saw the mother of a person. But for the woman the picture made more sense as herself as a mother in relation to her children, not about her relationship to her mother. So these inner images are free and sometimes you cannot understand them immediately.

What is the purpose of a sound boat session? What is most important?

For me it is important to see that everyone is at a point in his or her life where certain things are possible, and certain things are not. With

some people significant transformation happens in the boat, with others it is more subtle. My purpose is to support people in their own possibilities. There is no purpose except to arrive in the here and the now. What is needed right now? Maybe it feels right to mainly relax, maybe it also feels right to sense the resistance, maybe it feels right to open to transformation.

What do you enjoy most during a sound boat session?

What I enjoy most is when a connection develops. When we both arrive in the here and the now. In that moment there is a deep inner silence, and it feels like the here and the now are beginning to carry us. Life becomes perceptible, no matter if it feels good or difficult. In that moment I feel deep gratitude.

How do you see this work in connection to mindfulness practice?

When someone asks me about my training for guiding people in the sound boat, it is very clear to me that the foundation of my work is mindfulness practice in the tradition of Plum Village. The breathing plays an important role for me. When I encounter a difficult situation during a session, when I am at a loss, I come back to my breathing. Like this I can stay open and present for what is happening. The talks by the EIAB dharma teachers are a source of inspiration for me. When I have questions concerning my work, I can share with the brothers, sisters and Dharma friends, and I find valuable support and deep understanding.

How is your work connected to the EIAB?

For me, the sound boat and mindfulness practice go together. The sound boat is a particular form of practicing mindfulness. Already early on I had the vision to have a sound boat in the EIAB because many people can learn to use it to help others. I am thinking in particular about courses in which difficult emotions arise; offering one or more sound boat sessions in combination with other practices to address the inner process can be very helpful. A sound boat ride can support body and mind to regain balance, stabilize and find inner calm. Or to tenderly go forward deeper into the inner process and see if there is something more that wants to appear and be clarified.

How did the boat find its way to the EIAB?

During the preparation for the family retreat in 2010 the idea came up to construct a sound boat together with the children. I wanted them to be able to see how it is constructed, and to lie down in it afterwards. They could then experience being surrounded by the sound, being carried and protected. And the more I do the work with the inner child, the more it becomes clear that for almost everyone of us, no matter how old we are, there are lots of wounds and difficulties from that time.

How do you use the boat in the EIAB?

I have already led group sound boat sessions in many courses at the EIAB. In relaxation or stress-reduction



A Sister on a Journey – a Sister at Home



I have recently returned from a pilgrimage to the Buddha Land. 11 monastics from the EIAB and 45 lay people travelled to India in the footsteps of the Buddha. The journey was a great gift for me. Each section of the trip to the holy land left me feeling great love. There was Lumbini, rejoicing in the Buddha's birth. Then Bodhgaya, honoring the Buddha's enlightenment under the bodhi tree. The city of Varanasi, where Lord Buddha started to turn the dharma wheel bringing joy to countless hearts and finally, Kushinagar, where the Bud-

dha entered Nirvana. At each place of pilgrimage, Thay Phap An gave a dharma talk on a particular period of the Buddha's life.

Visiting the Buddha Land

In India, there are still many very poor places. You can easily spot the children begging on the street. Once, holding a young child in my arms, I was deeply moved. She was so petite, so thin and lacked tender, loving care. Her future would be harsh and uncertain. I wish there will be many

more manifestations of Bodhisattvas like the Venerable nuns Khiet Minh and Tri Thuan, who extend their loving care to build schools for these poor children, giving them a better and brighter future.

Every place left different impressions and beauties in me. I remember most the day we visited Vulture Peak, a favorite spot of the Buddha. All of us wanted to enjoy the sunrise from the peak of the mountain so everyone woke very early. We left the hotel in the early morning darkness. We made our way up the steps leading to the peak with the help of torches. We climbed in silence, nobody wanted to break the serene and holy atmosphere of the early dawn. Once we reached the peak, I found myself a quiet spot to sit, facing the distant mountains. I felt the new day coming in stillness. The horizon began to appear in a pink blush. We sat in silence, enjoying the

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courses, in Wake Up retreats for young people, or in courses focused on music or creativity, the group comes together for an afternoon or evening. Sometimes only a few people take a ride, sometimes everyone gets a turn. But always the focus is on the whole Sangha body; to emphasize that we are secure and connected to each other in the group. Many of the course participants have also come to my home for a sound boat session, during or after a course. I live about 3 km from the EIAB in a very beautiful village. Hiking in nature is a won-

derful preparation for a sound boat ride. A conversation in the beginning helps us to slowly arrive and to orient ourselves. Looking back together on what was experienced completes the session. In private sessions I can respond to the individual needs of the person and support his or her process. Therefore it is very beneficial to come several times at short intervals.

What is your aspiration for the future of the sound boat in the EIAB?

First I wish that the nuns and monks in the EIAB can get to know the sound boat better. It is also nourishing and

supporting for them to experience it. And then there is the idea that people working in the helping professions—for example in kindergartens, schools, or as therapists—who are interested in learning this new mindfulness practice, could apply it to their work. So in the future, I would like to offer courses at the EIAB to train others to be „sound boat guides.“

Elmar Vogt, Truthful Knowledge of the Source, has been practicing in the Plum Village tradition since 1994, and in 2003 became a member of the Order of Interbeing. In addition to his sound boat practice, he designs and constructs original sounding bodies. Visit klang-bewegung.de for more information.

special morning and contemplating the Tathagata. How many times had he been sitting here, enjoying the sunrise? More than 2600 years have passed, yet it is as if time has stood still, as if everything has just happened yesterday.

On the bus, we listened to a reading of the book, *Old Path, White Clouds*, by Thay and other stories about the Buddha told by Venerable monks. I felt the Buddha's presence very close and real in me. During the whole trip, the chant „I take refuge in the Buddha, the one who shows me the way in this life“ was always in my heart. My gratitude was nourished and strengthened tremendously. The first day upon returning to Germany, my heart was still with the sunlight and the wind in India, I had not yet quite arrived, and come home. I know this trip will continue to nourish me long into the future.

The breathing room

My breathing room is a small corner in our office. Office number 6 is the place where I go back and forth every day. It is my second meditation hall. Apart from my bedroom, it is the place I spend the most time, and it is where I have worked for the past two years. It has been through moments of joy and sadness with me. This breathing room has nourished love and strengthened my faith in the practice of mindful breathing.

Sometimes, I felt I had too many things on my plate with the work I was assigned to do. Some of them were beyond my ability and I felt under pressure. I was confused, not



knowing where to begin or how to continue. Then I would stop working, turn my chair to face the green grass in the backyard, and close my eyes, listening to my breathing. Observing the breathing in and out, the falling and rising of my abdomen, I told myself: „Everything will be OK!“ After 10 breaths, I felt more peaceful, lighter and more inspired to come back to work. When the work seems endless, I always ask myself: How can I make it more interesting and turn it into a precious opportunity to deepen my practice, to explore and transform myself?

I have found that it helps me to tidy up my desk before I leave the office, and I leave a small vase of flowers or just simply a leaf. Then the next morning, coming back to that familiar corner, I will only see an empty desk. The small vase of flowers or the leaf are the sound of the bell inviting me back to my breathing helping me be in touch with the vast and free space inside of me. To begin a new day with gratitude and to look at everything with new eyes always generates abundant energy for me to go forward.

Helping hands

Several times during the past year, I would get very tense when the tasks I was given exceeded my ability. My biggest obstacle was the language. I didn't mind staying up late. My only concern was that my limited German could cause hindrances and misunderstanding in handling information. Then I told myself that everything was going to be OK as long as I carried out my duties with love and with my practice of mindfulness.

At times I thought we should study more to improve our organizational skills so that we could arrange our work better. Then I realized: the main job of a monastic sangha is to practice with happiness. We have come from various walks of life, received different educations. Among us, there are many young monastics who have not had any kind of training beyond high school. Everyone always tries their best to carry out their responsibility and learn from it. I have seen it often now: as long as we practice with happiness and diligence, there will be many caring hands to help.

I also want to express my gratitude towards the lay friends who help us with registration during Thay's annual retreat. Without their wide open hearts, their willingness to serve, their sacrifice of personal time, we would have encountered many difficulties in organizing the retreats. They are people with kind hearts and don't expect much in return. They work without a salary but with a lot of love and diligence. Although they are busy with family life, with earning a living, they always make themselves available to arrange and organize the big retreats alongside the monastics.

The EIAB is still very young. Without a doubt we will encounter many hardships in the future, yet I feel quite confident knowing that there are always many open hearts and embracing hands ready and willing to help.

Sr. Chan Sac Nghiem comes from Vietnam and was been ordained as a nun by Thich Nhat Hanh in 2005. Since 2011 she happily lives and works in the EIAB.



2012
im EIAB



Our excursion to the Buddhist Center in Waldbröl

On Tuesday the 19th of September, 2012, two classes of the Hugo-Kükelhaus-School for physically handicapped children and youth visited the EIAB in Waldbröl.

The building now housing the Buddhist Center has had a very troubled history. Until 1938, it was used as a facility for people with mental handicaps. During the Nazi period, Robert Ley planned to convert it to a 'Kraft durch Freude' hotel. The handicapped people who lived there at that time were moved to a clinic in the Westerwald and from there many were deported to the Hadamar Euthanasia Centre. Many of them were killed there by the National Socialists, as they were seen as inferior human beings.

The Buddhist monastics created the 'Healing Hearts' exhibition, as a memorial to the victims killed by the Nazis.

When we arrived in Waldbröl, we were warmly welcomed by two nuns. The wheelchair users entered the handicapped entrance from the back of the house, as they were not able to manage the steep stairs safely. At first we took a look at the Hearts that were created by students in our school, among others, in memory of the handicapped people that were killed.



Meanwhile, we were served something to eat and to drink. When we finished looking at all the Hearts, the nuns led us through the building. Afterwards we were invited to take part in a meditation, led by a nun, in the same traditional way as the monastics practice it twice a day. This was a very pleasant experience. The students who were not limited to a wheelchair were then able to take a look at the rooms in the upper floors. The wheelchair users waited downstairs, as there is no elevator in the building.

It was a very joyful morning.

Julia Brück is 16 and in the 9th grade

Dharma Drama and Interplay

Discovering the "Discourse on Love"

A course at the EIAB with
Sister Jewel and Ulrich Reisberg
January 2013

Can one approach a discourse of the Buddha through play? Does it show a lack of seriousness? And can it do justice to the deep meaning of such a text?

The above course answered my questions. We playfully approached the text. We gave expression to words and terms through bodily gestures. We wrote the discourse down in imaginary script as it was dictated to us. We explored parts of the sutra through theatrical exercises. We expressed ourselves in free dance improvisation. The discourse brought us close as we shared deeply and openly with each other what it mirrored for us. It also got us moving.

Ulrich Reisberg encouraged us to experience the discourse afresh in each moment, in different ways as if trying it on for size. Our two teachers worked together masterfully. Sister Jewel infected us with her way of dancing. With her sensitive understanding she offered us playful means to express our innermost feelings. She encouraged us to try out new ways of moving, allowing each of us to improvise in our own unique styles. The discourse started to move us

from within. We became each others' discourse.

For me it was exactly this playful approach that helped me find a great inner lightness. The Essenes have a saying: He who does not let the Angel of Joy pass by, cannot reach the Kingdom of Heaven (which is in us). Maybe one could also say: only with a light heart can we find and open the door to the discourse.



It was that way for me. Much of the course touched me very deeply all at once. Seeing a participant express her innermost self wordlessly through dance moved me so much that I couldn't stop crying. There is a purity and perfection in us which sometimes shows itself unexpectedly. Often it is like this: only by expressing so-

meting do we become conscious of it. The weekend skillfully enabled this to happen for some of us. I will never forget how much more alive some of our faces looked at the end of the course.

Much of it was due to the fact that it was held in the monastery of the EIAB. The nuns and monks made us feel so welcome in their community. We could join them in their silent

meditation and walking meditation as well as their meals. In this way, we were carried by their way of mindfully sharing love and peace with everyone.

Michael Schweizer is a Protestant pastor who loves to tell stories in the EIAB children's program.

Sangha-building

This is us, the Sangha at the Aachener Weiher in Cologne. We are sitting in the “library” in the Bauturm Café under the Buddha, having breakfast and sharing our experiences, our practice, in a circle – as always on Wednesday from 9:45 to 11 o’clock. Always means: for the past 15 years.

At the beginning the group was small, five people meeting in the Stadt-Raum for a meditation. Afterwards we would go to the Bauturm Café to have breakfast. This time was filled with intense conversation: everyone was offered enough space to report about his or her life and practice. Often we chose a reading as the topic for our conversation, by Thich Nhat Hanh, Jack Kornfield, Willigis Jäger, Byron Katie, Theresa of Avila or others.

we recited it often at the beginning of our meditation:

The day is now ended, our life is one day shorter.

Let us look carefully how we have acted.

Let us practice wholeheartedly and with Right Diligence.

Let us live deeply as free human beings, always aware of impermanence.

So that life does not drift away meaninglessly.

Annette invited us several times to have days of mindfulness in Windeck. We worked in the garden, Ivo

equanimity in the face of wasps buzzing around us.

We visited each other to meditate and have breakfast in our flats. This way we began to form a community that is like an extended family for me, carrying me even in times of crisis. We went through periods of sickness, depression, flat hunting, parents or partners becoming ill and dying, separation, looking for meaning and blossoming through new responsibilities and the overcoming of difficulties. It was enriching to be able to look through Sangha-eyes on Wednesdays.

New Sangha members came and went. Some of them stayed for years with us, others left sooner. A few years ago we had a crisis and the presence of the monks and nuns in Waldbröl helped us to resolve it. Thanks to the EIAB, there was so much encouragement, energy and new members coming, that we have regained our strength. Now we are a bigger group, sometimes 14 people, so that the informal style of conversation is no longer satisfying. We always use the practice of mindful speaking and listening. Our conversations are intense and open.

Recently Gabriele reported in the circle about her course with Thay Phap An on Living and Working Together in Harmony. She shared that it is important to create a space for ourselves and to give space to the other person. I wish that our Sangha can be such an open space for all of us in which everyone can work on extending his or her own inner spaciousness.

Gisela Sellmons, Joyful Source of the Heart, practices with the sangha on Aachener Weiher in Cologne.



Some of us were already students of Thich Nhat Hanh. We had encountered Thay at a talk in the university of Cologne and had followed him to a Retreat in Oberlethe. Later we traveled many times to Plum Village and after returning we inspired the group with our reports. The following verse comes from one of those visits,

led the walking meditation through the sunny forest and we sat at the table in the kitchen, cutting apples together and letting them dry on the tiled stove. I remember also a day of mindfulness on the Hombroich museum island where we were sitting in the shade, mindfully eating potatoes with lard and plum jam, maintaining

Life in a Monastery as a Laywoman

2013 turned out to be a very special year for me, because I gave myself a break from my usual routine in order to realign myself. Among other things I allowed myself to practice with the nuns and monks for two months and also to support them with their projects.

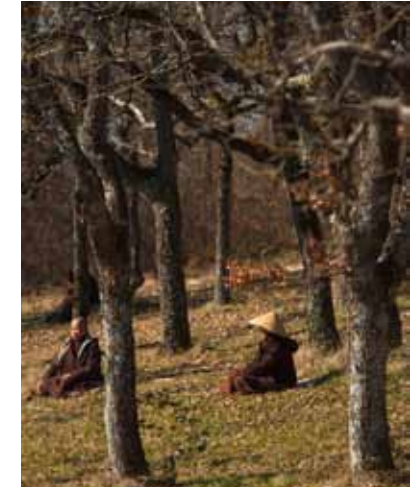
Life in a monastery is totally different from what I was used to in my everyday life. This is due to the fact that the centre of all activities is the Sangha. Before any decision is made all matters are talked over. As a result projects take a much longer time than I am used to in my normal life. At home I am the only one to decide, without consulting others, which happens to make my actions fast and goal-oriented. The goal of decisions here is happiness of the Sangha. And in case of different opinions on a subject the Sangha will not cease to discuss the matter until all are happy with the result. This was the first test of my patience since my plan was to participate actively in the work from the first day on, putting all my effort into it. But this was not possible as other members of the Sangha had to be consulted.

I noticed various feelings arising in me, starting from anger at having nothing to do, to impatience, because

my mind was busy feeding me with the thought that I was wasting my time here. At the same time, grief came up for feeling useless, and I also questioned myself as a person. All of these feelings were well-known ways which I have always responded in difficult situations. And so the practice of mindfulness and loving attention towards myself and my feelings was very precious. The more I took care of the feelings coming up, the more I realized that I was able to let them go. An attitude of acceptance spread through my whole body. Sometimes I really feel vast and free, completely aware of myself.



Walking meditation is a big help to me. Here I try to just walk, taking the one step at a time, connecting my breathing with my steps and being aware of the world around me. In the beginning of my walking meditation my head is full of thoughts which keep running through my mind. But with each step I remember how beautiful it is just to walk. Then my mother comes to my mind. She liked walking a lot, nowadays she can’t anymore because of her illness. And so I’m happy to be able to simply walk, and I walk on her behalf, too. I am happy and something inside of me opens up. Maybe I notice some small yellow flowers



by the wayside blossoming after this long wait for spring. I had not seen the flowers before and it seems as if they are smiling to me. And though they are so tiny their powerful presence is overwhelming.

Being in contact with the very young nuns and monks really freshens my heart. I feel very happy and at ease with them. All of them are eager to speak German, which sometimes leads to funny misunderstandings like: “I will go into the kitchen to cook my sister.” When I pointed the mistake out to the sister, she couldn’t stop laughing, which was very infectious. We both laughed together just to take delight in the laughter itself.

Now I have been assigned some tasks. I am aware that I quickly forget about the practice when I’m working. I really get carried away by all I have to do. This is something I can improve since it is important to be happy while we work. And whenever I am happy, I will be able to spread out this happiness into the world, so we can all be happier. I feel the great power of the Sangha that supports me and my personal growth.

Saraswati Klaudia Feltens, Friedliche Ausstrahlung des Herzens, lives in Nümbrecht and works as a Health Practitioner and as a Yoga teacher. She has practiced in the EIAB and with the Waldbröl Sangha since 2009.

A Heartfelt Greeting to Waldbröl and the World

The metallic sphere of the full moon gently illumines the tree-tops of the EIAB at Schaumburgweg. This winter, in accordance with the wishes of the monks and nuns of the EIAB, the construction of a new symbol of peace and reconciliation has just been completed: A bell tower, also commonly known in Asia as a stupa.

Upon arriving, all visitors, whether local residents or guests of the EIAB, gaze upon a structure representing two joined palms; a symbol of reverence and a gesture of welcome. The Stupa of All-Embracing Inclusiveness mirrors the form of a lotus flower. The monument embodies the peaceful teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, the founder of the EIAB. As a young monk growing up during the gruesome Vietnam War, Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings helped guide many followers on the way to finding peace within themselves and with their surroundings.

The stupa was constructed using unused pillars, which were found in a storage room of the main Asoka building, and were originally meant for an unfinished building project undertaken by the National Socialists over 70 years ago. Conversely, these building components now support a monument symbolizing tolerance and human compassion.

From the middle of the tower hangs an 800 kg golden-black temple bell (height 1.70 m, diameter 90 cm), it is the core of the stupa. A sun and moon symbol of polished stainless steel, which reflects moonshine as well as sunshine, graces the peak of the tower. The distinct transformation of the pillars from the National-Socialist era into a stupa, symbolic of compassion, harmony and equality, also represents the possibility of human transformation. Refined energy-focused ceremonies were performed at the base of the stupa to help heal the suffering in people's souls as well as in the surrounding area. For the monks and nuns of the EIAB recycling these historical building components is a creative as well as a sustainable form of ecological construction.

The EIAB community heartily invites all the residents of Waldbröl and the neighboring areas to come visit the stupa at Schaumburgweg, to take a relaxing stroll in the park and to enjoy the serene ambiance of the beautiful surroundings. We would be delighted to inform you about the intricate symbolic meaning of each element of the stupa. You are welcome to visit anytime!

Klaus H. Schick, True Sacred River, has practiced in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh since 2001 and in 2010 he became a member of the Order of Interbeing. In his practice, he focuses on his family, the local sangha in Bielefeld and taking photos.



Popcorn in Waldbröl – Mindfulness in Amsterdam

During the Dutch retreat with Thay last year, at the beginning of each Dharma talk he would ask the children to come forward. He would then give a special talk just for the children. One morning he gave each child a grain of corn and explained that the grain of corn already bears the entire plant in it. As “homework” he asked the children to plant the seed, water it well and grow a beautiful plant. “And don’t make popcorn”, he added laughing.

For yet another time during the retreat, I felt like I’d been struck by lightning. Popcorn...popcorn...I pondered. That was in fact what happened to me during the retreat. From a compact, dense, not very accessible grain of corn, I had popped open in an enormous outburst. I had become light, airy and open. My seed had finally found the right temperature and circumstances to pop. Out of deep gratitude I’d like to share some of things that happened to me during the August 2012 retreat in Waldbröl.

Ave Maria

Thay’s Dharma talk on interbeing struck me deeply. It began with a meditation in which we made contact with our inner child, followed by making contact with our parents as toddlers. My father passed away last year and all of a sudden he was almost physically present. Sadness about everything I still wanted to say made place for the deeper truth. He lives on in me and I can still tell him everything.

There was another moment during the retreat when my father was so clearly there. During a festive picnic, I sat about 15 meters from Thay, and twice we had brief eye contact. The weather was glorious and a nun played

Schubert’s Ave Maria on the violin, one of my father’s favorites. A coincidence? I do not think so. The image of Thay, the violin player and the sound of the music will stay with me for the rest of my life. My father enjoyed it with me.

Warmth and Openness

Beforehand, I had some doubts about whether I would commit to receive the five mindfulness trainings. I am so happy that I did. They have become the principle guideline in my life. During a presentation, five people shared personal stories of how they practiced each training. Two of them made me cry. It was so special to have experienced this kind of warmth and openness. It convinced me to take the five mindfulness trainings. On the last day of the retreat, Thay transmitted the trainings to me and many others. It was a beautiful ceremony, with monks and nuns in special robes, an incense offering, mantra singing. The meditation hall was bursting with energy. This again was very emotional for me. Especially memorable was the singing of a long mantra, which I could sing entirely by heart, even though I had never heard it before. I am not sure what to think of this, but it is true. I even checked it with the woman next to me.

In the midst of all of this I fell in love. It was very short, very intense and very much in vain. Despite the fact that it the feeling was not mutual, I see this lady as a true Bodhisattva. She was there for me, and played a vital role in my transformation. Because of this, and everything that happened during the retreat, I felt like I had been run over by a train by the end of the retreat. At the same time I felt better

than ever before, because my mindfulness and compassion had grown.

Everyday Life Back Home

When I returned at Amsterdam Central train station, I was completely overwhelmed by the colors, sounds, scent, buzz and stress. How on earth could I have ever taken this for granted? I was glad when I returned once again to the quietness of my own home.

As I write this, the retreat is some six weeks ago. What does my life look like now? Well, I get up at 5.30 am and start my day with sitting and walking meditation. I have breakfast, exercise and by 8am it feels as though I have already spent half a day, full of energy. I try to live every moment, each day mindfully, even though I do not succeed always. I do not eat meat or drink alcohol and experience great joy in everything I do, even when it comes to chores I really disliked in the past. Too good to be true? Well, no. Firstly, it just is true. Furthermore, the most important thing I have learned at the retreat is that happiness is not in grand things, it is available here and now. The step to be taken is very simple and very profound at the same time. Now, I practice on a daily basis. I have joined the Amsterdam Sangha and try to integrate my practice into as many aspects of my life as I can. People often ask me how I will be able to maintain this new life style. My answer is that it is not about effort. It is something I give myself as a present. My grain of corn has popped open. I keep practicing, each and every day.

Casper van Dijk, Loving Lotus of the Heart, lives in Amsterdam, and practices with the Amsterdam Sangha. Working in the food business, he has special interest in the topic of mindful eating and drinking.

New EIAB Courses in 2013

| 12.-15. September: BUDDHA STATUE WORKSHOP

Course with Brother Gregor Rinko Stehle and Sr. Song Nghiem

In this workshop you will be guided to model your own clay Buddha. This creative modelling process brings you closer to your own Buddha nature. (Gregor Rinko Stehle is a Zen monk and artist).

| 22.-24. November: MEDITATIVE DRAWING-- Healing through Drawing and Relaxation

Course with Barbara Niesen and Sr. Song Nghiem

| 15. – 17. December: WHAT I REALLY WANT IN MY LIFE IS ...?

Course with Jörg Dierkes and Sr. Song Nghiem

In this course we want to find out which goals are truly relevant and important for us.

EIAB Highlights 2013: Retreats for Families

| 26. July to 9. August: SUMMER RETREAT

| 27. Dec. to 3. Jan. 2014: CELEBRATING LIFE--NEW YEAR'S RETREAT

The EIAB Course Program for 2013 is available upon request and can also be found on our website: www.eiab.eu.

In December the 2014 Program will be available. Please check our website this autumn for information about 2014 courses.

Registration for all retreats:

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www.eiab.eu
Tel.: +49 (0)2291 907 13 73



Registration by email:

registrar@eiab.eu

Other questions:

info@eiab.eu



We are very happy about the building progress that has been realized with your help. The EIAB is now eager to build a modern kitchen and a large Meditation Hall. For this, we would be most grateful for your support and donations. We send an annual tax-deductible donation receipt for all contributions.

EIAB – European Institute of
Applied Buddhism gGmbH

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