



EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF APPLIED BUDDHISM

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2012

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Edited by Sr. Jewel, layout and design by Christiane Hackethal. We thank the many friends who helped with translation, editing and photos!



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Dear Readers,

we hope you will enjoy and be inspired by our fourth annual EIAB Newsletter. It is a colorful reflection of the many voices and hearts that make up the EIAB.

Lay and monastic practitioners share their experience of courses at the EIAB, including life-changing insights and how they have healed old wounds. One contribution details the profound and many-faceted meaning of the architecture of the new Stupa.

The blossoming and maturing of the EIAB is visible in all areas. Everything grows: our outreach (to schools, hospitals, local Sanghas and other organizations), the number of courses, the number of the guests, events for children and families, and the circle of practitioners who feel connected to the EIAB. For example, the Waldbröler sangha is providing a refuge to more and more locals; it now has 45 regular participants. And as you will read, the renovation of the Asoka Institute building continues. On August 22 we proudly celebrate the inauguration of the entire ground floor, with an exhibition of Thay's calligraphy and books.

Last autumn many brothers and sisters were proud to earn their B1 German language certificate. And since January or March, 2012 the brothers and sisters who arrived from Vietnam in 2011 have begun attending the Cultural Integration course where they learn German every day.

We thank all our friends and guests for your continued support and faith in the vision of the EIAB. In the coming year we look forward to walking joyful, solid steps together towards our common future.

The nuns and monks of the EIAB

Suggested donation to cover printing costs: 1,50 €

Celebrating the Inauguration of the Ashoka Institute

Thay Phap An

With immense joy and gratitude, we would like to announce the formal inauguration of the newly renovated Ashoka Institute of the European Institute of Applied Buddhism (EIAB), scheduled for 22 August, 2012, in Waldbroël, Germany. EIAB was established as a non-profit organization under German law on November 05, 2007. The Ashoka Institute was the first building acquired to house the EIAB, purchased on September 10, 2008. It was built in 1897 as a psychiatric hospital. Under the Nazi regime it was remodeled to serve as a hotel, but instead it was used as a military hospital during the war. After the Second World War it became a general hospital; and finally, the German Federal Military managed it until 2006. The second building of EIAB is the Great Compassion Monastery which was acquired on August 13, 2009, as the monastic community needed a residence during the renovation of the Ashoka Institute. In June 2010, the first phase of the renovation was completed making one fifth of the Ashoka Institute habitable.

The inaugural celebration marks the historical opening of the entire ground floor of the Ashoka Institute, which will be open to the public for the first time since its acquisition four years ago, and the 5th anniversary of the establishment of the EIAB. The inauguration will be presided over by Thay and Mr. Peter Köster, the Mayor of the City of Waldbroël.

As with any long-term vision, the complete renovation of the Ashoka Institute will take a few more years, depending on the commitment and financial support for the vision of our beloved teacher, Thay, from each of us,

his friends and students. Thus, even though the renovation of the whole building is not yet complete, we want to take advantage of Thay's precious presence still here with us to celebrate the inauguration of the ground floor; the very heart of the building, culturally and historically. This event is only possible because of the support and commitment of our international Sangha and so the inauguration is also a celebration of our collective accomplishments.

This auspicious celebration will include an exhibition of Thay's Zen calligraphy, inviting us to enjoy the beauty of Thay's gentle, calm and peaceful artistic expression. Together with the University of Hong Kong's Museum and Art Gallery, the EIAB has presented Thay's exhibition of Zen calligraphy internationally, beginning in 2010. Other exhibitions have also been held in 2011 at the Dharma Drum Mountain University Museum in Taiwan and the Asian Center of the University of British Columbia in Canada. Thay's teachings on the art of mindful living are tangibly experienced through these calligraphies and thousands of people have enjoyed their serene and uplifting energy.

Thay is a prolific yet simple and profound writer who has written more than 100 books, translated into more than 50 languages. In addition to the calligraphy exhibition, a number of these books in different languages will be on display. His calligraphies and books contain the essence of his vast and transformative teachings that our world so desperately needs today.

On this occasion, we also celebrate the healing and transformation our mindfulness practice is bringing to

this building and its surroundings. Inside the building, this will include a 'Healing Hearts' exhibition, 700 hand-sewn cloth hearts, made by residents of Waldbroël and practitioners from all over the world, in honor of the 700 mentally handicapped patients forcefully removed from the building in 1938 and 1939 under the Nazi regime.

Outdoors we are creating the Garden of Transformation, containing the Gate of Interbeing, the Path of Joy and the Stupa of Inclusiveness. The gate and the stupa are being made of large stone columns that have lain unused in the Ashoka Institute for over seventy years and were originally intended to create a large plaza in front of the building for speeches and gatherings by the National Socialist Party. This process represents an important step towards healing the wounds of this land and a transformation of the tragic history of the building. As one of Thay's calligraphies states,

'With the mud of discrimination and fanaticism, we grow the lotus of tolerance and inclusiveness.'

Not only is this healing for Germany, but it is also a little step toward healing in our world, which is still very much divided and troubled by wars and great violence. When we are able to taste the fruit of peace in our own lives, we make the world more peaceful. As Thay writes, *'Peace in oneself, peace in the world.'*

The inauguration will be a unique spiritual and artistic celebration of the beautiful transformation that is happening now at EIAB. We invite you all to come and be a part of celebrating the progress we have made together, either on August 22 or anytime afterwards.

The Healing Hearts Project

An exhibition of 700 handmade cloth hearts in remembrance of the 700 patients removed from our building in 1938 and 1939

The inauguration of the ground floor on August 22 is also the opening day of the long-term 'Healing Hearts' exhibit, an artistic installation of the 700 hearts in key locations of the impressive ground floor which will then be available for visitors to appreciate all year round.

According to our research, the NSDAP moved all the patients who were housed in our building, a former hospital for the mentally handicapped, to nearby Hausen, in order to reconstruct the hospital into a *Kraft durch Freude Hotel* for the Nazi Party. Many of these patients were spared the first wave of the "euthanasia" program in Hausen by hospital staff who intentionally delayed the process of selecting which patients would be killed. Of the 700 patients, 320 who could work were allowed to stay in Hausen, and the majority of them survived both euthanasia and the hardships of war. But the rest who could not work were sent to other institutions where most of them were murdered by intentional starvation, hypothermia or poisoning.

We are grateful to

- the many schools whose students and teachers made hearts
- the many sanghas and Buddhist centers who lovingly made hearts together
- the other local organizations who have supported the project
- the newspapers and websites which published articles on the project
- and the numerous children and adults from Germany, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, England, Ireland, Italy, France, USA, Australia, Hong Kong and beyond who sent hearts individually.

We will do our best to thank all of you by name on our website.

We have invited everyone in the community to join us in remembering them. Several school groups visited the EIAB to learn more about the history of the building and its inhabitants. Some classes made their hearts in the EIAB itself.

We invited individuals in the local community of Waldbroël as well as practitioners near and far to each make a heart in memory of one of the patients. Some have found the process of making the hearts truly healing, not just for the 700 patients of the EIAB building but also for healing wounds in their family. Making a heart became a way to honor and remember relatives with great suffering or with a mental illness.

A number of sanghas decided to take up the sewing of hearts as a mindfulness practice, a meditation together, an act of engaged Buddhism. There was also a healing atmosphere of tenderness and togetherness making the hearts with groups of children who came on retreats at the EIAB and elsewhere. The children understood immediately the importance of such a project. Their eagerness and wholeheartedness in sewing the hearts was truly impressive. We always began asking if they knew anyone who was mentally handicapped. If so, the children were invited to sew a heart with this person in mind.

Already before the final due date we have received over 700 Healing



Hearts! In the light of interbeing each heart reminds us that we must also remember and pray for all those who perpetrated the euthanasia, starvation and poisoning of mentally handicapped people. We know that somehow they are also victims of the ignorance, hatred, discrimination and violence in them and around them.

One Retreat, many Opportunities

Dr. Kai Romhardt

For a couple of years I have been guiding retreats in the Plum Village Tradition, and since 2010 also at the EIAB. These retreats are very special to me. Each retreat is an individual and collective process of insight and transformation, from which we profit on many different levels.

Observe seven central dimensions of impact during a retreat: The retreat theme, the continuous practice of mindfulness, the personal process, the experience of community, the inspiration of the monks and nuns, the growth of engagement and collective action and the element of surprise, the unexpected.

I will describe these seven areas, including the personal stories of healing and transformation shared by retreat participants.

1 Retreat Theme

For some participants the theme is central for their participation in the retreat. They aspire to deepen a certain aspect of their life or their practice. The theme is the entrance door, but as we go deeper we also touch all other aspects of our life.

“I am a corporate consultant and have come to this retreat in order to get to know the Buddhist view on the economy. Intellectual interest and a recommendation brought me to the EIAB. However, my focus already changed on the second day. I was aware of how mercilessly I treat myself. How I push myself internally, even screaming at myself, when I make mistakes. “Breathing and smiling” became my main practice. Whenever the inner judge came up, I returned to my breathing and smiled. So easy! I haven’t felt so alive in years.”

2 Continuous Practice of Mindfulness

Mindfulness should be practiced and strengthened continuously. The EIAB is an ideal place for this, as we immerse ourselves in a collective field of mindfulness which is built by the continuous practice of the residential community. As a seminar leader I can feel this effect on a physical level. During the day we are reminded by bells of mindfulness and rituals to come back to the present moment. Hence insights grow naturally.

“It happened during eating meditation. I was just sitting there and listening to the gentle rattling and the sounds of eating created by the Sangha. There was nothing to do. I had arrived. Nothing was lacking. As I was eating, tears rolled down my cheeks.”

3 Personal Process

It is often crises that bring us to the practice, loss, insecurities, reorientation, and anxiety. Or we are looking for inspiration, for a fresh perspective on our lives, and for people with whom we can share these experiences. Each of us is at a different point in our lives and brings our own questions. Some of these questions are overwhelming and block us rather than helping us go forward.

A retreat deepens our contact with ourselves, we see ourselves more clearly—the beautiful and the not-so-beautiful sides. We fool ourselves

less. Sometimes it is a sentence in a Dharma talk which dissolves our old questions. Sometimes the tears or joy of another person sets us on a fresh track. Perhaps we experience a sleepless night or sense how something is resolving and moving deep in our body.

“It was during a Dharma sharing. A participant shared about painful experiences in her family. I felt as if she was speaking from my heart, as if she was expressing something which has limited my inner freedom for years, even for decades. She spoke out something, which made me capable of understanding something in myself. She dissolved something in me, which I myself was not able to see before.”

4 Experiencing Community

In everyday life many of us do not have the chance to experience community. In many work environments competition and rivalry dominate and we may experience a lot of conflict and judgement. When we come together in mindfulness, our judgement and thinking calm down and naturally, we create a space of connectedness.

It has been a deeply healing experience for many participants to be accepted completely, including their weaknesses and shortcomings. To be part of a community with all they are and are not, and to be heard and seen. This feeling does not arise all at once and also may not arise for everyone. We can observe how we ourselves

give rise to the feeling of separation and connection through our thinking and states of mind.

At times we observe ourselves in slow motion falling from connectedness into separation and back. A retreat is a social laboratory in which we—with the help of mindfulness—experience a deeper connection and open exchange with each other.

Innately, I am a sociologist and thus have observed our group process through this perspective. I do not understand how we could become a group so quickly. Mindfulness seems to bring a new dimension into the social sphere. And I am very glad to have experienced this.

5 Inspiration from Monks, Nuns and other practitioners

In everyday life we are rarely surrounded by a practicing community. Especially by a community whose aim in life is to cultivate compassion and understanding and to help all living beings. The contact with such a group is very inspiring for many of my participants. We gain trust. We see an alternative way of life. We recognize the enormous degrees of freedom we have as human beings. Where do I want to go? In whom or in what do I take refuge? The EIAB brothers and sisters’ way of life and spiritual path show us that we can choose our own direction in life and partly unplug from the “normality” of the mainstream.

“Especially the young monks and nuns have touched me deeply; their smiles and natural joy in life. One

of them called me “brother” and I sensed that this was not an empty phrase. By calling me his brother, I was able to see the brother in him as well and this feeling and perspective expanded to more and more people during my stay.”

6 The Unexpected

There is no retreat without surprise. If we look at a retreat as an opportunity for personal transformation, then we will dive into the unknown and unexpected. A friend shares:

“Unexpectedly, it is a Buddhist ceremony for the deceased in the foyer of the EIAB which presents the occasion for my initial contact to this totally concrete and stone monster of a building. ... And look and behold, it happens as one arrives inside. What cannot be in my head, feels however completely different in my belly and soul. The gentleness of the monastics’ presence, their smiles, the breathing exercises. The meditation dissolves the threat caused by the building and its shadows. I do not feel well, but without I doubt I feel better. The capacity of enduring is stronger than my flight instinct.

All of a sudden I have the feeling of understanding what Thay means when he speaks about the transformation of this building as the initiation of the transformation process of all the pain from the two World Wars, for the people of Germany, for the people of Europe. And with this understanding the idea for a film manifests. And spontaneously, I also have a working title for it. Transformations.”

7 The Growth of Engagement and Commitment

The Network for Mindful Economy and Business (Netzwerk Achtsame Wirtschaft: NAW) was born in a retreat in Berlin. Seeds are continuing to be sown in retreats. Nowadays the NAW gathers in eight regional groups and has various initiatives and projects in the German speaking world. Each of our retreats and seminars on mindfulness is an opportunity for individual transformation and sowing new seeds.

As we deepen our practice, we see that we never practice for ourselves alone. We see how helpful a Sangha is, and that a Sangha can even manifest in places where we would least expected them.

“The Retreat has encouraged me to become proactive, to act in a more courageous way and to show more of myself in my working environment. And I also aspire to be engaged in the NAW, perhaps I will organise a mindful working day on my job or a public walking meditation.”

In all of these ways, the retreats at the EIAB have a very special quality, contributing very meaningfully and concretely to sowing seeds of mindfulness in the world. We are grateful to everyone who supports and enlivens this wonderful place, turning it into a place of healing and transformation.

Dr. Kai Romhardt, True Precious Practice, is the initiator and coordinator of the Network for Mindful Economy and Business (www.achtsame-wirtschaft.de). He makes the potential of the Dharma and Mindfulness accessible for our contemporary society in the form of books, seminars and lectures.



War Trauma: Healing old, deep wounds

Muoi Lu

I would never have imagined that the 2nd World War could have had anything to do with me or my family. I took part in the ‘Trauma of War’ seminar with Sister Bi Nghiem more out of historical interest than personal concern. I have a great interest in German history, both in the 2nd World War and in the post-war period, which was a difficult time for the German people.

Sister Bi Nghiem spoke very vividly during her first Dharma talk about the motivation of the soldiers of both World Wars to fight for their country as well as of their deep pain and despair. She spoke of the feelings they had to repress and of the emotional wounds the soldiers, their families and especially their children suffered after the wars.

That same afternoon we had our first Dharma sharing. Many participants

parents to provide for our large family.

During the second day of the seminar, Sister Bi Nghiem told us about the bombing of German cities and of the thousands of people who had to flee from their land and their homes. These facts brought back to me what

The deepest grief welled up from deep inside me, without me really knowing what was happening to me. I was sobbing and I cried like never before.

I had ‘forgotten’. I saw in front of me again the people fleeing the war in Vietnam, carrying their belongings

on bicycles or simply on their shoulders. They moved slowly, step by step along the National Road 4 from Saigon to Hue, parents holding their small children by the hand followed by injured soldiers and a chaotic mass of people.

Old Images – Old Wounds

Then I remembered the hundreds of boats heading out into the open sea laden with people, most of them children. I remembered how I, the oldest sister sat in one of the boats with my three younger brothers and sisters amongst total strangers, their faces etched with fear, helplessness and despair.

The simple boat was filled to the brim with people and the chaos was overwhelming. We spent three days and two nights at sea with no food or water. Finally we reached Malaysia and were taken to a refugee camp. From there we were granted permission to leave for Germany. Then we were sent to join my older brother who was a lecturer at the Technical University of Berlin.

I saw how traumatized my younger brother was by the ordeal of fleeing Vietnam by boat. Unlike his siblings he did not adjust well to his German school. He was depressed. The rhythm of day and night were reversed for him. He isolated himself from his class mates and no longer sought contact with anyone. Even at home with his family he could no longer manage. One day he became so violent towards us that the police had to be called and he was arrested. After being questioned by them he was sent to a psychiatric hospital where he was treated with anti-psychotic drugs for two years. Finally he committed suicide. His death was shocking for us all and became a tragedy for the whole family.

Everyone was left with a searing pain.

Now in the middle of the workshop I was rocked by strong emotions. The deepest grief welled up from deep inside me, without me really knowing what was happening to me. I was sobbing and I cried like never before. After a while I decided to go for a walking meditation in the nearby woods. I breathed in deeply and out slowly, as deeply and as slowly as I knew how. I walked like this for several hours. Slowly I understood: now, finally, I am in a position to look into my past and face my own trauma. Now I can learn to accept and transform it and to live in peace.

Touching the Heart of the Suffering

Doing the intense work of transforming my suffering was like peeling an onion, first the outer layers, then slowly moving towards the centre of the suffering. Suddenly I had touched the heart of the onion, the suffering that lay deep inside me and my family ever since the events of the war and the traumatic death of my brother. Twenty or more years ago I was unable to face and work through this trauma. I had evidently repressed it. Now every single detail appeared before my eyes as if it happened yesterday. I finally realized what I suffered from all these years. I felt guilty as the elder sister for not having been

able to prevent the flight from Vietnam of my three younger brothers and sisters. I felt guilty for not having cared enough for my brother in

Slowly I understood: now, finally, I am in a position to look into my past and face my own trauma. Now I can learn to accept and transform it and to live in peace.

the years after our arrival in Berlin. I felt guilty for not having recognized over time how deeply troubled he was. I felt guilty for not having taken time to seek out a doctor and psychotherapist who could help him.

Now I had an opportunity to allow and embrace these deep feelings of guilt and pain. I stayed with myself, went into the woods and meditated, walking slowly. With the help of this practice, the walking meditation and the Sangha I realized that the trauma is over now. I can now experience transformation and healing.

I saw that I was not responsible for the situation of my family during the Vietnam War and that I no longer needed to blame myself for the death of my brother. I didn’t know



then how to help a depressed young man.

Slowly my deep feelings of sadness and strong feelings of guilt lessened. I put myself into my parent’s and my brother’s situation. I could feel their pain as my own and work with it in me. Each time the pain or suffering surfaced in me I tried to recognize, embrace and dissolve it. Slowly, bit by bit I freed myself from the suffering and the pain. Love and compassion were awakened in me. Now I feel so much love for my parents, my siblings and especially my younger brother who died, more than ever before. I live so much more fully now and look at people and my family with the eyes of love.

My story is the sad story of hundreds and thousands of Vietnamese people all over the world. They all carry this deep wound inside which they need to transform. This seminar did not constitute the final healing of my trauma. I believe it will continue to resurface when the conditions are right so that I can continue healing on deeper and deeper levels. When it does, I will recognize it and work with it again. I am certain however, that it will not be as difficult as the first time, for now I have the helpful practice of meditation.

Muoi Lu, Chan Duc Khai, lives in Berlin and EIAB where she practices with the Source of Compassion and EIAB Sanghas.



spoke openly about their personal traumas. I was so touched, that I, too, could talk about my experiences in the Vietnam War. I told them how much fear my parents had suffered during the war and how difficult it had been for them and for our grand-

Letter to my Grandmother — Victim of the “Life unworthy of Life” Program

Heiner van Sandt, Bergisches Land, June 2012

Dear Grandma Grete,

for several days now I'm trying to write a letter to you. But it's not easy at all. You passed away so very early, seven years before I was born. Nevertheless I am your grandchild, the son of your youngest daughter, Trude. When I was already a young adult, she sometimes talked to me about you. Not in a relaxed manner or with gratitude or very lovingly, but more allusively, indirectly and somehow sad. I knew that you had died during the final weeks of the war, at the beginning of April 1945. There existed this old faded leaflet from your funeral with only a few informative details: your marriage, five children, three daughters, two sons. The oldest son, Heinrich, had fallen on the “Eastern Front” in Russia in August 1942. Meanwhile Willy, the youngest son, had already spent many months in a military hospital, severely wounded.

If I did not misunderstand my mother, symptoms of your so-called “mental illness” must have begun to show around this time, starting at the beginning of the war. Your second daughter, Maria, had become a war widow by then.

Trude, my later mother, looked after you and tended you, dear Grandma Grete, for some years in your own house. Even at that time she already knew, from a reliable source, what usu-

ally happened to mental patients who were unfit to work when they came under the influence of state psychiatry.

And unfortunately it occurred, when you, Grandma Grete, ran away in panic during that heavy bomb-raid. Your time as a patient of that psychiatric institution 80 kilometers from your home town was extremely short. Physically you had been quite healthy. Mother was convinced during all her lifetime that you had become a victim of the so-called “Euthanasia” program. “Life unworthy of Life,” as it was officially called in those days.

Recently, together with Sr. Ingrid, Sr. Jewel, and two friends, we visited Hadamar, one of the former killing-institutions for mentally ill people. One part of the building complex is now a museum.

This special visit was more than a test of courage for me. Somehow, dear Grandma Grete, I met you at that place. In the context of all these photos and exemplary biographies of the people who lost their lives there.

And in spite of all this enormous suffering I suddenly felt a deep love for you. I simply understood that it is necessary to approach this shocking kind of reality with a clear mind and an open heart. Deep insight, compassion and awareness. A taboo, the strenuous re-

pression of a painful truth, ties down too much life-energy.

Maybe, on that special day, Grandma Grete, I felt love and deep understanding for you for the first time in my life. Now you have a very good place in my heart, a place of honor, united in harmony with all my other ancestors. The taboo is broken. You're very welcome in my heart.

August 22, 2012 is the date when at the European Institute of Applied Buddhism in Waldbrohl we honor and remember the 700 male and female mental patients who once lived at this place. We do so with a public exhibition of 700 “Healing Hearts” individually made out of cloth.

All these patients were forcefully taken away from there. And almost 500 of them had a similar fate like you, Grandma Grete. One of these 700 “Healing Hearts” is for you, made by myself, your grandson, Heiner. It is rather plain and of brown color. But to me it's very valuable. I made it out of my good old leather jacket that has served me so well over the last 30 years. I cut the heart shape out of its backside.

I'm so glad, dear Grandma Grete that I can feel true love and respect for you now.

Your grandson, Heiner van Sandt

P.S.: Thank you, dear monastics of the EIAB in Waldbrohl that you are so healing and beneficial for us all by doing your daily practice, in friendly cooperation with other religious faiths and communities. So that old and new wounds may be allowed to heal, in this country and all over the world.

Discovering my divine Nature

An account of a Christian Buddhist Dialogue at the EIAB, May 3–5, 2012

Pastor Matthias Schippel

I came to be at this seminar as if by chance. Sister Ingrid (Bi Nghiem) invited me, and coincidentally or not, I was free to go. My wish to attend an interfaith dialogue with Buddhist brothers and sisters had been answered.

I found myself sitting in a room with 16 people from different countries and faiths, Christians and Buddhists, sisters and brothers, priests and lay people.

During these two days I was blessed to experience one of the most memorable meetings with people of differing faiths. I listened to Father Brian's interpretation of Biblical texts and his words breathed wisdom and clarity into me. He is a man led by spirit and the will to unity. I felt a resonance deep inside and an awareness that something was being spoken that I had longed to hear: the deeper meaning of ‘God's Word’; the mystical quality and spirit of unity that encompasses everything. Father Brian made the connection to Thay's message and the mysticism of Meister Eckhart and I realized they express the same thing: I and the Father are One.

The point of my life is to discover and develop my divine nature and for it



Group photo of some participants (from left, front row): Friar Brian (Dominican), Sister Bi Nghiem, Sister Josefa (Dominican), Sister Jewel, Friar Scott (Dominican), Pastor Michael Schweitzer; (back row:) Paul, Brother Phap De, Friar Prakash (Dominican) and Pastor Matthias Schippel

to benefit people who are suffering. This means that I not only learn to look at myself with God's Eyes, but also at everyone else with the same eyes. I think it is this which connects Christians and Buddhists most profoundly and where we feel most close, despite all other differences.

I enjoyed an interfaith dialogue of the highest quality during these two days. We discussed Father Brian's interpretations and came closer together as a group. We shared a Eucharist offered in an open format on

the last day, which was an expression of our deep meeting and was for everyone a blessed experience. Any barriers that existed before between our faiths had fallen away and there were no more feelings of separation. This was an especially intense experience for me, a Christian pastor, as I normally only offer the Eucharist in a Christian context. Singing a favorite song of mine ‘The River is flowing’ on Friday in the morning sunlight was a deeply happy moment for me. Many of us felt the unity of our different faiths in a special way when we were singing together. I am deeply grateful for this weekend. It is going to affect me and my work for some time to come.

Pastor Matthias Schippel is a preacher in the Protestant Church of Waldbrohl and regularly leads small groups in Christian Meditation.

Sharing Mindfulness in Schools

How Students and Teachers benefit from the practice

Sister Jewel (Chau Nghiem)

One of the goals of the EIAB is to share the transformative power of mindfulness with young people so that they can find a spiritual dimension for lives. We especially want to reach out to schools and universities to support each other and work together. We have been very happy to see this aspect of our practice really blossom in the last nearly four years we have been in Waldbrol. We have been offering two annual family retreats with a children’s and teens’ program in summer and winter (this year we added a third retreat over Easter), as well as an annual weekend retreat just for children, and a monthly meditation class for children in 2011. In addition we offer two annual Wake Up retreats for young people, age 16 to 30. This last Holiday retreat in December 2011 hosted some fifty children and thirty teens at the EIAB, our biggest group ever.

We not only offer the practice to hundreds of children and teens each year at the EIAB itself, we also are making quite some progress in bringing mindfulness into the local schools. So far, in addition to offering a regular teaching presence at our local Gesamtschule since Spring 2009, we have hosted at the EIAB about ten religion classes from different high schools in the area who are interested in learning about Buddhism and mindfulness. We have spoken on several occasions at religion classes in the Waldorf school in nearby Gummersbach. We have also offered a number of

mindfulness courses or days of mindfulness for teachers, both at the EIAB and in their own schools.

In the time of the Buddha, when monks were preparing to travel to a foreign land to teach the Dharma, the Buddha counseled them to learn the language and culture of the new land so that their ways of sharing the Dharma would be appropriate and relevant to the people there. Sharing mindfulness and offering a spiritual dimension in the German school system is a bit like going to a foreign land, not only because most of us monastics who share with the children and teachers are not German, but because it is a completely different world from that of our practi-

ce centers. So we have been doing our best to learn the language and culture of this new land so that our teaching can be appropriate and as helpful as possible to the needs and difficulties of the teachers and students. We are still very much in the process of learning, developing and refining our way of sharing with the students and teachers. We look forward to forging ever stronger links with the schools around us and helping the practice of mindfulness take root in the curriculum so that many students and teachers will be able to benefit.

Mindfulness at the Gesamtschule—Work that is bearing fruit

In the following we report concrete examples of our work in the Waldbrol Gesamtschule, with the hope that it will inspire and give ideas to others also working in education.

Early 2009: We had only been in EIAB a few months, when the school counselor invited us to offer a weekly class known as ‘Arbeitsgemeinschaft (AG)’. Being newly arrived in Germany, I was very impressed that a public school would invite us monastics to come and teach, especially as the EIAB had only existed for a few months. In no other country where I have lived as a monastic have we been so warmly welcomed into a public school setting.

About fifteen 6th and 7th graders voluntarily signed up for the AG, called it “Take it Easy and Be Yourself.” We met



nearly every Friday for one hour from February to June. We shared mindful breathing, total relaxation, mindful games, walking meditation, pebble meditation and raisin meditation. We spoke about how to take care of our emotions, learned to pay attention to our thoughts, and how we could calm our mind by paying attention to our breathing. EIAB monastics taught them calligraphy, tai chi, and meditation songs and on our last class, we ended our five months together with a delicious Vietnamese vegetarian feast of spring rolls and peanut sauce. It was affirming to hear several students say they practiced total relaxation at home before sleeping or when they needed to calm down.

Mindful Games: That same spring, we were also invited to come teach a drop in class, an OA (*Offenen Angebote*) which met after lunch on Wednesdays. Eight to fourteen children joined us to play games that increase concentration, like *Kim’s game*, in which we have two minutes to look at ten items on a tray and then cover the tray and write down all the items we could remember. The more we played Kim’s game, the better we could pay attention. These kinds of exercises very naturally brought the children in touch with their bodies and out of their thoughts, simply by activating the senses. There was a lot of laughter and joy in our being together and this feeling of connection and friendship was an important part of the *implicit* curriculum.

Putting down roots in the Gesamtschule

During 2010 we were regularly invited to give presentations in different classes at the Gesamtschule. Then in spring 2011, two co-teachers asked us to come and teach a weekly one hour mindfulness class for their entire class of thirty 5th graders. This was another step in our work at the school, because we were sharing in the normal part of the school day, not at a time of optional classes, like the AG and OA previously. And the teachers were usually present, which gave the subject of mindfulness more significance, more of an official place in the curriculum. We began and en-

Teachers expressed ...

- Eating a banana mindfully was a very special experience. After that, the students demonstrated it at home. They integrated awareness of and respect for things that nourish us in their daily life.
- In school I often have the opportunity to apply elements that I have learned with you.
- I was deeply touched by the cooperation with the Buddhist monastics, although at the beginning I did not fully accept to offer and join a course on Buddhism, as I am Protestant Religion teacher.
- For me, as a teacher, getting to know and practice deep relaxation and mindfulness exercises which were offered and integrated into our truly stressful school life, was an enriching experience.
- I noticed that many students responded in an extraordinarily open and polite way to the sisters and brothers. Just like the students, I enjoyed this openness, friendliness and their inner light. I had the feeling that they brought more friendliness to and brightened up our school day.
- Rarely have I felt so much positive energy in a room as I did during and after the meeting with you and the musicians and guests from EIAB. For me it was a great moment in my work at school!

ded every class with a student inviting the bell. They wholeheartedly practiced breathing in awareness and many shared that they felt much calmer after taking time to simply breathe as they listened to three sounds of the bell. In one class it was amazing to see thirty 10 year olds sitting so still and full of respect as they breathed three times in and out while each student in turn invited one sound of the bell. The teacher told us she had never seen her students be so still for so long! There was a peace in the room that no adult could have commanded by authority, it was very natural, restful and light, and it came from within each child.

I remember I began on the very first day by telling the children that actually I wasn't going to teach them anything because they already had the wisdom and ability to be mindful in them. The purpose of our class together was to simply allow this energy in each of us to manifest more brightly and clearly. Mindfulness, presence, is not something anyone can give to someone else. This sense of empowerment and dignity was very tangible in the circle when each child wholeheartedly invited a sound of the bell with full concentration and all the classmates breathed and listened with respect. The class continues regularly with this practice as the one of their teachers bought a bell for her class from EIAB bookshop.

Instead of lots of words, concrete activities worked better. They really enjoyed the New Zealand song “Epo i tai tai eh” that had complicated hand movements which would get faster and faster and become quite challenging. It required our full concentration to do it well. They enjoyed it so much that they always asked to sing it in every class!

Eating fruit with a 5th grade class can also be an experience of mindfulness. The class came to visit the EIAB. We sat down on the grass for banana meditation. Each child got a piece of banana still in the peel. We began by

Visitors to the class shared ...

- We were able to transmit the joy that we had generated in the EIAB course with Sister Jewel, to the whole group.
- After this experience, we heard from the teacher, that this lesson stayed in the mind of the students. It changed the ambiance in her class: many students found an open and free way to socialize together.
- Some students were astonished when they got to know that as a protestant preacher I like to take part in the courses at the EIAB and I feel it is an enriching experience.
- I felt the reality of what connects me with Buddhism: it's the practice that counts!

breathing with the bell. They held the fruit in their hand and just looked at it; how many colors could they see? What did it feel like in their hand? Cool? Wet? Soft? How would you describe smell? Slowly they peeled the skin and tried to listen to the sound, noticing the way the peeled skin left grooves along the side of the banana. They then took a very small bite and just let it rest on their tongue without chewing it. They noticed the saliva and the temperature of the banana in their mouth. Leisurely they began to chew the small piece, noticing the taste, where the flavor was strongest on their tongue, how they chewed with their teeth and used their tongue to swallow. We needed a good 5 minutes for just one small bite! In our reflections afterwards, a few said they realized they had never really tasted a banana before doing this exercise. The teacher told me later that one of the boys was so impressed by this exercise that he introduced it to his family and they now practice it regularly.

One day the children made a list on the board of all the different kinds of emotions they could identify. Each child in turn spoke or did an action that expressed one of the emotions and the others tried to guess what emotion it was. Once we had guessed it, we all

named the emotion out loud, “Hello, anger,” or “Hello, shame.” Then we reflected on how each of us deals with our difficult emotions like anger and sadness. We explained that mindfulness does not mean they must always feel peaceful and happy. Mindfulness is paying attention to and accepting whatever is there, even if it is unpleasant.

The students themselves invite us to teach

Autumn 2011: a 10th grade class of 23 students asked themselves for a religion class focused on both on Buddhism and Protestantism. We met every Friday for one and a half hours at the Gesamtschule. Several EIAB monastics took turns leading the classes each week from September 2011 to February 2012. Their religion teacher attended nearly each class with us. It was lovely to see that one of the boys who had been in the AG three years previously had again signed up for this class, now as a young man and no longer an eleven-year-old boy.

Sr. Song Nghiem was the most regular leader of this class and would always bring a few other young monastics with her. The students like learning about mindfulness and are very curious about Buddhism. They have many ideas of how exotic and strange it is, but then find out that much of what we do is quite reasonable, normal and even quite fun! They find the quiet atmosphere and paying attention to their breathing very pleasant. And they are most impressed that as monks and nuns we play volleyball, soccer, basketball, and even enjoy rollerblading and skateboarding!

The students observed the monastics very closely and carefully. They shared in their feedback throughout the course that we looked very friendly and peaceful to them. They were very impressed that we didn't seem distur-

bed or irritated, even when they were a bit disruptive or naughty. We just keep going as if nothing happened. They commented that they saw no stress in us, and no conflict between the monastics. This allowed them to be relaxed, like in a family. They said they felt very well, very at ease in our presence and that they liked to be with us. So they leave us perhaps more aware of our similarities than our differences. We all want to be happy, we all want to make those around us happy; we all want peace.

Dealing with disruptions— Breaking down barriers through mindful play

There are also times that are not so harmonious. Once some of the boys really disrupted the class, trying to distract the other students and make them laugh. The teacher and I spoke after the class and we were quite perplexed about how to continue the following week. Luckily, the next time we had the support of four men from an artists' retreat I was currently leading at the EIAB: a music teacher, a Protestant minister, a sculptor and a photographer.

We started with body percussion, taught by the music teacher. That got the children interested right away. Then I led exercises from Interplay (www.interplay.org), a spiritual play practice. At the beginning, many of the boys were shy and stood in groups at the edges of the room. But when they saw me, a nun, being quite free and even silly, and then the artists, men the age of their fathers, also being very natural and funny, it gave them permission to be who they were. Both boys and girls became more and more confident to let go and just play. As we allowed ourselves to be so physically playful and relaxed, the other kinds of boundaries between us began to shift. The fun and laughter spreading throughout the room was breaking down barriers between teacher and student, between students in different

Healing for our Children and our World

Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children is now available in German as *Achtsamkeit mit Kindern* from Nymphenburger press



cliques, between boys and girls, outsiders and insiders.

The teacher affirmed that she found herself interacting with students in ways she had never done before. She got to know parts of them and shared parts of herself that she never before had the occasion to reveal.

All of us were so high leaving the school that day. The pastor saw we had been teaching them Buddhism without ever saying the word! And the difficulties from the previous week were transformed.

Teaching the teachers

June 2011: the Gesamtschule organized a Workshop for about twenty teachers: ‘Mindfulness and Meditation for Teachers,’ offered by Brother Phap An and Sr. Song Nghiem. They wanted to experience relaxation and mindful breathing for themselves. The workshop was well-appreciated and we hope to do more such events in the future.

For teachers to truly transmit mindfulness to students, it is very important that they practice themselves. This way they can experience for themselves the natural joy and peace that mindfulness brings. Then they will not be in a position of having to ‘enforce’

it, or demand that the children pay attention. If they can authentically model being present, the children will naturally touch it and enjoy it as well. We have learned from our experience in other countries, like India, where we visited numerous schools in Delhi on the 2008 trip with Thay, that simply going into the schools to teach mindfulness to children is not enough. We must also train the teachers, because they will then communicate mindfulness and peace through their way of being, and this is much more powerful than words.

It is for this reason that Thay sparked the Applied Ethics Initiative last June 2011, at the EIAB, an effort to offer widespread training to educators in mindfulness. The EIAB has held three week-long courses for teachers since 2010. This year, we have also offered three weekend courses. This past winter in Plum Village, Thay and the Sangha gave a week-long course for 75 Educators and this April we organized a four-day Educators’ retreat for 240 in London. We welcome your suggestions, ideas and help in making these courses for educators and students a reality in Germany, across Europe and around the world. (More information at: mindfuledu.org).

Sister Juwel (Chau Nghiem) enjoys sharing mindfulness with young people and educators, in schools, at the EIAB, and wherever she is invited.

An auspicious Path

Brother Phap Cu

Our respected teacher has led a life of mindfulness, not grasping, not caught by wealth, never chasing after fame. I used to ask how he could live such a life, when I had only pursued the opposite path, looking for ways to make money to satisfy my greed, living in fear and jealousy, grasping for my own profit, and never thinking of anyone else’s suffering. There were times I had asked myself, “Who am I? What am I doing?”

I have been so fortunate to have found the Buddha, Thay, and the Sangha so that I could find my true self and come back to the true nature of clarity and pureness, of non-discrimination. And now I can live with ease, with calmness, and not like my old self of four years ago—a young man filled with greed, worry, who overworked to find wealth and to build a perfect future in my head... the things I thought would bring me happiness and success.

I am now 24 years old. Though still young, I sometimes regret the lost years before I met the sangha and became a monk. I ordained as a monk because I was experiencing great suffering in my own life. There were times when I felt absolute despair, when I wished to escape this life forever. But I now recognize that because I tasted the bitterness of suffering at that time I can truly value my life as a monastic now, and this experience alone has allowed me to believe in and nurture all the conditions that are present in the here and now. Because I have suffered, I can now recognize the many miracles of life.

Looking back at my life and my independent nature, I can say that the

difficulties I had growing up contributed to my painful situation. When I finished high school, I went to Saigon to continue my studies. During that time, I also worked to help pay

**The sun shines on my homecoming path,
Fragrant flowers and lush grass remind me of my village,
Here is where my heart belongs,
Here is where my determination remains everlasting**

my room and board while living with my brother’s family. I started as a busboy in a restaurant, and not long after that, I became the head cook. I learned many life lessons during this time. Many of the customers at the restaurant were rich and arrogant, looking down on all of us employees. Because I wanted to make money, I had to accept these working conditions. Plus, if we didn’t take care of the customers, they would criticize us and stop coming to the restaurant.

A colleague confided in me saying, “This is life. Anyone with education, skills, or money wouldn’t suffer like we have to.” I felt that in his outlook there was a lack of kindness between one human being and another; that it was all about each of us getting ahead on our own, with no care for anyone else. Why must we behave like that with each other?

A few months later, my friend and I opened our own restaurant. When the business became successful after some five months of hard work, other challenges emerged as well. I experienced much sadness, anger, suffering...and I ended up leaving the business. At this time in my life, everything turned dark and I just wanted to forget everything. I was lifeless, depressed and I lost my direction completely.

I returned my brother’s home and did nothing. It was during this time that I began to feel a spiritual stirring. I just wanted to sit and meditate. I began to read books on Buddhism that I had borrowed from a friend in my home village. Day after day, slowly but surely, I found myself again, and wanting to please my father and brother’s family, I registered to return to school.

I went home to visit my father and to collect my tuition fees from him, as well as to get a few more books on the Buddha’s teaching to bring back with me. Before I returned to the city, I had a chance meeting with Thay Giac Hung. I sat with this monk to visit with him, and he selected certain gathas, or meditation poems, that would fit my situation. I had no idea that after this chance encounter, the seed of monastic life would begin to sprout in me.

A week later, I bid my father farewell to go back and pay for my tuition without saying anything to him about my desire to become a monk because I didn’t want to make him sad. Out of seven siblings in my family, I was the only child who took to education. For this reason alone, my father favored



me and placed much hope in me to attain a higher level of knowledge so I wouldn’t have to live such a hard life like my brothers and sisters. Looking at him, I felt so much love rising in my heart, and I just wanted to make him happy in his old age.

As I sat on the bus heading back to Saigon, my mind was going back and forth between the two paths ahead of me – university or monastery? I was lost in my thoughts. Many questions about life in the monastery filled my head: How does one live in the monastery? Will I be happy as a monk? What will I do there? What if there is disagreement and bickering? Then there were my questions on the path of higher education: What if I am faced with the same issues in life as before, how would I deal with them? Looking out of the bus window, seeing the way people rushed around, pushing to get ahead, being pulled toward a fast-paced life, I wondered to myself, Will I be just like them? The bus continued on its way toward the city. When it got close to Hoa Thuong Temple, I called to the bus driver to let me off and I went to the root temple of Thay Giac Hung.

His temple was simplistic in its beauty—a place of peace and serenity. It was made out of bamboo, surrounded by many big trees, and the air was filled with a calmness that settled my heart. When I awoke the next morning, I didn’t know I where I was un-

til the temple bell was invited reminding me I was lying on a simple cot. I knew this was the day I had to make my decision one way or the other. If I were to miss out on paying for my tuition today, I would have to wait until next year.

I took a stroll in the nearby forest to think carefully about the decision ahead when all of a sudden, in the distance before me, I heard a lovely reading voice. My footsteps slowed and each action of lifting and putting down my feet was done with control as to cause no sound on the dried leaves in the forest. These words read aloud were something I had never heard before! Each word went directly into my heart. When I got back to the temple and asked about the text I had heard in the forest, I learned that it was Old Path, White Clouds as written by our dear Thay.

I can’t even tell you the happiness I felt when I realized that my heart was free and unburdened. And that was how I made my decision to follow this path that has given me direction and a reason to live. I went in and spoke to Thay Giac Hung about my decision to become a monk, and was pleasantly surprised when he advised me to stay on at the temple for at least six more months to be sure of my decision. He also instructed me to write an apology to my father and return the tuition fees to the family. Fifteen days living at the root temple gave me time to open

my heart and to think less. I got to hear many stories from Thay Giac Hung about life with the sangha, which added to the faith growing in me. He traveled with me to Bat Nha Temple; a place I had never known existed. It was here that I was reborn into a spiritual life as a monk.

Four years have flown by so quickly. Still, I can say that I have transformed quite a bit. The life of a monastic is beautiful, always looking for ways to be compassionate and kind to yourself and everyone around you. At this moment, my heartfelt gratitude is overflowing. I know if there were no Thay, and no sangha, I would not be able to live this rich and fortuitous present moment. I would never have become a person with understanding, love, and the ability to recognize each happy moment. I live with many people whose mind and body, speech and action, reflect a boundless love each day. Everyone is gentle and pure. These are my elder and younger brothers and sisters, who all want to bring happiness to everyone wholeheartedly. I can only hope that anyone who is faced with the kind of difficulties I have had to face will have an opportunity to be embraced by a sangha, and find what we think has been lost.

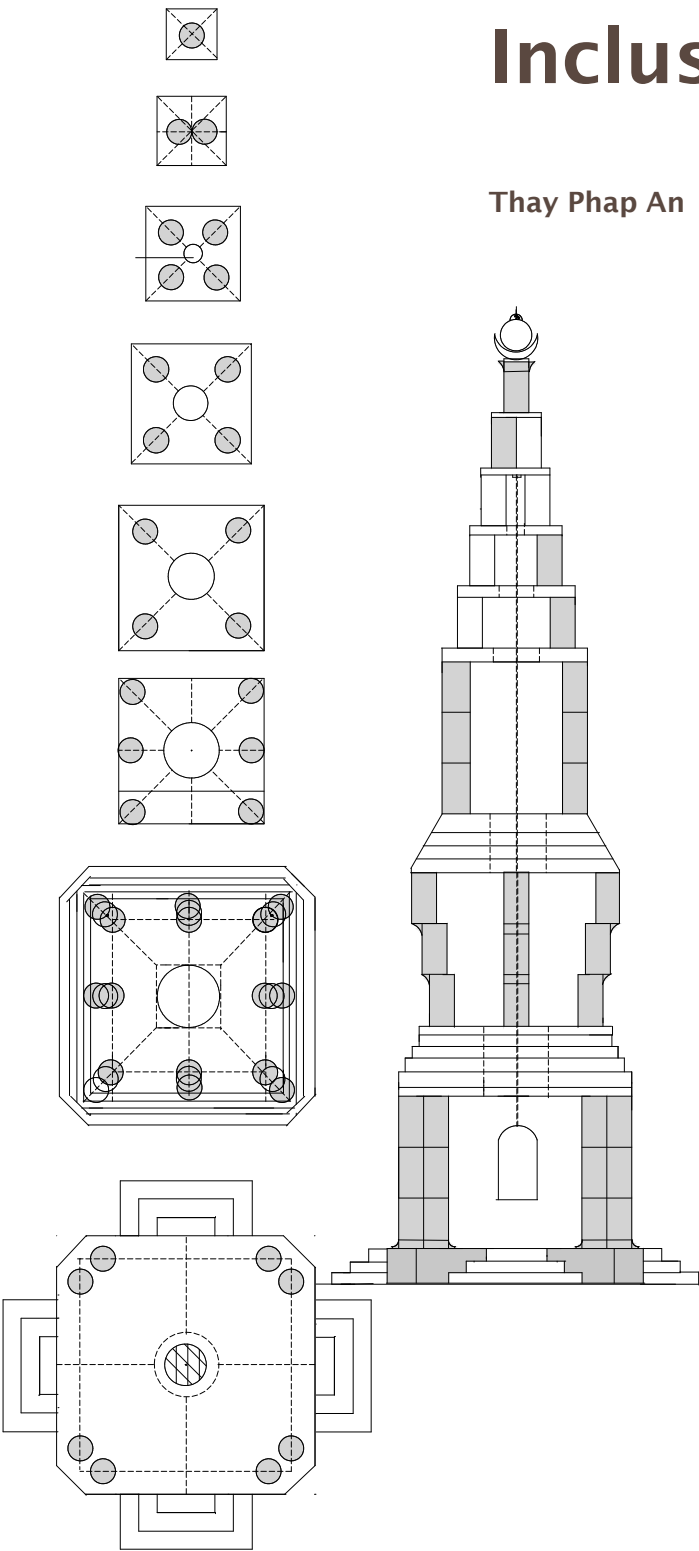
Once again, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Thay, who founded the sangha, who taught us how to practice mindfulness, and who has helped so many people to live joyfully.

Brother Phap Cu became a monk at Bat Nha Temple when he was 21. He currently resides at the European Institute of Applied Buddhism in Germany.

Celebrating Transformation

Cultivating the
Lotuses of
Tolerance and
Inclusiveness

Thay Phap An



For a long time, as our guests approach the EIAB, it has been hard for them to find our property. Even though we have put up signs showing the way, it is still difficult to find the entrance to our whole complex. The Garden of Transformation and the welcoming Gate of Interbeing will connect the EIAB campus to the general public. The garden is a small piece of land uniting the Ashoka Institute and the Great Compassion Monastery and is situated at the corner of Scharnhorst-Straße and Schaumburgweg. In front of the gate there will be a small garden offering its charm to the people of Waldbröl. As the name suggests, the Gate of Interbeing will open its arms widely for the EIAB to embrace the outside world and through this gate the outside world, especially the city of Waldbröl, is invited to open its arms to embrace the EIAB community.

As already mentioned in *Celebrating the Inauguration of the Ashoka Institute*, on p. 2, the Gate and the Stupa are being made of large stone columns that were originally intended to create a plaza for gatherings of the Nazi Party.

We are especially blessed to have the celebration happening in this year,

as it is not only the 30th anniversary of the founding of the international Plum Village community that began in 1982, but also the 70th anniversary of Thay's novice ordination in 1942, and the 50th anniversary of the publication of Thay's moving booklet, *A Rose for Your Pocket*, written in 1962. It was the first of Thay's books to transmit the practice of mindfulness to a wider public beyond the monastery walls and it marks the beginning of the blossoming of Engaged Buddhism in the Plum Village tradition.

The Stupa of Inclusiveness is specially designed and constructed as a dedication to Thay's life of teaching and peace work, commemorating these significant anniversaries in Thay's life and in the growth of Plum Village. Its overall shape is in the form of joined palms, representing a respectful bow that accompanies our greeting, *A lotus for you, A Buddha to be*. The joined palms extend a warm and welcoming gesture to our guests who come to the Institute as well as a greeting from the EIAB community to its surrounding environment, especially the people of Walbröl. The Stupa of Inclusiveness is also in the form of a lotus bud because it represents the process of transformation from the mud of suffering into the lotus of enlightenment. Transformation is at the heart of the teachings



and practices offered by Thay, and reflects the pragmatic nature of the Buddha's original teachings rather than abstract theory or philosophy. This emphasis is born from Thay's lifetime of practice in the midst of periods of great turmoil and war in Vietnam.

The Garden of Transformation and the welcoming Gate of Interbeing will connect the EIAB campus to the general public.

The stupa will be located between the Ashoka Institute and the Great Compassion Monastery where there is a depression in the land and a decrease in energy. The land where both buildings stand is high so building a tall stupa on this lower lying area will bring back harmony and balance and help heal and raise the energy level between the two existing structures. The three structures will then support each other and help to stabilize and heal the energy of the whole area.

The stupa will become the spiritual symbol for our Institute because it would be difficult and expensive to modify the existing buildings to architecturally represent our spiritual principles. Arriving at the Garden of Transformation from either one of the town streets we walk through the Gate of Interbeing, and continue in a meditative and peaceful walk on the Path of Joy. The Path of Joy is the path of our community. To cultivate joy in every moment of our life is a very important part of our practice. Thay reminds us many times that: *There is no way to happiness, happiness is the way*. Our Path of Joy curves around the Garden of Transformation as a little river which includes all of us. Thay's insight is that the Future Buddha, Maitreya has been born in our time in the form of a beloved community. The Path of Joy shows our commitment to build a happy and harmonious community offering its joyful fruits of practice to the world. At the end of this path, we enter a small, intimate, natural shrine, made by a beautiful circle of old, sturdy trees. As we climb a small mound, we step into a field of geomantic energy which grows as we walk toward the stupa. The stupa stands on an underground system of



artificial water tubes installed to circulate and radiate energy into the surrounding area. This system is self-regulated by simple solar energy panels. The whole structure is designed on the principle of balancing and harmonizing energy flows.

The concentration of energy-- at its high point where the stupa will be built--will also radiate out with the help of a big bell hanging from the stupa. This great bell is 800 kg, 1.7 meter high and 0.9 meter in diameter. It is a donation from the Taiwan Compassionate Service Society, one of the Sanghas created by Thay Hang Truong. We are very grateful for his support. It is a miracle that the sounds of the great temple bell transmitting the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha and all ancestors continue to vibrate until now and help to transform our lives and those of many others.

On each of the four sides of the bell, there is a circular symbol. On the North side is the official logo of EIAB. On the other three sides, there are Thay's calligraphies with his famous Zen circles. On the South side, the



calligraphy reads *Höre mit Mitgefühl* (Listen with Compassion). On the West side, it is *Intersein* (Interbeing), the foundation of Thay's teaching. On the East side, it is *Für eine bessere Welt* (For a better World). Mantras are also engraved in Chinese and Sanskrit to release beings from the realms of suffering and darkness, and to help them be liberated, as well as the names of the four Great Bodhisattvas: Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Great Understanding, Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattva of Great Action, Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, and Kshitigarbha, the Bodhisattva of Great Aspiration.

The structure of the stupa itself represents the core teachings of the Buddha. It is 21 meters high with 8 levels; the first seven represent the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, successive stages of the practice in the realm of conventional truth. The topmost level stands for the final accomplishment, complete enlightenment. In the dimension of the ultimate truth, the first seven levels represent the 7 Buddhas of the past, and the eighth level the Buddha of the present and future: the ever-present reality of en-

lightenment which is always available in the here and the now. While in the realm of conventional truth we must practice to attain enlightenment, in the realm of ultimate truth, we have never been apart from our true nature of awakening.

At the base of the stupa there are three-steps on each of the four sides signifying the Three Refuges: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The ground floor is built in the shape of an octagon signifying the Noble Eightfold Path with four open faces alternating with four closed faces. The four closed faces of the Noble Eightfold Path signify our practice of stopping and looking deeply within for the benefit of our own transformation regarding unwholesome energy accumulated in the past. We can consider it as the Yin aspect of the Path. The four open faces of the Noble Eightfold Path signify our practice of the outgoing process of cultivation of wholesome energy for the benefit of the transformation of others, our environment and our society. We can consider it as the Yang aspect of the Path.

On each of the closed faces, there are two columns supporting the ceiling. The pair of columns invites us to contemplate the two truths (conventional and ultimate), a fundamental teaching of Mahayana Buddhism. The four pairs of columns also represent the four pairs of the fruits of practice and the harmonious existence of the four-fold sangha. The columns support a four-layer ceiling representing The Four Noble Truths. The five levels beneath the topmost

level represent the Five Powers, with the tallest level signifying Faith, an indispensable source of energy for realizing the fruits of the practice.

Standing on the ground floor, which is the Noble Eightfold Path or the conventional truth of reality, looking up through the layers of ceilings, we see a row of empty circles in the middle of the ceilings, representing the deep insight of emptiness or the ultimate truth of reality. The empty circles decrease in size closer to the top of the stupa creating a ring of empty circles, a metaphor for the unending process of liberation, as there is no end to our transformation. Looking down from the top of the stupa, the growing rings of circles are the Dharma rain, the drops of compassionate nectar, falling down and radiating out from the *dharmakaya*, the body of enlightenment. The ring of circles continues with a circle on the ground floor containing an engraved calligraphy of Thay: *Dies ist weil jenes ist* (this is because that is). In this way, the upward journey is one of cultivating wisdom to transform our limited view, while the downward journey is one of sharing our compassion for the healing of ourselves and others.

With these images, we are invited to contemplate the principle of dependent co-arising, or interbeing, in its numerous forms. The balance and harmony between any two pairs of opposites--inward and outward, self-cultivation and offering service to others, Yin and Yang, conventi-

onal and absolute truths--will bring us to the deepest insight of the Buddha; the teaching on the Middle Way. Its practice will liberate us at every level of our existence--physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. The thread of the Middle Way is symbolized by the single rope hanging the big bell from the top floor of the stupa, passing through all of the empty circles, which represent the different levels of our own being.

The architect of the Garden of Transformation, the Gate of Interbeing, the Path of Joy and the Stupa of Inclusiveness, is Mr. Wolf Dieter Blank. He is a long time meditation practitioner and has a deep knowledge of western as well as Indian and Chinese geomancy. His work on this project is in large part a donation. We have also received loving support from Mr. Peter Köster, the Mayor of Waldbröl as well as the town-hall staff and other Walbröl residents. The local sangha of Walbröl has been involved from the beginning with the design process and construction. We are especially grateful to Mr. Ivo Scheppers who has been a generous source of



inspiration, energy and love. Together with the skillful hands and heart of Mr. Uwe Jurgschat, the whole project has been greatly blessed and supported. The building of the Stupa of Inclusiveness has been mostly funded by anonymous philanthropic donors that respect Thay's teachings and believe in EIAB's mission. We thank them as well as all other friends all over the world for helping us realize the construction of the garden, the gate and the stupa.

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.



Visitors share their best moments at the EIAB

1. What I like best at the EIAB is ...

- the feeling that I have arrived.
- the energy of the Sangha: love, compassion, and joy.
- the sense of being truly welcomed. Especially as a mother with children to be encouraged to embark on the path of mindfulness together.
- the warm and loving atmosphere—and the sensation of calm and peace that I experience as soon as I get here.

2. My most memorable moment at the EIAB was ...

- my arrival. When I saw the sign “You Have Arrived” and my heart jumped for joy.
- to sit outside in the sun on a blanket with the children as Sr. Chau Nghiem shows us how to “look deeply” into an apple. I’ve been savoring my food ever since.
- a wonderful meditation led by Sr. Bi Nghiem in which we traveled to a time far before our birth. What I discovered there explained a lot to me and is still on my mind today. It allowed me to touch my deepest roots.

3. My wish for the EIAB is ...

- that many people learn about the EIAB and come here to support it in any way possible.
- that it will grow and thrive—and turn into a potent place for the loving realization of the Dharma.
- that it’ll take its time with its further development, so that we all can come along in a relaxed and joyful fashion.
- that there will be a big new meditation hall soon.

4. My favorite spot at the EIAB is ...

- behind the main building where the plum trees are.
- sitting in the sun on the wooden bench in front of the house with a glass of tea in my hand.
- the meditation hall. And the dining hall – because the food is soo delicious!
- among the Brothers and Sisters, on my cushion in the meditation hall.
- the bookshop.

Feedback from our Weekend Retreat “Children of This Earth,” May 2012

1. What was the best part of the weekend?

- Seeing the foxhole. (Ronja, 6)
- Chopping wood. (Jafeth, 11)
- Singing, making music, sewing hearts, being creative. (Helen, 9)
- Football and the forest and the bonfire. (Luca, 7)

2. What was not so nice for you?

- When it was time for bed. (Luca, 7)
- Having to go home. (several children)

3. What did you learn?

- To relax. To take my time with everything I do. (Greta, 11)
- To give thanks to the full plate of food, and to give thanks to the empty plate. (Helen, 9)
- Being quiet at eating time, singing, sewing. (Ronja, 6)
- How to stay calm. (Jafeth, 11)
- That baby birds are pink and are born with their eyes closed. (Mara, 8)
- When we join our palms to bow, one hand is your mind and one your body. Why the woodpecker makes holes in trees. (Luca, 7)

4. What will you take home with you?

- To be more mindful of everything: Eating, breathing, walking... And to be calm and relaxed. (Greta, 11)
- Putting my hands together before eating food. (Luca, 7)

Interesting Facts about the Courses and Visitors of the EIAB

Number of courses offered: 61 (2010), 70 (2011), 84 (2012)
Number of courses and Days of Mindfulness for families and children: 7 (2010), 8 (2011), 9 (2012)
Number of overnight visitors: 1528 (2010), 1515 (2011)
Number of children (up to 12 years) attending courses: 121 (2010), 133 (2011)
Number of teenagers (13-17 years) attending courses: 62 (2010), 55 (2011)
Average age of visitors: 41.6 years
Gender: Nearly 2/3 of our visitors are female, just over 1/3 are male.
Average length of stay: 5.2 nights
Number of countries our visitors come from: 25 (2010), 21 (2011)
Top countries: 1. Germany, 2. The Netherlands, 3. Belgium, 4. Switzerland
Most common languages spoken by visitors at the EIAB: 1. German, 2. Dutch, 3. Vietnamese, 4. English

5. What would you like to teach to others?

- The incredible peace that everybody has here. And the patience they had with us. (Greta, 11)
- When the bell sounds, to take three deep breaths in and out. (Helen, 9)
- That you can do everything calm and easy. (Jafeth, 11)
- Helping my friends enjoy nature. (Luca, 7)



Learning to love myself

Anne von der Lüche

For more than one year the EIAB was my home, the center of my life. During my stay at the EIAB, I was allowed to be just as I am. Even though I like to be active and to contribute to the community life, the monastic Sangha let me know: It is okay to do nothing—just be yourself and practice. This helped me to let go of DOING and focus instead on pure BEING—which is not a habit in our culture.

I participated in a number of courses and I learned a lot about the history of Buddhism. I studied the sutras and I learned to love formal mindfulness practice: sitting, walking, eating, chanting, inviting the bell, touching the earth. In deep contact with myself and with my Dharma friends, I could touch my difficulties, my strong emotions, my darkest thinking—and let it all be there and embrace it tenderly. In this process, I received so much support from the Sangha and I feel deep gratitude.

My stay in the monastery was much longer than I had initially planned. But one day the time had come to go back home to Karlsruhe. I wanted to bring mindfulness practice into my everyday life, practicing alone in a worldly environment.

I learned to establish a rhythm which helps me

to keep the practice alive. Concerning the formal practice, there is no right or wrong. I try my best to practice in mindfulness and in the mind of self-love. I feel and find out what is beneficial to me.

In the early morning, I first practice physical exercise and then sitting meditation. I do it mindfully and lovingly, without pressure, without stress. After breakfast, I feel strength and clearness and I begin my working day. I try to keep a gatha or practice poem in my mind: Breathe and smile. Actually, I easily forget to breathe while I am focused on a difficult task. After lunch, I need a break. In the afternoon, I continue working or I read.



Towards the end of the afternoon, I take my bike and I ride through nature for one or two hours.

I like to practice walking meditation deep in the forest. In former times, I felt alone. Now, I feel surrounded by and connected to trees and all sentient beings living there. I feel that the forest is my Sangha. When the weather is fine, I swim in a lake and bring all my awareness to my senses: what I feel, what I hear, what I see, what I smell, what I taste. I don't let myself be carried away by the activity of my mind. I try to stay in the here and the now.

I am happy that I have the possibility to go to the Karlsruher Sangha once a week to practice with others. Every time I visit a local Sangha, I am fascinated that people are coming together to practice applied Buddhism. With open hearts and arms, they welcome whoever shows up. I have experienced this in the Sanghas of Waldbrol, Kassel, Berlin and Karlsruhe.

When I spend the evening alone at home, I look carefully at what I am taking refuge in to avoid feeling my loneliness: a film, a glass of wine, a packet of chips? I give myself the compassion that I would give to others who are going through a difficult moment. A gatha is helping me: *Love yourself as your neighbor*. May be the most important skill that I learned during my stay in the EIAB is the middle way: the balance of self-love and connecting deeply to those around me.

I am here for you: The EIAB and the Netherlands/ Benelux countries

Brother Phap Xa

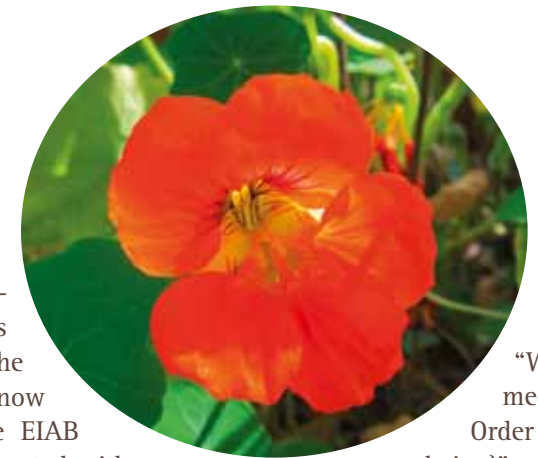
Since its opening in 2008, more and more people from the Netherlands find their way to the EIAB. Each year during summer we have a growing number of participants in the Dutch Retreat with Thay. Often these retreatants participate later in one of our many, smaller courses at the EIAB. Most of our guests come from Germany, though the participants of this flat country, famous for its mills, wooden shoes, tulips and tolerance take second place. Because most of our guests have German or Dutch as their mother tongue, I feel happy and at home in these Germanic languages.

Ten years ago I was born as a cell in the Plum Village body. In 2008 this body gave birth to the EIAB and I soon joined as a small cell. I wanted to be a part of the hand of this EIAB body because a hand can reach far. The Netherlands is very close to us. My family lives in Arnheim and we can visit each other in just two hours by car. And I can easily offer regular retreats and days of mindfulness all over the Netherlands.

This rapid and thriving connection between the EIAB and the Dutch people would not have been possible without the Dutch foundation, “Leven in Aandacht” (Living in Mindfulness). Thanks to this fruitful cooperation many Dutch people can attend the Dutch Retreats at the EIAB and attend activities with EIAB monastics in the Netherlands. They also make

significant financial contributions to the building of the EIAB. There are now three rooms in the EIAB that have been renovated with the financial support of the foundation. We are grateful for their continuous support and trust in us.

The Wake Up Movement for young people between 16 and 30 is also very active in the Netherlands. Many of them participate wholeheartedly in Wake Up retreats in Plum Village, the EIAB and the Netherlands. In March



2012 we hosted a “Wake Up meets OI (The Order of Interbeing)” retreat and most of the young people representing Wake Up were Dutch, eager to get to know members of the Order of Interbeing and to find out if an active membership in the Order is for them.

A second important theme for the Wake Up Movement is the connection with Mother Earth and a life in harmony with the environment. In 2011 there was a permaculture retreat in which many young monks and nuns also participated, who then energetically cultivated a permaculture garden plot. This care and process of becoming conscious breathe an unmistakable message: “Dear Mother Earth, I am here for you!” And in the same way the EIAB says to its guests from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and the whole world: “We are here for you!”

Brother Phap Xa was ordained in 2003 and is energetically sowing the seeds of simplicity, peace and mindfulness in the EIAB, in his homeland of Holland, and wherever else he goes.

Understanding – even scientific understanding – can take us in the direction of love. I see that where there is understanding, there can be love; but where there is no understanding, there cannot be love. And if there is love, then there must already be understanding, and that understanding will continue to grow. Understanding and love are two faces of one reality, like the heads and tails of a coin, or the wave and particle forms of an electron.

Thich Nhat Hanh
from *Letter to a Young Scientist*

New 2012 Courses

| Release stress and build inner energy by meditation and Integral Tai chi

with Thay Phap An, Sister Song Nghiem and other brothers and sisters in the EIAB

- 12.–14. October 2012
- 21.–23. December 2012

Meditation in combination with Integral Tai Chi are very effective in dealing with stress and burn-out. More information at www.eiab.eu

EIAB Highlights in 2013

| June 2013 with Thich Nhat Hanh in the EIAB

- 02. June: Day of Mindfulness
- 04.–09. June: Dutch Retreat
- 11.–16. June: German Retreat

| EIAB Retreats for Families

- 27. Dec. 2012 – 01. Januar: Celebrating Life
- 28. March – 01. April: Easter Retreat
- 26. July – 09. August: Summer Retreat
- 27. Dec. 2013 – 03. Jan.: New Year's Retreat

Insight Gathas from our new German Dharma Teachers

The half moon hides behind a few clouds
The morning chant of the monks floats through the air
The cool wind touches my face and I feel the muddy earth under my feet.
Life shows itself in many different ways—
Only my wanting and not wanting makes it difficult and creates all my suffering.

Ewald Müller, True Realization of Sympathetic Joy, February 2012 in Plum Village during the Lamp Transmission Ceremony

Out of the narrow valley
We climb up the mountain, following the old path.
You hold my hand safely.
A yellow sun rises.
We are standing in silence and gaze into the open space.
Both feet grounded on Mother Earth
I suddenly recognize I am home.
In this moment all doubts are vanished.
Full of joy I return into the village.

Jan-Michael Ehrhardt, True Practice of Harmony, February 2012 in Plum Village during the Lamp Transmission Ceremony

The EIAB Course Program for 2012 is available upon request and can also be found on our website: www.eiab.eu.

In December the 2013 Program will be available. Please check our website this autumn for information about 2013 courses.

Registration for all retreats:

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For registration by email:
registrar@eiab.eu
Other questions: info@eiab.eu



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