

EIAB MAGAZINE

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE EIAB AND THE INTERNATIONAL SANGHA AUGUST 2020





Practice I

- 8 From Corona to *karuna*
- 17 Accepting Death Without Fear and Regret
- 21 Mindfulness in Times of ill Health
- 23 Simply Being There – for Me, for Others and for the Earth
- 25 And I Ask: What Can I Do to Help?
- 28 Ariving in the Now
- 30 The Effect of Unconditional Love

A very big thank-you!

Corona forced the EIAB to close for four months this year, meaning we had no income. For a while it seemed as though there wouldn't be an EIAB magazine this year, not even an online-magazine. That despite everything we have now managed to produce an EIAB magazine is due to the generous help of two graphic designers Ute Storch (Sangha Darmstadt) and Salome Feltens (Cologne), as well as the immense efforts of Nicole Ritter (Sangha Waldbröl) as editor and coordinator. As in the many years before to our 'house photographer' Klaus Schick and for the translations into English Andrew Dennis.

You have made the EIAB Magazine 2020 possible thanks to your special skills, your tireless work and your love for the Sangha. It has turned into a very special magazine.

Thank you!

Contents

Sanghas

- 36 Sangha in Times of Corona
- 38 Feeling Connected
- 40 Sangha-gathering in a New Way
- 42 Offering a Cooperative Hand
- 43 Without Stepping Out the Door.
You Can Meet the World
- 47 "I Feel a Connection"
- 48 Breathe, You Are Alive ...
- 50 Practice@home
- 53 Mindful Breathing
- 58 Completely Refreshed
- 62 Creativity Across the Zoomiverse
- 64 Intense Learning
- 66 In the Midst of the Storm
- 68 Loving Attention
- 70 In My Garden
- 72 Living Holistically
in Demanding Times
- 74 What Next After Corona?
- 76 Practicing Compassion
- 84 Admirable Friendship
- 87 The EIAB During Corona Crisis
- 88 Generosity Around the World

Plum Village

- 94 Every Step is Peace
- 96 Locked Inside
- 98 Don't Know If ...
- 100 Plum Village Was My First love

Memories of Brother Phap Luong

- 105 A Life Full of Devotion
Memories of Sister
Song Nghiem, EIAB
- 108 Memories of Sister
Chuan Nghiem, EIAB
- 109 Memories of Dieu Ha, Brother
Phap Luong's biological sister
- 114 Memories of Br. Phap Luong's
friend Trang

Practice II

- 115 This Is It – Seeing the Wonders
of Close By
- 116 White Awareness Sangha
- 118 Children of God, Children
of the Buddha
- 120 Small is Beautiful

Gathas on pages
4, 6, 39 und 90 from
Thich Nhat Hanh.



Edited by
European Institute of
Applied Buddhism gGmbH
Schaumburgweg 3 | 51545 Waldbröl
+ 49 (0)2291/907 13 73
info@eiab.eu | registrar@eiab.eu
www.eiab.eu

Editorial staff: Brothers and Sisters of the
EIAB, Nicole Ritter, Andrew Dennis,
Sarah Monk
Layout: Ute Storch, Salome Feltens
Photos by Klaus Schick: 1, 2, 3, 6, 20-23,
28, 32-38, 42, 48, 50-55, 66/67, 71, 74/75,
105, 106/107, 109, 116, 122-124





Walking Meditation

*The mind can go in a thousand directions,
but on this beautiful path, I walk in peace.*

With each step, a gentle wind blows

With each step, a flower blooms.





Sitting Down

*Sitting here
is like sitting
under a Bodhi tree.*

*My body is
mindfulness itself,
free from all distraction.*



From Corona to *Karuna*

A spiritual journey through COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has aroused our species' primal fear, releasing a wave of suppressed energy across the world. In this article, EIAB Director and Dean of Studies Thay Phap An helps us look deeply into the roots of our fear, how we can take care of it and how we can become more stable and secure. By engaging with those around us and by applying the Buddha's teachings and practices, we can radiate the energy of peace, love, and compassion to an increasingly turbulent world.

Our teacher's courage

As a young monk, following the example of his own teacher to step out of the monastery and call for religious freedom, our teacher Thich Nhat Hanh courageously led a movement for radical change within Vietnamese Buddhism in the early 1960s. He inspired monastics to go beyond the relative isolation of their monasteries to engage more deeply with those suffering from civil upheaval and the escalating war in South Vietnam. Thay's students gladly followed him out into society, risking and even losing their lives.

Recently, EIAB was plunged into total physical isolation at the height of the coronavirus pandemic in Germany – an isolation from which, happily, we are now emerging – because of government restrictions on social interaction and mobility, to protect lives and curb the spread of the virus. But, strangely, we have never felt more engaged.

Throughout lockdown, technology has helped us keep up with developments across the world. We have been able to reach out to friends from Europe to Asia via our website and WhatsApp. Zoom has made it possible to hold wonderful “meetings” with Sangha members in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, and Sweden, some joining from confinement in their basements. We were able to listen to their pandemic stories as we tried to address their fears and concerns.

It seems that, everywhere, a wave of suppressed energy is manifesting. It is as if the pandemic has disturbed a deep block

of painful energy in humanity, sending the whole world into a state of agitation. We can observe this in how violent protests in the United States rapidly spread across the world after the shock killing in May of an unarmed black man by a police officer who knelt on the man's neck for nearly eight minutes, and in Stuttgart's sudden night of violence in June.

We can see extremist groups taking advantage of social disorder to pursue their own agenda of violence and racial hatred. Pandemic blame games, some involving populist leaders, seek to manipulate people's minds and stir up division between nations. The widespread circulation of conspiracy theories and sensational news, consumed without fact check or independent verification, is only adding to the confusion. There is a danger of being swept along by a belief that the “collective view” – no matter how misinformed or misguided – validates our own false sense of reality.

In a new era of global unpredictability, geopolitical frictions are intensifying across spheres ranging from economy and trade, to technology and weaponry, including new weapons for cyberspace, the deep sea, and outer space. As arms limitation agreements falter, as the language of diplomacy degenerates, and as telephone hot lines between world leaders go cool, the risk of nuclear conflict – whether by accident or intent – is once more on the rise.¹

It is increasingly clear that the world is, in fact, in the grip of two pandemics: one of viral origin and one of fear; fear

that is deeply embedded in our species, in us as individuals, in our families, our societies, our politics, our ideologies and in international relations. Unfortunately, neither pandemic is likely to end any time soon.

In the mysterious ways of the cosmos, though, COVID-19 presents each of us with a chance to look more deeply into our fear so we may understand its roots and learn to take care of it. We can become more stable, anchored, and secure. The suffering caused by the pandemic has also re-energized EIAB to deepen our engagement with the increasingly turbulent world beyond the Institute's tranquil grounds, and to follow with fresh vigor the courageous path of our teacher, within our Vietnamese spiritual lineage of Engaged Buddhism.

A time of extremes

In nature, fear has a lot to do with our survival and evolutionary success as a species. Whenever our mind perceives we are in danger of being destroyed, fear instantly activates a physical mechanism in our brain. Fear for our life quickly bypasses those parts of the brain where thinking and emotions are located, and goes straight to the “reptilian” brain where our central nervous system releases neuro-electrical signals and neurochemicals for the “fight or flight”, or “frozen” response.

That is why we hear stories like that of my father whose life was saved when he ducked a bullet during the war in Vietnam, even before he was fully conscious



Brothers and sisters offered prayers for victims of the coronavirus, which was then peaking in China and starting to spread overseas, during EIAB's monastic retreat in February. At a solemn ceremony (pictured) in the Asoka Institute, they also prayed for world peace, and to ease the suffering of all invisible beings in the realm of suffering.

of what he was doing. From a physical aspect, this fear mechanism to secure our immediate survival is most beneficial. But emotional and perceptual fears, coming from a higher order of cognitive abilities and skills, can also cause a lot of confusion and distortion in how we perceive and live our life.

At the time of publication, the coronavirus has infected more than 17 million people and killed more than 680,000, sadly, with more to come.² Lockdowns are being re-imposed in countries and cities where “hotspots” have flared after initial success at containment. People everywhere are afraid for their health but also of losing their job, and for the future, because the longer the pandemic continues across the world, the greater the risk to economic, political, and social stability. So, uncertainty, anxiety,

and worry on a mass scale have fueled the energy of fear, globally.

It is an energy that can lead to extreme behavior where we try to protect what we believe is our “self” and to ensure our survival at all costs. Entering primal mode, we do not think of other people, only that “self” and perhaps our immediate family. During the pandemic, we may even see other people as a threat to our health, a slippery slope that can lead to discrimination, hatred or worse. At the other end of the spectrum are people who reject science-based advice for controlling the spread of the virus, turning public health into a political and human rights issue. They demonstrate with anger and violence against lockdowns and social distancing, saying that governments have no right to take away individual freedoms or to force us to wear masks,

even for our own protection and that of those around us.

But all is not lost. The uncertainty and suffering brought on by the pandemic are also bringing up the energy of love in people who have a deep desire to serve and to contribute to something meaningful. Modern-day bodhisattvas are helping to save the lives of coronavirus patients, even though they might lose their own lives, as many nurses, doctors, and other hospital staff already have. Theirs is surely a great act of *karuna* which, according to the teaching of the Buddha, is the capacity to remove other people's suffering. More broadly, it is translated from Sanskrit as “compassion”. Countless compassionate volunteers have looked after the practical needs of the elderly and vulnerable in their local communities during lockdown.

So, the energy of fear touches both sides of us, bringing out open-hearted *karuna* as well as closed-minded self-obsession. How can we practice in a way that calms the energy of fear in and around us and that enables us to be – and do – our best?

The roots of fear

It helps, first, to understand how fear comes about. In the school of Mahayana Buddhism to which we belong – the Manifestation Only School of our teacher – there are 51 mental states but, interest-

ingly, there is no mental state called “fear”. That is because fear is a compound energy made up of different mental states, different elements. When the Buddha attained full enlightenment, he looked deeply into the process of the human mind as well as the working of human psychology and discovered three roots or energy sources that can cause a lot of disturbance within us. The Buddha called them the “Three Root Poisons”, or root afflictions.

The first is greed or desire or attachment. It means we have the tendency to grasp

on to an object whether external or internal. For example, our object of desire could be food, sensual pleasure, physical invincibility, sex, money, power, position, security, authority, or control. The moment we are afraid of losing that object of attachment, fear comes. It is another layer of response to the energy of attachment.

The second source of energy is the tendency to push things away, to deny, to resist, to fight. Sometimes, we resist or fight without any reason. We meet someone and instantly feel an aversion.

Countless individuals have stepped up during the pandemic to care for the sick and vulnerable, sometimes risking their own lives. In May, EIAB monastics honored these modern-day bodhisattvas by performing a song on Vesak Day inspired by the Lotus Sutra, in which countless bodhisattvas spring up from the earth. In the background is EIAB’s bell stupa, representing the Lotus Sutra’s treasure tower.



Even though he or she has not done anything, has not expressed him or herself in any objectionable way, we feel a sense of hostility. That is the second source of energy. The Buddha called it anger, hatred, or aversion and enmity.

The third root energy the Buddha discovered is confusion. As humans, we have limited understanding, a limited view about the world. For example, we think we see the sun rising, but in fact it rose eight minutes and 20 seconds earlier, for that is the average time it takes for the sun's light to travel to earth. Like the blind man of folklore who thinks an elephant is a broom after touching only the whisk of its tail, we constantly misperceive the true nature of reality. We lack the capacity ever to see it and, instead, project our limited understanding onto it. The strong emotion of fear comes when we are unable to perceive and accept reality the way it is.

And, so, in the Buddhist tradition, fear is a compound mental state, a second-layer reaction to the first-layer mental states of greed, hatred, and confusion which, themselves, are reactions to ultimate reality, which manifests naturally when conditions are sufficient. These three roots of affliction exist because, as humans, we do not live in a perfect world. The unexpected, such as the pandemic, is always happening. That is because reality is impermanent, and life is always changing – not always in accord with our wishes. While we may each respond differently as individuals, human psychology is such that our responses have common roots in greed, hatred, and confusion. If we do not calm down these three sources of energy, fear can easily arise.

Chain reactions

We see this happening every day during the pandemic. For example, we are queuing at a supermarket checkout and someone behind us stands less than the required distance away. We move forward and they edge even closer. Immediately, we feel irritation and in our unconscious mind, the energy of aversion is activated.

We feel hostility towards that person. If we are not mindful, we might say something that triggers a hostile reaction, then an angry exchange may follow.

How do we interrupt this chain reaction? By bringing the practice of mindfulness into every moment of our life. We stop. We become very attentive to the energy within us. We feel the energy coming up and we say: "Coming back to myself, feeling my whole body, I breathe in. Embracing my whole body with my love and care, I breathe out. Feeling my whole body, feeling so much love for my body." So, we need to go back to our body, learn to embrace ourselves, be with ourselves, and to sink the energy down into our center of our gravity, which is within our lower abdomen.

When we stop, and hold our breathing in our field of awareness, we do not let go. Once we hold the awareness long enough, a miracle happens: there is a transformation in our mind. We can come back fully to the present moment and get in touch deeply with what is going on now. This helps us go beyond our irritation or anxiety, beyond the energy of fear because when we come back to our inbreath and our outbreath, we find a reality that is pleasant and safe right now; one where there really are no problems. Our tendency to project into the future – a tendency that leads us into fear – naturally stops.

This is the most basic practice. But at the same time, it is the main practice because when we sink the energy down, we have another chance. The moment we embrace the energy of greed, the energy of hatred, we have greater clarity and can begin to see a way out of our confusion.

"Us" vs. "them"

During the pandemic, some politicians and commentators have played upon people's doubts about the benefits of lockdown versus damage to the economy. An "us" versus "them" mentality has emerged, pitting individuals against each other and against "authorities" seen as responsible for turning people's lives upside down.

But who, really, has been making all the decisions to protect public health during the pandemic and to prevent hospitals from being overwhelmed? Is there someone to whom we can directly point a finger? On the surface we have the feeling: "Yes, there is someone in our government who is responsible and accountable for making these disruptive decisions."

In the Buddhist tradition we look at things differently. We recognize that a decision is a collective manifestation of energy within us as well as around us. It is a manifestation of the total energy of our community or society. This total connected energy is the energy responsible for a decision or outcome of an event. There is no separate energy that is completely isolated from the other energies, so there is no one specific to blame. We are all responsible, to a certain degree, for what is happening in the world right now. That is the Buddhist teaching of inter-being, inter-connectedness, the teaching of inter-penetration, inter-embracement.

From this perspective, we also see that countries and governments have been doing their best during the pandemic, conditioned by their scientific knowledge, their politics, their media, their economic and social circumstances, their educational background, cultural background, collective memory and so on. Many elements come together to manifest in a single decision. And once it manifests, we try our best to support that decision.

Should a decision turn out to have been wrong, then slowly, slowly with our practice of calmness, peacefulness, of true communication, of deep listening, of true love and loving speech, we express our concern in a calm, peaceful way. Perhaps the collective energy will change again, and a different decision will manifest.

If we practice well during the pandemic, we shall have more clarity, less fear and shall be better able to support the whole society. There is no point in expressing



When we discover a reality that is pleasant and safe in the present moment, then our tendency to fearfully project into the future naturally stops. Here Brother Troi Tue Giac is pictured enjoying just such a moment beside the EIAB's lotus pond.

Practicing all-day mindfulness

1 Choose an object for your mindfulness practice, such as your breathing. "Aware of my inbreath I breathe in, aware of my outbreath I breathe out."

2 Choose a second object for your mindfulness practice, such as your body. "Aware of my body I breathe in, relaxing my body I breathe out."

3 Deeply enjoy practicing them together: "Aware of my inbreath I breathe in, aware of my outbreath, I breathe out. Feeling my whole body, I breathe in, relaxing my whole body, I breathe out."

4 Sink the energy and cultivate a sense of firmness, rootedness, groundedness: "Aware of my lower abdomen, I breathe in. Sinking the energy down into my lower abdomen, I breathe out. Rooting myself in my center of gravity, I breathe in. Feeling firm, rooted, grounded, I breathe out."

5 Stop and come back to this practice throughout the day, or whenever you remember.

the energy of violence to impose our views on others because the more we express our violence the more we confuse the situation and the worse it becomes. We need to communicate, we need to share, but we need to do so in a way that is peaceful and, in whatever decision we take, we need to think of the other person in a sensitive, compassionate way.

Who decides?

Our Institute has been going through exactly this process. For months, our brothers and sisters have been debating when to close and when to re-open, subject, of course, to official health restrictions and guidance.

When the coronavirus was first spreading in Europe, and before mandatory lockdown came to Germany, some brothers and sisters felt we should continue to offer courses and go out to help the community, while taking appropriate measures to protect ourselves.

They looked to the example of our teacher and his close collaborator Sister Chan Khong during the Vietnam War. Thay continued his peace activism despite an assassin's attempt to kill him with a grenade, and Sr. Chan Khong carried a wounded child to safety under a hail of bullets. Yes, it was possible we could be infected by the coronavirus. But Thay and Sr. Chan Khong risked being killed by grenades and bullets, yet this did not stop them from stepping out.

On the other side of the equation, brothers and sisters expressed valid concerns that if an outbreak of coronavirus did occur at EIAB, the Institute's reputation for safeguarding public health could be irreversibly damaged. Friends might be wary of coming to the Institute and we might be forced to close permanently.

Actually, to open or to close the Institute was not the question. Rather, the energy of the entire monastic community was manifesting in a certain direction to produce an outcome. We all contributed ideas and opinions to this necessary discussion. We gathered monthly to revisit the situation and consider our next steps. Finally, we agreed upon 15 July as the date for re-opening EIAB to the public, following the strict guidance of local authorities and shortly after the lifting of other restrictions. We also decided to go ahead with a visit to Munich and other cities to lead retreats, days of mindfulness, give public talks and engage in religious dialogue.

Perhaps these decisions could yet result in brothers and sisters in our community being infected. At present, that risk seems low, but should there be "a second wave" of coronavirus, perhaps the risk will rise. The point is we must all take decisions in our life and usually there is

some risk. We need to have courage and learn to accept the outcome whatever it is, knowing that we have taken that decision with all our mindfulness, attention and understanding, and with compassionate consideration for others.

So, who makes the decisions? Thay Phap An? Sr. Song Nghiem? Or some other brother or sister in the community? No, together – and influenced by our conscious and unconscious heritage³ – we make our decisions. Together, we as a family, we as a community, as a society, as a nation, we manifest the decisions that affect our lives. We express our view, our position, our opinion, then we open our hearts and embrace the views and concerns of all others. We need to be attentive, to listen and to come up with a compromise.

Lockdown, breakdown

It cannot have been easy for families to practice together during lockdown

because the energies of anger, attachment and confusion have had a chance to manifest strongly in each family member.

Normally, various family members leave home each morning to go to work. They have a chance to change their environment and get away from whatever block of energy causes pain and sorrow in relationships at home. But people in lockdown have been with each other 24 hours a day for months on end. This has uncovered a lot of underlying incompatibility, stress and hurt in families. Demand for marriage counselling has rarely been higher and divorces are reported to be on the rise.

If we practice coming back to ourselves to embrace the energy within us, if we learn to have a clear mind, learn to see that our view is only a limited view, that our opinion is only a limited opinion, that our version of reality is only a projection from our mind, we can open

Leading by example, Thay Phap An (pictured) wore a mask when speaking with EIAB monastics on the importance of strictly following the government's measures and guidance to protect the health of ourselves, each other, and the community during the pandemic.



our heart and embrace the views of all family members. We have a chance to get out of “lockdown syndrome” and to avoid a breakdown in close relationships. As a family, we have a chance to emerge from the pandemic stronger and more united.

Another powerful practice at this stressful time, is to cultivate happiness and joy at home. We have seen friends in Italy doing that beautifully. At the peak of lockdown there, when the coronavirus death toll was surging, Italians were out on their balconies in the evenings, singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, banging pots and pans, and cheering on health workers.

It is possible, too, to recognize that good things have happened because of lockdown, even if these turn out to be temporary. This spring, while humans went into enforced “hibernation” the planet was healing. Industrial pollution was down, air quality improved, and birdsong seemed louder than ever. For the first time in decades, it was possible in Kathmandu, Nepal’s capital, to see the snow-capped peaks of Mount Everest some 200 km away.⁴ In Venice, less boat traffic on the canals meant calmer, clearer water, and swans returned.⁵ As the world went quiet, scientists detected a significant reduction in the planet’s ambient seismic “noise” from the vibration of cars, trucks, trains and so on impacting the earth’s crust.⁶

We deserve happiness. We do not deserve sadness, hatred, anger, irritation, anxiety. So, we should worry less and make life as joyful and happy as possible. We should celebrate that friends have been cheering each other up during lockdown by sharing an outpouring of good-natured humor, jokes, and creativity on social media. And as lockdowns continue to ease in many places this summer, we should go to the beach, swim in the sea, and walk in the forest. But when we do, we should – as much as possible – remember to leave the virus behind and commit that time to cultivating happiness.

Towards the way out

Due to our confusion and inability to see the way out, fear gains a deep foothold

in us personally as well as collectively. With the pandemic, there is strong evidence that precautions such as frequent handwashing, self-isolating as much as possible, social distancing when out in public, and wearing a mask when around others, are effective at minimizing the risk of catching or spreading COVID-19.⁷ These practices cannot offer a complete solution but are good for each of us to follow as one pathway out of fear at this time.

On a bigger scale, the pandemic and its ongoing economic impacts have opened a Pandora’s box of challenges not just in homes and neighborhoods but within the global community. Some pre-pandemic norms of life may be gone for good. Floorboards we thought were firm under our feet may no longer be there.

This uncertainty has thrown the world off balance, as reflected in humanity’s unsettled collective energy at this time. But the issues that have been exposed – and aggravated – by the pandemic could yet tilt the world in a more positive direction. Wiser, happier outcomes could begin to manifest from our collective conscious if we learn to recognize and trust the evidence at hand, and to open our hearts to the collective good.

We could see a new era of cooperation, in which the international scientific community comes together out of necessity to develop a vaccine that is as available to the poor as it is to the rich. Cooperation of this non-discriminatory nature could also give a much-needed boost to collective action on climate change.

The pandemic could be a catalyst for overhauling and revitalizing institutions established in the aftermath of World War II to manage conflicts between powers and to advance peace, health and prosperity in the world, bodies such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization.

With a different perspective and change of heart as a human family, we may yet

pull back from the brink of a new Cold War, such as that which kept Berlin on a knife-edge for decades and which now threatens to embroil Hong Kong. We may also work towards ending proxy wars such as those which, over the past 70 years, devastated Korea, Vietnam and, now, Syria and Yemen.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of such challenges and to ask: “I am just one person, what can I do?” The answer is “a lot”.

By coming back to our self, calming the energy of fear within us, and transforming its roots of greed, hatred and confusion into the energy of understanding and compassion, we can step away from the collective energy of hatred and fear to be part of bigger solutions to the world’s problems.

Our teacher has said: “Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World.”⁸ We can be an oasis of peace that offers sanctuary for others. We can show that there is a way forward without blame and conflict. By cultivating non-fear, we can radiate peace and stability to anxious communities greatly in need of hope at this time.

From corona to karuna

During a recent Zoom sharing with friends in Italy, a question came up about *karuna*. Sr. Song Nghiem smiled when she heard the word because it sounds so like “corona”. Indeed, the difference between the two may be less than it seems. “Because of corona you can practice *karuna*”, is how Sr. Song Nghiem puts it. In other words, the coronavirus is a wonderful chance to show our compassion and to help others reduce their suffering.

So, the pandemic is an invitation to look at our fear, look at our world, and to see how, at every level, in every way, great or small, we can help to reduce suffering. In doing so, we continue the life’s work of our teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh. Like Thay, we can tap into an immense stream of powerful energy from spiritual and blood ancestors who cultivated courage and



With less economic activity generating less pollution around the world during the pandemic, it has been possible to enjoy some of the clearest skies in years in business centers such as Hong Kong, pictured looking down from Victoria Peak across to Kowloon.

strength to overcome danger and fear in their own lifetimes, and who had the aspiration to move humanity to a higher spiritual level.

Now nearly 94 years old, Thay stays actively in touch from his root temple in Hue, Vietnam. That is where, some eight decades ago, his spiritual journey began towards the revitalization of Vietnam's Buddhist heritage, a Buddhism which since the first century B.C. has helped to build Vietnam's culture, national identity and statehood, a Buddhism that engages deeply with people and society at the most stressful and painful of times, and a Buddhism we can apply, today, to ease suffering on a global scale.

The author wishes to express his deep gratitude to Sr. Song Nghiem for inspiring many aspects of this

article, and to Ms. Sarah Monks for her research, input, and careful editing.

Thay Phap An

- 1 On 23 January 2020, the Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, set "the Doomsday Clock" at 100 seconds to midnight, "closer than ever", citing global failures to adequately address two simultaneous existential dangers – nuclear war and climate change. <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/>. Accessed 30 June 2020.
- 2 At a media briefing on 29 June 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said: "... the hard reality is: this is not even close to being over. Although many countries have made some progress, globally the pandemic is actually speeding up." <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---29-june-2020>. Accessed 30 June 2020.

- 3 It includes our family and educational background, our past conditioning, our individual character etc. The latter is also shaped by the culture in which we are raised. For example, German people are widely admired for being disciplined, responsible citizens.

- 4 <https://www.ndtv.com/offbeat/kathmandu-gets-a-glimpse-of-mount-everest-from-200-km-away-pics-are-viral-2232748>. Accessed 30 June 2020.
- 5 <https://www.classicfm.com/music-news/coronavirus/venice-canals-clear-dolphins-swim-italy-lockdown/>. Accessed 30 June 2020.
- 6 <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/coronavirus-impact-earths-vibrations/> 8. April 2020. Accessed 30 June 2020.
- 7 <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>. Accessed 2 July 2020.
- 8 This is inscribed in our teacher's calligraphy over the stone gateway into EIAB.

Each
step
is
freedom



Accepting Death Without Fear or Regret

Thay Phap An shares how he practiced embracing fear and shock at the sudden passing of EIAB's beloved Thay Phap Luong in 2019. He explains how we can move beyond fear by accepting death as part of the beautiful manifestation of life in all its aspects.



While in Berlin on a teaching tour in spring last year, EIAB monastics made an excursion to the city's famed Gardens of the World. In the park's Korean garden, our late brother Thay Phap Luong shared a smile with two stone statues.

What happens, happens

An accident can happen at any time. When we first hear that something bad has happened to someone we love, we are full of fear. When our worst fears are realized, we go into shock. At that moment, we can benefit greatly from turning to the practice. I know this from personal experience.

As you may have learned from EIAB's website, on 24 July last year our brother Thay Phap Luong drowned in the Biggesee lake while on an outing with younger brothers. He, who decades earlier was rescued fleeing Vietnam on a sinking boat crowded with fellow refugees, died while attempting to save another brother

from drowning in Germany. It is a painful irony.¹

Thay Phap Luong was lovingly nicknamed "the Bonsai master" because he was skilled in cultivating and nurturing beautiful Bonsai plants.² He also offered EIAB's course on Bonsai. From childhood in Vietnam, he was acutely aware of the suffering caused by the war and cultivated a strong desire to alleviate it. After his rescue at sea, Thay Phap Luong gave himself a new name – Hoàng Mai Hòa Bình – which expressed his heartfelt wish for Vietnam to have true peace soon.

We have a right to suffer when we lose a person we love, especially in distressing circumstances. We have the right to be

fearful. We have the right to be sad. But we should practice in such a way that these negative emotions do not dominate, overwhelm, or paralyze us. The way out is to understand how our mind operates and how it continues not to accept reality. This is a training because we cannot do anything to change it. Reality is reality regardless of how we perceive it. What happens, happens.

Breathing through shock

The moment I was informed that Thay Phap Luong was missing, believed drowned, I asked for the brothers and sisters at the lake to gather immediately and begin praying for him by chanting, evoking the name of Avalokitesvara, the

Bodhisattva of Compassion. This was to offer the energy of compassion to Thay Phap Luong and to ourselves.

I then went to lie down and began to practice, coming back to my inbreath and my outbreath, feeling my whole body, relaxing my whole body to embrace the shock; to embrace the vibration of fear, anxiety and sadness in my whole body. I lay there breathing for some time. Then I informed Sister Song Nghiem and asked her to look up the location on the map so we could go there. While Sr. Song Nghiem did that, I continued the practices of praying, awareness of breathing, feeling my body and relaxing my body.

For the three days before Thay Phap Luong's body was recovered, EIAB monastics and friends practiced intensively sitting meditation, walking meditation, praying, and Touching the Earth. I continued practicing the following weeks, too, to embrace our community, to embrace myself and to embrace Thay Phap Luong. Sr. Song Nghiem and I also did everything we could to comfort Thay Phap Luong's family in Vietnam and to expedite visa applications so that his sisters could come to Germany for the funeral.³

So, there is fear, there is shock. We need to practice embracing these with all our love and compassion. And we need to accept what has happened. We accept it, and then we stand up and ask our self: "What can I do, now, to face the situation in the most proactive and healing way, not letting the situation overwhelm me, paralyze me, or carry me away? What can I do to help myself and others in this situation?"

Personal memories

I first met Thay Phap Luong when, as a lay person, he attended my retreat in Munich in November 1995. At the time, he lived and helped in a Buddhist temple there. He was inspired to become a monastic and visited Plum Village in France a few times. Six years later, he was

able to release his worldly affairs in order to be ordained.

He was still a heavy smoker so the community hesitated to ordain him. I volunteered to be his mentor and to help him give up smoking. I did not forbid him to smoke but encouraged him to practice "mindfulness of smoking". Every time he had the urge to smoke, he was asked to do so beyond the boundary of Upper Hamlet monastery. The idea was that, while walking there, he would practice mindfulness of his body's responses to the urge, and contemplate the effects of smoking on his body, including the potential danger to his health. Thay Phap Luong was very committed and managed

to overcome his smoking habit so that his ordination could go through.

Throughout the years, we enjoyed a good relationship marked by mutual respect. Thay Phap Luong always respected me as an elder monastic brother even though I am three years younger. I always respected him as an elder friend with many life experiences. At EIAB, he supported me and helped wholeheartedly to build the monastic Sangha of EIAB as well as doing his best to help Thay to fulfil his vision of establishing EIAB in Germany. I always loved him as a younger brother and supported him in his practice. And he always loved and supported me in my practice. We remain very connected.



At the Gardens of the World, Thay Phap Luong was keen to take the cable car to enjoy an aerial view. He is pictured above (right) with Thay Phap An.

Coping with fear after traumatic news

- 1** Move to a secure environment. Lie down on the floor.
- 2** Come back to your breathing and your body in the present moment. Relax your body.
- 3** Embrace the fear with all your love for yourself; try to be present for your fear. Do not run away from it by thinking and reasoning about the situation.
- 4** Say this mantra to yourself: "There is *always* a solution. There is *always* a way out. There is no dead end. Life is always beautiful. I am safe."
- 5** Once you feel calm, ask yourself: "What gives rise to these unpleasant feelings in me?" Begin to examine their roots.



While enjoying their Gardens of the World visit, EIAB monastics found delight in the Japanese cherry blossom trees in full bloom. From left to right: Sr. Song Nghiem, Sr. Trang Sang Soi, Thay Phap An, Thay Phap Luong and Sr. Trang Hien Ngoc.

Life is always beautiful

In a Dharma sharing not long after the accident, a friend said to me: “You say that life is always beautiful. But when there are accidents and all kinds of misfortune and suffering in the world, how can you mean that? Is it a contradiction?” No, because reality never consists of one aspect. There are always two aspects – a polarity – to anything that happens. For example: living and dying, suffering and happiness.

Often, we think we can live only with the “living” aspect of reality and want nothing to do with the “dying” aspect. We accept life and not death. But that is not possible. Where there is living there is also dying. They go together. We are alive right now, but some other form of life must have passed away in order for us to have received the energy to live.

So, when we say “life is always beautiful” it means we embrace all aspects of life,

the process of life and the process of death – the entire manifestation. And the manifestation of life is always beautiful. There is some element of dying and some element of living. But, together, it is life. And life – the wonderful dharma, the wonderful miracle – is always beautiful because it is a manifestation of these diametrically opposed aspects of life. It is the product of movement between the polarities of life and death. Thanks to this exchange of energy going on all the time, life manifests.

Accepting the whole reality

I have always loved my mother, father, and whole family deeply, so it was not easy for them when I moved far away to study, and even farther away when I decided to become a monk. At graduate school in Pasadena, California, I called home each week for five years to be “present” for them by telephone. After I went to Plum Village in France, and then here to EIAB, I

continued the weekly calls. Brothers and sisters at EIAB saw me do that every week.

When I heard that my Mom was dying of cancer, I went home to help care for her. In her final two months I did everything I could to make her happy and to be present. After my Mom passed away, Sr. Song Nghiem was concerned that I would suffer deeply. She thought I would crumble and be unable to stand on my two feet. But when I returned to EIAB, she was in for a surprise. Everything about me seemed to be normal. It was because, over the years, I have been contemplating birth and death. I have been contemplating life, the whole reality of life, and have learned to accept all its faces without being overwhelmed by sorrow, grief, and the feeling of being lost. Three years later, my father passed away, I went through the same process of learning to accept death as a part of the whole reality.



Most of us fear losing our beloved ones. Years later, we regret that we had conflicts with our parents while they were still alive. I am happy that I have no regrets over my interactions with my parents. During the years of living with them, I learned to open my heart to accept my parents the way they were, the way of their manifestation in life. There was no conflict.

In many of our relationships, we live in our own world. We construct our own world and do not feel connected to “the other”. This feeling of being separated is the ground for fear within us. This energy of fear causes us and the people around us a lot of suffering and does not allow us to accept the other’s death peacefully, without regret.

Learn to embrace life in its entirety. Learn to open our heart to accept the mani-

festations of others. If we do that, all fear that manifests from the constructs of our mind and in our relationships will end and we shall experience for ourselves the true nature of the mind, the nature of true emptiness.

Thay Phap An

- 1 The ship that rescued Thay Phap Luong in 1980 was called the Cap Anamur. It had been chartered by a German humanitarian organization which subsequently became known as Cap Anamur. The vessel Cap Anamur eventually rescued more than 10,000 Vietnamese boat people.
- 2 Thay Phap Luong created a wonderful Bonsai garden at EIAB. Sr. Chuan Nghiem continues his work of cultivating the Bonsai and has written a beautiful memoir of Thay Phap Luong. Please see related articles in this issue from page 105.
- 3 This became complicated because Thay Phap Luong had used his adopted name when registering in Germany. So, for the purposes of visa applications, there was a mismatch of names. Thankfully, with the sponsorship of Sr. Chan Khong and Plum Village, Thay Phap Luong’s sisters were finally granted visas enabling them to travel here via France.

Mindfulness in Times of Ill Health

**“Neither he nor his parents sinned ...
He was born blind so that the words of God might be revealed in him.” (John 9:3)**

The wonderful thing about ill health is that it gives us a chance to learn about our body. Before falling ill, we did not take the time to understand our body, and may have done things that have led to our present ill health. It is clear from the teachings of the Gospels we should not think of ill health as a punishment from God. We should not say, “Why do I have to bear this sickness? I have lived a healthy, wholesome life!” Rather than blaming God for letting this happen, we take it as an opportunity for the glory of God to be realised, which means an opportunity to heal our whole being: body, mind, and spirit.

Our body is a truly wonderful instrument. We hesitate to use the word “instrument” because instruments are manmade, and our body is something that has evolved over millions of years: very subtle, constantly changing and adapting to its environment. When we fall sick, we do not need to lose faith in our body. In

fact, we can find a deeper faith in it than the faith we had before. That faith comes when we experience our body healing itself. We have all observed how when we cut our finger, it will heal itself in a wonderful way. We just need to keep it clean and still. Sometimes it is best to do nothing, in other words, just to rest. Like a sick animal will lie down in a quiet place and let its body take care of itself. At the very least on falling ill, we do not immediately engage in all kinds of activity. We take the opportunity to rest as much as possible, both physically and mentally, giving our body a chance to heal.

We learn the subtle intricacies of our body and how every part is inter-related. A body is the most wonderful example of inter-relationship. It also inter-is with the mind and the spirit. Our ill health could have begun with stress, fear, anxiety, and sorrow. We did not know how to handle these emotions and they cause blockages

in the energies that flow through our body. We may have eaten the wrong food, failed to exercise our body, or exercised it in the wrong way. The pollution of the environment by human beings is also a major cause of ill-health. Now we have a chance to listen to our body and let it tell us what it really needs. We can talk to our heart and the other organs of our body. As we lay our hand on the part of the body where the organ lies, we ask the organ what we can do to help it, and if we are still enough, the answer will come from an intuitive wisdom deep within. Sending our love and our mindful breathing to a part of our body that is in trouble, after ten or twenty minutes, nearly always brings some relief.

It is true that the technology of modern western medicine has saved many lives, but we can learn not to over-rely on doctors and nurses. We can see that the doctor and the patient inter-are. The truth is that the body knows how to heal itself, and the doctor is there to empower the self-healing in the patient. We could say that the doctor does 50 per cent and the patient has to do his or her 50 per cent. The good news is that every moment is a moment of change in our body, and so can be a moment of healing. Cells are constantly being born and dying. Mindfulness of the body and of the feelings is the key, because it is an awareness of what is happening in us from moment to moment. With some help and advice from a good doctor, we can begin to heal our self.

We can be aware of what is going right in our body, not just what is going wrong. Just as in your garden there may be one or two trees that are sick, but many other trees are healthy. You can





still enjoy the healthy trees. In times of sickness you can call to mind your ancestors and relatives who have lived to a ripe old age and remember that those long-life genes are also in you.

In recent times we hear about integrative medicine that heals body, mind and soul

together. Mindfulness becomes the key in this kind of healing. We are mindful of our body, our feelings, perceptions and emotions. Mindfulness of our body means we become aware where our energy is blocked in our body. We can do this on our own and call on the help of the health-care professional if needed. Then we become aware of our feelings. They can be pleasant or painful. While we dwell in mindfulness we are not carried away by the pleasure or the pain. If we recognize the pleasant feeling is healing us, we keep it in our awareness as long as possible. If the pleasant feeling is causing us excitement or anxiety, we use our breathing to calm it. We are mindful of our perceptions, our view of the world: whether it is optimistic or pessimistic and whether it leads to loving kindness or aversion. When we recognize a thought or perception that heals us, we keep it in our awareness as long as possible. When we recognize a thought or perception

that causes us pain, we are careful not to keep thinking that thought. We are mindful of our emotional state and how it is influencing our health. We recognize anxiety and stress and how they are directly responsible for unease and discomfort in our body. We do our best to breathe and walk mindfully in order for the parasympathetic nervous system to operate. This kind of mindfulness is both preventative and curative medicine.

Chan Duc/Sr. Annabel

Excerpt from the book: Mindfulness and Christianity.



Simply Being There – for Me, for Others and for the Earth

Twenty years ago I arrived in Plum Village for the first time. The moment when Thich Nhat Hanh first entered the Dharma hall is still alive in me; something in me knew that I had arrived. Tears of deep joy rolled gently over my cheeks. I am home – in me, in a place touched by his presence.

At that time, I could not guess how fundamentally this arrival would change my entire life. Step by small step.

From my first retreat I took the intention to meditate every morning, as I sensed that this would be a source of stability for me. So every morning I sat down on my cushion – without even asking if I wanted to or not, whether it did me good, whether I was doing it right. I just sat – and I'm still sitting. Today, I sit in the certainty that the most elemental aspects of my life will not be changed by thinking about them, but in the silence of meditation, through a connection with something bigger.

Following the next retreat there was porridge at home for breakfast; as I became more aware of the effect food had on me, my eating habits began to gradually change. After this, I would always take home a little something from each retreat, even if it was only the conviction that something small would change, although I didn't know exactly what.

Looking back today, I see that all these small changes have formed a new whole that is healing for me and others, and creates stability.

In 2001, I received transmission of the Five Mindfulness Trainings in Plum Village, and was given the Dharma name: „Polar Star of the Heart“. This name also contained an aspiration or task, which was not clear to me at that time. There was a sangha in Munich, and Thay attaches great



importance to being part of a community. At the beginning, I only went to the mindfulness days; the ambience seemed too "German" to me, I missed the internationalism of Plum Village. Then I noticed how much good it did me to meditate with others, so I started going to the Sangha evenings too – but it took a few more years before I realized that I can only change something by I actively participating. So I started to organize Sangha evenings, silent days, days of mindfulness ... And in 2014, at the transmission of the Fourteen Mindfulness

Trainings, I received the name "True Earth of Great Compassion" – a new name and a new possibility to develop.

The five and later the fourteen Mindfulness Trainings seem to me like a river that slowly seeps into all areas of my daily life. It is the small sentences that make a big difference; in my daily life they remind me of my direction: that I resolve all conflicts no matter how small, that truth is found in life, that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I

already have more than enough conditions to be happy ...

Thanks to these years of practice many of my inner wounds have been able to heal, wounds that I otherwise would not even have been aware of.

The first years of my practice were dominated by my relationships with my family, with the difficult relationship with my mother and her premature death. It was only by becoming aware and accepting of my pain that healing and change, understanding and love became possible. I tried to understand, and looking into the causes I discovered the legacy of the Second World War and its emotional aftermath within me – in the way I had grown up, and what had been unconsciously passed down to me. I learned the power of touching the earth, the deep connection with an earth that absorbs and transforms everything. I often had the feeling the earth brought me into contact with the stream of my ancestors, with 'irrational' events, which could now come to rest and heal.

And then came the point, when it was alright; my story was no longer a drama, and I no longer had any wish to tell it. But then a completely new question arose: who was I without my story? What did I have to share? Because I didn't have any drama to share, I no longer received the warmth of heartfelt compassion, and I frequently felt isolated, misunderstood, and ultimately insecure.

What kept me going was my deep faith in the Dharma, in the Practice. I could see clearly that although I had already removed mountains of suffering within me, there were innumerable others waiting.

It became ever clearer that it was about cultivating a clear mind and an open heart. I started to observe my mind, how it always wanted something, or didn't want something, or wasn't aware just what was going on – how suffering was being created for me and others, because the world didn't correspond to my ideas of how it should be. And I became more aware of my body, my resistance, the

reactions I felt in response to what was happening around me.

Breathe in, breathe out, be here. It is so easy and yet sometimes so difficult.

Body and mind have become my training ground. I try to be honest with myself, to be aware of and accept what truly is. To be loving and caring towards myself. To give space to everything within me and to allow life to simply unfold. Give up control – accept everything as part of life.

I no longer have to exert myself to do everything well, correctly or perfectly; things can be as they are, and my

practice is to deal with them skilfully and wisely.

The more I do this and the more caring I can be towards myself, the more my heart opens to the suffering of others. I can allow the suffering to be there and to hold it, create space for acceptance and healing. This a wonderful gift of the practice. Not looking away, but rather seeing what is there and acting, doing what I can

*Simply being there, for me,
for others and for the earth.*

Sabine, True Earth of Great Compassion, practices with the Sangha in Munich



“And I Ask: ‘What Can I Do To Help?’”

“In Plum Village, there is no need to hurry.” – I can still clearly visualise the scene today. On our first morning there, it was in the mid-1980s, my friend and I are hurrying to the place where Sister Chan Kong and some others are waiting by the car, which will take us to meditation in Upper Hamlet. We were a bit late and didn’t want the others to have to wait for us, so that perhaps we would all be late for the meditation. As Sister Chan Kong saw us rushing towards her, she gestured with her hands in a way we interpreted as meaning we should

hurry even more. Later, we learned that she meant the exact opposite. When, out of breath, we reached the group, Sister Chan Kong said that sentence that I have never forgotten.

That summer in Plum Village I learned that the problem was not being late, but rushing and hurrying not to be late. This was the complete opposite of my habit energies, and my values and beliefs („it is impolite to make others wait“, „you have to be on time in the meditation hall“). Even today – decades later – I often tend

to rush to get from A to B, to run to get to meditation on time. But in Plum Village, it is all about calming down, so that the mind can become clearer again. But that is often very difficult, as our heads are still full of what was happening before Plum Village and our bodies are tense. And even in these recent weeks and months, because I have been meditating a lot with others via zoom, I sometimes experience a restlessness before calming down: the computer doesn’t start up fast enough; I might not be in the virtual meditation room in time.



Foto: David Nelson

But I should know better. I have heard it so often, read it, translated it, but also directly experienced how important it is to slow down, to pause, and come to a halt. And that life can only be experienced and lived in the present moment and not at some point in the future, which I need to reach quickly in order to stop there. As Thay has often said, our appointment with life is only possible in the here and now, and if we rush carelessly through our lives we miss it. One of the books I particularly love is “In the Now” because in it Thay explores the mystery of the now very deeply. When I read his words, I often feel I am sinking into the depth and breadth of this now, and I feel how true it is that the present moment is, as he writes, more beautiful than any dream, and everything I have ever searched for can be found in it. But mostly my experience of time is of a different sort, and I can see myself all too clearly as one of those theology students who years ago took part in a social-psychological experiment. We weren’t told the real reason for the experiment.

Some of us were told to give a lecture on the parable of the Good Samaritan, others on the career prospects of theologians. Some of us were told we had plenty of time to prepare our lecture and get to the building where it was to be given. Others were told to go straight away, and that they would have some time once they reached the venue. The third group was told they would have to hurry in order to start their talk on time. Near the door there was a man lying on the floor, obviously in need of help. He was part of the experiment. Those who had been told they had enough time to reach the lecture hall usually stopped to see what help the man needed. But those who had to hurry to get to their lecture on time usually ran heedlessly past him, regardless of whether the subject of their lecture was the story of the Good Samaritan, i.e. whether they had previously thought about the situation that now confronted them, or whether they had the alternative topic that had nothing whatsoever to do with the situation. The majority of them said they had seen the man, but had not

given any thought to whether he needed help, and if so, what kind of help – because they were in a hurry.

Even if they had to do it quickly, someone very schooled in mindfulness would certainly move from A to B with a high degree of awareness of what is going on in and around them, and would stop if they saw someone is in need. But how quickly do the rest of us, who are not so deeply rooted in the practice and driven by our habit energies, get stuck in tunnel vision, despite our good intentions, so that we don’t see the suffering (or the beauty either). Or, at the very periphery of our vision, we blurredly see some suffering coming into view – this could be something external, or also something internal – and then we speed up or find something to busy ourselves with. We

don’t want to be confronted with the question of how to react, how to deal with the situation in front of us, how we could help. We would rather avoid the question.

This is by no means a simple question. A short story from the Chinese Chan-Tradition illustrates the point:

“One day the layman Pang and his daughter Lingzhao were in town to sell bamboo baskets. As he stepped off a bridge, Pang stumbled and fell. Lingzhao, who saw it, ran to her father and threw herself to the ground.

‘What are you doing there?’, cried Pang.

‘I saw you fall, so I’m helping you’, replied Lingzhao.



‘Luckily no-one noticed it’, said Pang.“

Because of their devout practice, humour, profound conversations and deep realization, the Pang family has become very well known. There are many stories about them, especially about father and daughter, who were often out together to earn a living for the family. This story is about what help is and what our attitude to help is, or should be. The daughter, when she sees the father fall, does not run to help him up, pretending to know what the father needs. Instead, she literally puts herself in his shoes, is on an equal footing with him, empathetic, inseparable. And fortunately, as the father realizes, no one saw it. After all, no one was there: no daughter who creates an identity for herself by helping, no father who becomes an object of help.

Thay writes in one of his poems:

“I am back. Someone is singing.

My hand touches the old gate,

and I ask: ‘What can I do to help?’

The wind replies:

‘Smile. Life is a miracle.

Be a flower.

Happiness is not built of bricks and stones.”

Ursula Richard,, publisher, author, translator has been a Dharma practitioner for many years and has translated many of Thich Nhat Hanh’s books.



Arriving in the Now

I have arrived, I am home



At my age, anniversaries start to pile up. The things of 20, 30, 40 years ago, successful or less successful, find themselves being honoured and remembered. Many of the older events in particular seem like something from a distant, bygone age; things that appeared important then, seem trivial and insignificant today. Whenever I look back, I become oppressively aware of the transience of life, the irretrievable loss of the finite moment.

A glance back at the freshness of youth makes my heart heavy. I recall how often I struggled with myself, was dissatisfied, hoped and waited for successful breakthroughs, but was rarely in harmony with the flow of life. Then, I viewed life as a series of threatening battlefields where everything was a matter of winning or losing. I saw myself on a restless journey to a distant destination. Today was only ever a warm-up for tomorrow; I was more concerned with attaining than with being.

Today, I regret not having enjoyed the time back then more; frequently I wish I had dwelled longer in those moments of the past that, unfortunately, will now never return. There were many moments of joy, and I don't regard the story of my life as painful or dark. On the contrary, there was much that was good, and with hindsight there is little I regret. Never-

theless, today I realize how narrowly focused I was, how little attention I paid to the happiness, abundance and beauty surrounding me.

I had already passed 30 when I had a moment of insight. Normally, when I transferred unfinished daily tasks, which had often been on my list for days, from one page of my to-do list to the next, I felt a deep sense of frustration. However, that evening, looking at all those things still to do, I found myself hoping that life would always have tasks and challenges to give me. I realized that life is not at all about getting things done, about having finally worked through my list.

A little later I encountered the Vietnamese Master Thich Nhat Hanh for the first time. Entering the meditation hall I immediately noticed a beautifully written calligraphy: "I have arrived, I am home". I hadn't even thought about arriving. I saw myself at the beginning of a spiritual journey with him as my new teacher. Instead I received the message: you have arrived! Although the setting did not remind me much of home, I really felt I had arrived. A deep, peaceful relaxation and calm spread throughout my body and reminded me how I felt on the evening of my insight.

Throughout my years of practice with Thich Nhat Hanh, my arrival has become increasingly solid. I discovered a practice of mindfulness, which taught me to slow down and pause during my everyday activities, to become aware of what is alive within me, to reflect on what is hidden beneath or behind my foaming emotions instead of blindly following my stimulus-response pattern.

I developed a new perspective on my life, and no longer wanted to miss the wonderful moments it offers. I realized

that I am in the middle of a wonderful symphony, that is perfect in every phase, and now I no longer wait for it to reach the end and its supposed climax.

My focus is on the now; the baby doesn't have to become a toddler to be perfect, and the toddler does not need to become an adolescent, and the adolescent an adult, to have a happy and contented life. On the contrary, don't miss your life, as the Korean Zen master Seung Sahn always used to say. When people told him about their distant goals in life, he would answer with the sobering statement: "We are all on our way to the cemetery" and then burst into resounding laughter.

I have been teaching at my school for over ten years and experience the annual comings and goings of the pupils. Every year it is time to let go of last year's pupils and welcome this year's. The teachers only have this one year with their pupils, no continuation. No matter how good the school year may have been, it simply remains one year among many, there is nothing more to achieve. The cyclical nature of life is particularly apparent in the life of a teacher, and it is important to be as present as possible in every phase, and not to miss it through ignorance, stress or distraction.

Coming and going occurs in every moment of our lives. Thich Nhat Hanh said that rebirth takes place continuously throughout our lives. Our life consists of a series of moments that endlessly succeed each other. One moment unfolds, then dies, a new one is born and immediately passes away.

When I see my life like this, then every moment is unique and precious and invites me to be fully present in as many of these wonderful moments as possible. It is a presence of the heart that focuses on what is nourishing and healing, and

perceives the fullness and beauty of life, even in the most difficult and stressful moments. For me this entails a 'yes' to life that comes from deep within my heart, and allows me to open fully to the here and now without hesitation or timidity.

This attitude puts an end to the restless and hectic rush forward, the struggle and hope for a better future. It is a life in which I no longer divide the moments up into meaningful and non-meaningful, but rather give my full attention to every moment and am fully present for it. It is about being, not about achieving! In Zen it means: "Live every moment, as though you were experiencing it for the first time." In the slightly more dramatic version: "Live every moment as though it were your last!"

To end, I would like to focus on an inner attitude that is implicit in the mantra: „I have arrived, I am home“. For me, being at home means being at peace, feeling safe. 'I am home' means to be at peace now, in this moment, regardless of where I happen to physically be. Then it becomes possible to be at home even when we find ourselves in situations that are not peaceful. One reason I was so

touched by this saying was Thich Nhat Hanh's experience of the Vietnam War. His answer to this horror was, and is, a message of peace. During the war he was one of those who demanded an immediate end to the war under the banner: „Peace now!“ At the same time, he showed everyone, whether in war or not, a way to cultivate peace now. This path begins very gently and simply with a smile of gentleness and warmth for ourselves, our fellow human beings, and the path our lives have taken.

I would therefore like to end with the words of a calligraphy by Thich Nhat Hanh, which hangs in our meditation room and has accompanied me over the decades:

“Peace begins with your beautiful smile.”

Werner Heidenreich

(By courtesy of „Ursache & Wirkung“)



The Effect of Unconditional Love

A while ago, I had an interesting discussion with Thay Phap An, the Director of the Buddhist Centre here in Waldbröl. I said to him:

“If we always do our best and give everything, without expecting anything in return, then we always get everything.”

On reflection, this sentence, which I have been carrying around inside me for a very long time, made something new clear to me. The inner attitude, which this sentence expresses, makes us one with the universe. We nourish the universe and the universe nourishes us. We are connected to an infinite number of solutions, dimensions, possibilities for support, ... We are one, one with the infinite in and around us. In this sense, I feel deep friendship towards the monks and nuns of the EIAB as a whole. They and the friends of the EIAB are all part of this infinite cosmos and the boundless possibilities that are there for us. Let us continue to shape the present and the future together for the benefit of all. May every moment help us establish this contact to the infinite universe and allow us to be part of the whole. We are one. How wonderful.

We can experience this infinity when, for example, singing mantras. I often feel this way on such occasions and can also discover this quality of the infinite in uplifting moments in concerts, on walks in nature and also in my work. I open myself to these qualities and then discover them in all areas of life. Why is this important? For me it creates access to new solutions to the tasks I am allowed to fulfil. Fulfilled tasks create fulfilment within me, independent of external recognition. Simply fulfilling a task is a source of satisfaction.

When I think of the task of redesigning and rebuilding the Buddhist centre EIAB, European Institute of Applied Buddhism in Waldbröl, which is approx. 66m long, with 4 floors, a listed building with surprises waiting for me at every turn, this awareness that I can draw on two sources of power from the divine universe at every moment was very supportive. There were so many moments when I could have despaired. I just didn't give room to this growing despair. In those moments I always said to myself, „Frank, you are meant to do fulfil this task. Now show yourself worthy of it“. At the same time I always asked for support by inwardly saying the following: „I say yes to this challenge and I ask the divine universe for support“. My teacher, Daya Mullins (The Middle Way - Daya Mullins Foundation) says

“When we say yes, the universe gives us the energy we need.”

That is exactly what I have experienced time and again. Especially during the work on the EIAB renovation I was always surprised by the support I received. Although work for the EIAB took up at least 100 % of my time, I still had time for other tasks and, thanks to the staff in my office, I earned considerably more than in the years before.

This was also the case with earlier tasks for The Middle Way - Daya Mullins Foundation. As the work at the EIAB progressed, so the support became more and more apparent. When I asked friends of the EIAB to help me sweep up the dust at the beginning of the demolition work, hardly anyone was interested. So I swept up the dust regardless and disposed of it so that the craftsmen would have a decent place to work in. I wanted to be a role model, also because it led to cost savings, among other things. At the beginning there were even people who

opposed this voluntary work. However, I didn't let this stop me, even though it really hurt me inside and I felt left alone at times. This led to a few friends of the EIAB coming along to help me with this work. Everyone was surprised how meaningful voluntary work could be. The very same people then attracted others and we increasingly became a community, a Sangha. Rainer and Lotar from Cologne were especially supportive. They helped a lot to keep my spirits up. Wonderful friendships developed with many touching moments. More and more, I felt how I was also receiving support on a very practical level. Without the help of these friends of the EIAB, who have also become my friends, it would have been much more difficult for me to complete the task I was set. This also made clear that the tasks we are given are never an individual matter: they can only be completed well by a community, a sangha. The only important thing is that there is always one person to keep the flag flying and give directions. That is exactly what I was there for. It's not down to me that the renovation work was a success: we managed it together along with many craftsmen.

Looking back at those who ostensibly opposed voluntary help, I can see quite clearly that it was these very people who really encouraged me. They reinforced my determination to do the right thing and helped me develop the stamina to do it. Of these, one of them had even recommended me to the EIAB for this job years before. What does this mean? There are no adversaries.

“It is solely up to us, how we deal with obstacles. Whether we choose to regard them as a compliment to our potential ...”

... and a challenge to learn something new, or do we see the obstacles as insurmountable?

table and fail even before we have even started? In my view, obstacles are there to be overcome. We can really learn from them. Today, now that the work on the 2nd and 3rd phase of construction at the EIAB has been completed and the task accomplished, I can say with gratitude that I have learned a lot and gained a lot, especially new friends who accept me as I am. This also makes it clear that we can only ever be ourselves, and trying to create a pretend identity can never help. I have always shown myself as I am, and this has resulted in the people involved in this process having trust and being prepared to help.

At one particular moment in the presence of Thay Phap An, the Director of the EIAB, when I looked particularly worn out, he told me that I am a good architect and an intelligent man. I replied that I was no star architect but certainly of average intelligence with a healthy dose of common sense. He has a doctorate in mathematics, and as a former assistant to my mathematics Professor Bodo Liebe, I have a great deal of respect for that. The honourable Thay Phap An then responded that we are all of average intelligence and asked if I understood

what he meant. Of course, I hadn't understood and he explained as follows:

"If we were to put a point on a line, that begins in the infinite and ends in the infinite, to mark our level of intelligence, what difference would it make if it was a bit further left or a bit further right. So, we are all of average intelligence."

At this moment I was so moved that tears came to my eyes; I felt a direct contact with this infinity. We are part of the whole and together we are the whole. Here there is no coming and no going. Together we are always being.

People have walked this path before us, prepared it for us, today we walk this path and tomorrow others will walk the path that we have prepared for them. It goes on like this forever. We are in contact with our ancestors and with our descendants. We are always in contact with everything that is. Everything else is illusion, misconceptions that only lead to suffering. In this awareness of „being one with everything“ lies redemption, fulfilment. It is precisely in this understanding that we find a way to complete the tasks

that each of us has been given, something I will return to a little later.

In my view, Henry Purcell provides a wonderful description of this connection in his composition: "O solitude, my sweetest Choice". This loving oneness, aloneness as oneness with the universe, is an expression of devotion and trust that more is possible than an individual can achieve alone. There are counter-tenors who touch infinity with their interpretation of this piece. Around the time of last New Year's Eve celebration, I had a particularly moving experience during a Mantra Singing Seminar by Sa-tyaa and Pari. We sang Sanskrit mantras for at least 3 hours a day. So the wisdom of these mantras penetrated deep into my being. Through my own singing, I was given the chance to express my own devotion to the infinite wisdom contained in the mantras. In personal sharings with other participants, especially very young people and also with Pari himself, it became a little bit clearer to me on a deeper level that it is not me who can achieve something.

I can take on many things and achieve a great deal, perhaps even all I set out to



do. The question is whether the result makes me happy, brings me peace and contributes to healing? Every egotistical goal can be achieved; however, it will not lead to happiness, peace and healing. On the contrary, it creates suffering. I can say this from my own experience, because, some time ago, every year I would write down my vision for the coming year, what I wanted to achieve and how I wanted to achieve it. Everything I wrote down I have achieved. Then there came a point when I realized that this alone did not lead to happiness, and much more would be possible if I let the „divine beings up there“ show me what is truly meaningful and fulfilling. The more I trusted in this, the more I became part of wonderful solutions, including the peace room (former monastery church in Gerode) of The Middle Way – Daya Mullins Foundation and also the 2nd and 3rd phase of construction at the EIAB. All these

projects are and were meaningful. The peace room in Gerode is still under construction.

This mantra course with Satyaa and Pari encouraged me to listen and trust more in what „those up there“ want and to see myself as their tool. This does not mean that I no longer have free will. It means rather that I can decide for the only thing that is truly meaningful, the fulfilment available in the here and now of the eternal moment. The more I trust in this spiritual guidance, the more possibilities arise. This is exactly what makes me more of a magnet for really interesting tasks and it becomes clear that I am also meant to fulfil them. This makes me humble and grateful before creation and the Creator.

“I am willing to always do my best without the expectation that my work will bear fruit.”

With this I invite all the support into my life that is necessary to fulfil my tasks. We always get exactly what we need. If we give everything, we are given everything. From my own experience I can say that I am becoming richer and richer on all levels. At the same time, it also means that I am given more and more responsibility for the people around me. We are always nurtured.

To end, a little anecdote: A few years ago, I was plagued by migraines once again. The only thing that helped was to move slowly. So, every time I got a migraine, I did walking meditation. During one walking meditation I passed a tree. The question popped up:

“Can a tree ever be private?”

Then, and to some extent now, It was important to me to have a private place where I could be alone. A tree doesn't have this luxury. It gives itself selflessly at



all times. It gives oxygen and shade, sometimes birds nest in it or it even bears fruit. It always gives everything, with no ifs and buts. Today, I can say that I no longer want to be private. Just like this tree, I want to give everything all the time. The sun always shines on this tree and the rain nourishes it unconditionally. In just the same way, in every moment, I am always connected to an eternal source of nourishment through the divine. What more do I want?

What does this mean for the upcoming projects at the EIAB and the The Middle Way – Daya Mullins Foundation, the construction of a meditation hall for 500 people at the EIAB, and the completion of the peace and meeting room in Gerode Monastery, The Middle Way? Here we are all called upon to give our best at all times. It is interesting to note, for example, that the completion of the 2nd and 3rd phases of construction at the EIAB, with, among other things, individual seminar rooms for up to 120 participants each, was not sufficient to accommodate the approx. 400 people who came for the New Year's retreat. This is a clear sign that we need to start with the meditation hall in the near future. If we give everything that we have, then we will succeed. If we give our energy, our know-how and our financial support, Thich Nhat Hanh's vision will become reality. And I am convinced that we will succeed in turning it into reality. We are already in touch with the fulfilment of this task. We are not separated from the future – the future in which the meditation hall for 500 people together with the necessary toilets, cloakrooms and foyer is already complete.

The same applies to the planned hall of peace and meeting space within the old church walls in the grounds of the former Benedictine monastery in Gerode (northern Thuringia) for The Middle Way – Daya Mullins Foundation

strength needed to enable this vision to materialize."

Together we are strong, together we are more than the sum of each individual involved in this project. Let us give up our wish for privacy and allow ourselves the luxury of being part of a community, a sangha. It is up to each and every one of us to connect to the energy of the universe

"When we say yes, then the universe gives us the energy we need."

Sometimes I think this sentence was created just for me. This is, of course, nonsense. But over the last few years it has accompanied and guided me. May the power of this sentence further strengthen and inspire us all. Love is the source of this energy in action, love in ourselves, love for ourselves, and love for everything around us. To express our potential is love in action, and it becomes visible through its expression. This is the effect of love.

I am very grateful to all those who have accompanied me on my path and who continue to do so. You have helped me to become what I am. I am who I am, who I am. That means I don't have to become anything else, I can already be everything right now. The question which inspires me is: Can I say at the end that I have given everything, was I able to give expression to my potential at all times?

In this spirit I wish us all a blessed 2020 and the strength to master all the tasks that life gives us, so that we may also nourish all those around us.

In deep gratitude to each of you who reads these lines.

Frank Jungjohann-Feltens



"If we think the seemingly impossible yet nonetheless make ourselves available as instruments of the divine, then we will receive all the



Breathing

Breathing in, I calm body and mind.

Breathing out, I smile.

Dwelling in the present moment

I know this is the only moment.



Sangha in Times of Corona

Zoom-Experiences of Zoom at the 'Quelle des Mitgeföhls' (Source of Compassion) Sangha in Berlin

Since the lockdown in mid-March 2020, due to the Corona crisis, we have moved our live meditation evenings at the 'Quelle des Mitgeföhls' Sangha in Berlin into the Zoom dimension. Thanks to the help of a Sangha friend with experience of Zoom, who first allowed us to use his own Zoom account and then connected us to 'Plumline', the zoom-line that Plum Village makes available to sanghas, we have not had to miss a single evening: we have reserved a room on 'Plumline' for our Tuesday and Friday Sangha evenings.

At the beginning it helped a great deal that a Sangha friend took over responsibility for technical support, welcomed everyone and provided an introduction to the Zoom evening, so that the facilitator

was free to focus wholly on the evening programme.

Even though I don't have a great affinity for computer technology, Zoom was an immediate source of joy. It was wonderful that we could all meet at this virtual level, and see and hear each other. We received a lot of thanks from the participants for setting up this connection for Sangha friends.

During the Zoom evenings, we considered the following topics:

- How can I remain in contact with the wonders of life in times of crisis, and be thankful for everything that is present in this moment?

- How can I retain my stability and remain fresh?

- How can I deal with feelings of helplessness, resignation, despair, sadness, anger, fear and anxiety?

- How can I nourish my compassion, my joy and my sense of ease?

The evenings were structured similarly to live Sangha evenings:

Introduction to the topic of the guided meditation, followed by a guided meditation (30 minutes)

- Walking meditation together, everyone in their own rooms (10 minutes).



- Mindful movements (10 minutes)
- Still meditation (15 minutes)
- Reading a text by Thay (5-10 minutes)
- Dharma sharing/break-out-sessions in small groups (3-4 people)
- Dharma sharing with the whole Sangha
- At the end someone sings a practice song and everyone sings along, but with their computers muted, otherwise we end up with a cacophony due to the differing internet speeds.

Afterwards anyone who wants can stay in the Zoom-room, where we can just sit together normally, as though in the 'Quelle' library with a cup of tea, and chat informally.

We also still have 'Loomio', a virtual pin board, which allows us to share or pass on information.

In the first weeks we read many of the stories in Thay's book 'At Home in the World'. Each time we ask a different Sangha friend to read out a story. Some of these stories tell of how Thay or other people dealt mindfully and compassionately with difficult situations during the Vietnam War.

These stories are very inspiring. After this we looked at passages from the 14 or 5 Mindfulness Trainings. One evening a Sangha friend presented the 4th Mindfulness Training, 'Loving Speech and Deep Listening' and gave a lively account of the efforts she had made to deal mindfully with a very challenging situation.

Then, over Easter, I gave my first retreat via Zoom. One Sangha friend who had already registered for the Easter retreat at the 'Quelle', gave me a lot of encouragement to hold the retreat. She most definitely wanted to have 'her' Easter retreat, and it gave me a lot of joy to create a concept and then carry it through. Every morning and afternoon we had a two hour Zoom-Session with guided meditations, dharma

talk and sharing. I made texts such as the 'loving kindness meditation' for the early morning, in addition to the 5 contemplations for mealtimes and an audio deep relaxation.

Some people reported that the Zoom evenings and the Retreat have meant that they are now better able to practice mindfulness within their own four walls. Since the Zoom evenings they find it easier to bring the Dharma into their own homes. As a result, the chances of practicing walking and sitting meditation at home in everyday life have increased.

It is often the case that people come to the meditation evenings at the centre once or twice a week, practice there with others in the Sangha and succeed in bringing body and mind together and developing peace and ease. However, they often find it difficult to practice mindful walking and sitting when they are at home. Thanks to the Zoom evenings they can also 'conquer' the practice at home.

For me it is also touching to experience the others so closely via the screen. During the live-meditation in the Centre, we sit in two or four rows with our bodies facing the wall or window and I don't get to see anyone's face. A Zoom evening is different: we all see each other's faces (some turn the video picture off during the meditation), and especially in the small groups a very special closeness arises.

Once I also found it interesting that two Sangha members, who 'didn't find it so easy with each other' were very close to each other on the screen, i.e. they had the distance from each other they needed at that moment but were still in the same virtual room. In reality they would not have sat so close to each other, but Zoom just allotted them a space and made this proximity possible.

An advantage of the Zoom meeting for some was also that they could attend more often, or at all; in Berlin many have to travel a long way to get here. Many of us also show our appreciation for the

practice together through generous donations to the Centre.

Our willingness to also practice with technical problems was also put to the test, for example, a Sangha friend from Bernburg had to practice with the poor network in her rural area, and that together with the entire Sangha. Together we could either resolve technical difficulties or at least observe them with an open heart.

Some find not being in touch with the energy of others and being able to respond to it difficult, or they miss the conversations in the corridors, the library and the garden before and afterwards. Others miss the peaceful atmosphere of the meditation centre.

One Sangha friend emphasises the positive effect of the online evenings: 'It is so wonderful to see us all laughing together at the same time. That wasn't possible beforehand.'

For me, a very special Zoom experience came when I was invited by a Sangha friend from Turkey to structure their evening. This Turkish sangha is completely new and it was their second Zoom meeting, with around 168 people. I used a short talk to give them an introduction to metta-meditation, practiced walking meditation in their own rooms with them, followed by a still meditation and introduction and Dharma-sharing in the whole Sangha. E. translated what I said sentence by sentence from English into Turkish, I could tell just by the sound of her voice how she took in my energy and passed it on. It made me very happy to see how much interest these mostly young people, above all women, had for the Dharma.

Annabelle Zinser, True Fragrance of the Mindfulness Trainings, in collaboration with Maya Brandl and Janina Egert, Berlin

Feeling Connected

Zoom Sangha in Munich

The screen is plastered with small tiles, and more and more new ones are joining ... Tiles with pictures of people who know each other from our weekly meditation evenings, others who come from further afield, some who we have not seen for a very long time ... a feeling of togetherness develops that we couldn't have imagined was possible.

Breathing in – breathing out – smile – feel the connection across the great distances.

Since the lockdown, the Munich Sangha has met on Monday and Tuesday evenings from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. via Zoom. Beforehand we had no experience of video conferencing and weren't prepared for, couldn't even have imagined, a situation in which we couldn't meet

personally any longer. This new reality was different, unknown and disconcerting, and for us at the GAL it was soon clear that we wanted to create a space where we could meet together.

Feelings of isolation and loneliness, fear and uncertainty were suddenly part of our everyday life, and in the Zoom-Sangha we were able to share openly, and experience the healing that comes from knowing that others are feeling exactly the same way as we do.

We adapted the evenings to take account of the strong wish for sharing: we began with a guided meditation followed by walking meditation in our own rooms at home, then we read a text from a book by Thich Nhat Hanh and organised

sharings, sometimes in large groups, sometimes in smaller ones. To finish we sat in stillness to once again come back to ourselves.

During the meditation and walking meditation the cameras were turned off, so that no one felt like they were being watched.

The really important thing was to be able to practice together, to be aware of each other and to be in touch with Sangha members who were finding life difficult – and together to be able to nourish our stability.

During meditation we often experience a deep feeling of connection and we can nourish each other's stability. We have done what Thay has so often and



powerfully spoken of: “In the boats of the Vietnamese refugees on the high seas and in stormy waters it always needed one person who remained calm, otherwise the entire boat was threatened with capsizing.” Sometimes we can be this person ourselves, sometimes we are agitated and afraid, and can trust that someone else will manoeuvre our boat through the difficult time – what a wonderful and healing togetherness.

It is also interesting how quickly we all turned into Zoom professionals, so that we could automatically mute our computers to avoid feedback, share the host function amongst the facilitators, get used to the somewhat ‘awkward’ sound of the bell and even avoid singing together due to the painful cacophony...

We have created a new sangha reality and the fascinating question we are now faced with, is where the path leads in the future. Simply returning to the way it was before is not an option, so it is up to us to find creative and skilful means to make a new sense of togetherness possible.

When, in May, church services were allowed once again, we began to offer one-hour practice evenings on Fridays in the Mindfulness Centre. Participants have to register and the number is limited to 18 people, to ensure we can maintain the minimum distance. We also developed a hygiene concept that gives everyone the feeling of being as safe as possible... We had tears in our eyes when the bell was invited there for the first time, it touched our hearts in a way we were no longer familiar with. And it felt palpably different to meditate for real with other people in the same room.

Following the further easing of restrictions, after the first hour in the Centre we have an hour of walking meditation in the nearby West Park, where we can now also sing together with great joy and gusto,. So, at the moment (end of June) we offer a Zoom sangha and a ‘physical’ Sangha, so that everyone can follow their own practice in the way that best suits their needs.

We would like to retain some of what we have learned in this new time. So, when

we once again have regular meetings in the Mindfulness Centre, we will also offer a Zoom-Sangha on a different evening. It is an invitation to those who live further away to practice together in an uncomplicated way. And it gives those who are still careful a chance to be part of the community and experience living in healing togetherness.

GAL, Community for Mindful Living in Bavaria



Sangha-gathering in a New Way

Online-Meetings of the practitioners in Netherlands

From Friday 6 to Sunday 8 March, I was with our Dutch Order of Interbeing on the edge of the forest and village of Putten. There, we've been coming together twice a year since 2009 for our OI- retreat-weekends. This time the theme was Beginner's spirit & the 14 Mindfulness Trainings. We inspired each other, practiced together and shared what moved us, enjoyed the forest around us, sang together and enjoyed having contact with each other. Cuddling was a bit hesitant, due to reports of the new and highly contagious Corona virus. We washed our hands more often, sneezed in our own elbows, and had ginger tea. Fortunately, no one got ill afterwards.

Wednesday March 11, I didn't go to the EIAB nor to "MINDFUL ACTION", a retreat for climate change and peace for social activists, because it was canceled due to the risk of infection with the corona virus. The EIAB monastics wanted to offer a beautiful program to examine together the base of our actions in order to alleviate

suffering in our society. Together practicing stopping, experiencing body and mind as a unity, living and acting while being fully present, and in this way contributing to our society for the benefits of ourselves and others, for our world-community.

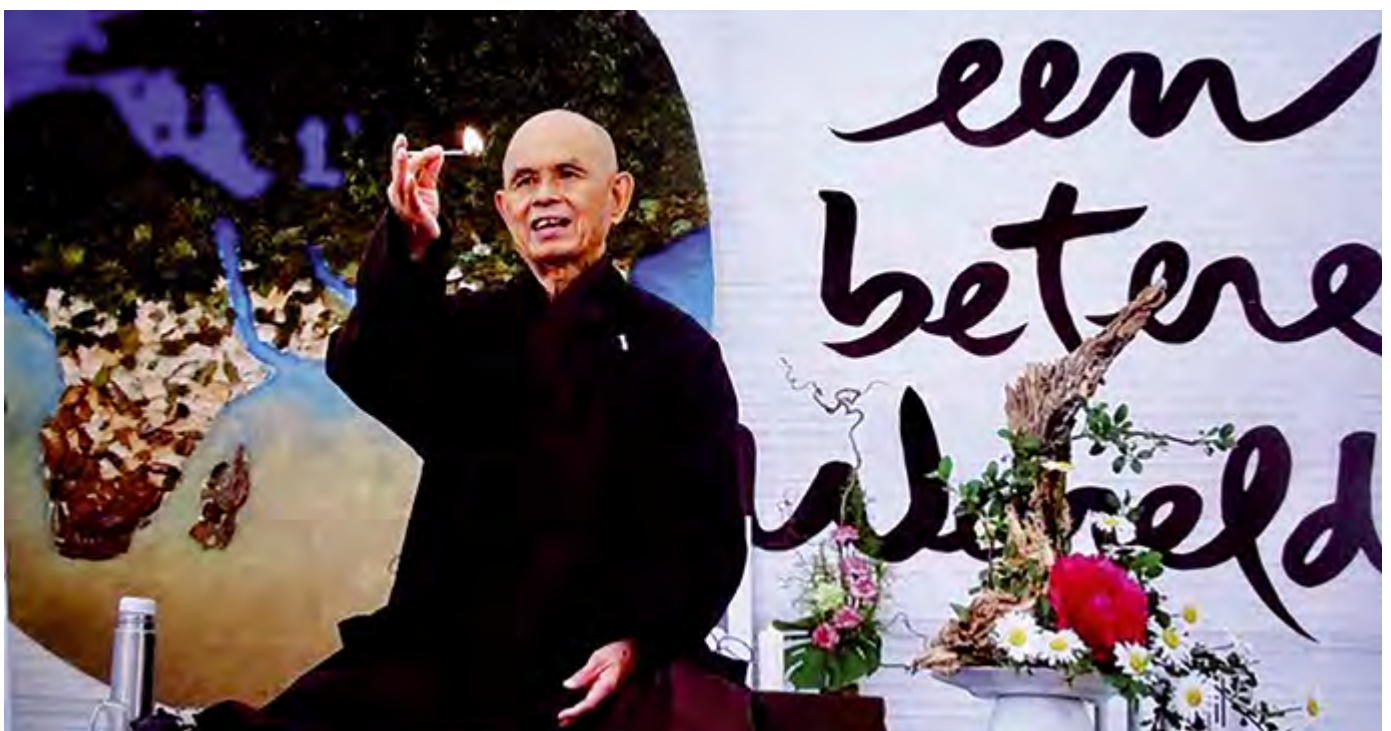
In the board of foundation Leven in Aandacht, we discussed how to continue with the 25-year celebration of our Dutch Foundation on May 2 in Amsterdam; could it continue? And what to do with all other already paid reservations for the various locations that probably also have to be canceled?

In our workgroup 'in-depth-program', we started discussing which nationwide days of mindfulness & retreats needed to be canceled, when and how to handle this. For the subscribers again, it was quite a job to now unsubscribe everyone and refund money. And we were very grateful that a lot of people donated so now we can continue to offer in-depth programs at the various locations.

As a board we were pleasantly surprised by and deeply grateful for the super-fast action of Jan Veenendaal (member of the Order of Interbeing) and his local Sangha-member Jacqueline van den Bosch. Jacqueline made her ZOOM account available for daily online-Sangha-gathering from 7:45 to 8:30 pm. They formed a team of volunteers, and meditation-guidance was invited. From March 19 until April 2, every evening there was a rich online-gathering with meditative singing and music from 7:45 pm; and a short Dharmatalk and guided meditation from 8 till 8:30 pm. Each time there were 50 to 100 participants. After this intensive period, the team continued with the nationwide gatherings every Sunday- and Wednesday evening until Sunday May 10.

First team – current core team

Meanwhile, the board arranged 2 virtual meditation halls via ZOOM. A new team was formed to enable continuing the national Sangha-gatherings every Friday evening. After the guided medi-



tation half an hour of Dharma-sharing was added. Around 9 pm the bell is invited 3 times and the meeting ends with:

*May by the power and truth
of this practice*

*all beings experience
happiness, and the causes of
happiness.*

*May all be free from pain and
the causes of pain.*

*May all never be separate
from the sacred happiness,
which is without pain,*

*and live in a right balance,
without too much attachment
and too much aversion,*

*in the awareness of the
equality of all living beings.*

Every Wednesday evening, Jan Veenendaal shared beautiful texts, very inspiring questions and answers from Thich Nhat Hanh in the national online Sangha-gathering from May 20 to June 29.

And every Sunday-evening from May 17 to June 29, there was a national online chanting of „Namo Valokiteshvaraya“, followed by meditation in silence, guided by Hans Roovers.

By singing Namo Valokiteshvaraya we could raise the powerful energy of Compassion and Unconditional Love, providing support to those who need it. Knowing that our hearts can close, when we touch suffering deeply.

Knowing, that through mindfulness and concentration, insight into interbeing and the coherence of manifestations will arise, and with it compassion, unconditional love.

While chanting and meditating, we focused on the 3 aspects:

1st Relaxing, feeling at ease, arriving, coming home to ourselves so that our hearts can open to the present moment,

to Life and to the energy of being loved. In this precious opportunity, we can give loving attention and compassion to our inner pain. And we often recognize that it is not only our own suffering, but something collective.

2nd We feel nourished, supported and strengthened by our dear spiritual community, by all the friends that surround us on the spiritual path.

3rd We dedicate all healing energy to all living beings who are struggling, who are hungry for food, safety, home, a healthy body, a peaceful mind.

At the end of March, as a board we also made an inventory of which Sanghas wanted to use the online-LiA-channel to have their own online Sangha-gatherings. 14 Sangha's were trained in using ZOOM. Our Flemish friends had their own online Sangha-gatherings on the LiA-channel.

The online-LiA-channel also appeared to be useful for core group-gatherings and meetings of various workgroups. The board also met online monthly. In addition, quite a few local Sanghas and the OI started their online-gatherings using their own channel.

The national online Sangha-gatherings were led by 5 Wake-Uppers and 19 other Sangha-members from all over the Netherlands, 11 members of the Order of Interbeing and 4 Dharma teachers.

Reactions we heard from participants: the online meetings provide support, comfort and inspiration, soften feelings of loneliness and strengthen the connection with other Dutch-speaking Sanghas; it's nice to be accompanied by members of other Sanghas, to hear and see more from other Sanghas. And also: there is no Sangha in my area, so now I can participate, or: I have a chronic illness, and online makes it possible for me to participate in a Sangha.

In June we had the first Dutch online retreat with 15 participants, led by Hilly

Bol. The participants all gave very positive reactions. A reason for us to continue with the national online Sangha LiA meetings, in addition to the physical gatherings.

Our online-team will take a break in August, and then there is the EIAB retreat, with physical presence!

Margriet Messlink
Wahrer Freudvoller Frieden



Offering a Cooperative Hand Into Another Dimension

Online-Support from De Maanhoeve

Wim and I take care of De Maanhoeve inspired by Thay and engaged Buddhism. And we found our own form in the last 12 years doing that.

We canceled every activity on De Maanhoeve in March. But we wanted to keep De Maanhoeve energy alive. So after 5 days we started an online Corona support program. With every morning a short guided meditation and the reciting of the Gayatri mantra, a dharma talk every Monday evening and Q & A every Thursday evening, and twice a week a spoken guided meditation on Whatsapp.

And we already had two online retreats. And have a retreat planned once a month for the rest of 2020.

We are enthusiastic about how it connects people. The participants (about 850 people every week in the first months and now in June about 500 a week) reactions are grateful. They experience the hand that we reach out to guide them as an anchor.

In this way these people can stay in connection with the love of the sangha and the practice and the routine of practicing. And that is so helpful to them.

The Corona support program is for free. We do ask dana. And the participants act responsible on that.

We love what we do and are very grateful we are healthy to do so. Hope you are healthy too!

Love and take care!

Wim und Ida



Without Stepping out the Door, You Can Meet the World

A Report from the Avalokita Centre in Italy



When the lockdown came into effect in Italy on March 9, it felt like being in a giant version of a Red Light, Green Light game we played as children: someone would say „One, Two, Three, Red Light!“ and everybody had to freeze wherever they happened to be. Here, at the Avalokita Centre (<https://www.avalokita.it>), seven people found themselves living secluded: three of us, Letizia, Stefano and Marco, had been living for many years here at the Center while four dear friends, Beppe, Francesca, Miriam and Margherita, had come from various parts of Italy to stay only a few days or a few weeks, and found themselves taking part in a retreat of which they knew the starting date, but not the end date.

In a few days, the last of these four friends will be leaving the Center to return to his home, and we felt the need to reflect and understand the meaning of this long experience, and to share it with you all.

A few days after the lockdown, the initial bewilderment and uncertainty slowly gave way to a sense of deep connection and harmony. The feeling of being in the ideal place and company to experience such an unexpected and challenging time emerged: we felt a sense of mutual protection that was reassuring, immersed in a remote place of rare beauty, under the protective wing of Mother Earth, with plenty of land around to be able to get anyway out and walk.

Day after day, it became clearer that for quite a long time the Centre would not be able to host retreats as we had been doing for the last 8 years, with friends who gather here to practice for a few days or a week from all over Italy and sometimes from other parts of the world. On the one hand, we naturally asked ourselves how we could take advantage of the unexpected retreat that what was happening afforded us. On the other hand, we wondered how we

could offer support to the many friends in the Dharma who, unlike us here at the Centre, found themselves facing such a challenging situation perhaps locked up in the few square meters of their apartment, in one of the suddenly deserted Italian cities.

In the past few months, those living at the Centre have been able to benefit for the first time for a longer period from the presence and support of a larger resident community. The four visiting friends were able to live the experience of a long and open-ended retreat, an experience often desired but which under normal conditions they would not have opted for, because of existing personal relationships and „family duties“. Unexpectedly, it became possible to take good care of all of that even from a distance!

We decided to commit two precious Dharma sharing opportunities every week to the themes that the situation brought



Thanks to the Zoom online-platform we could remain in contact. The Avalokita Centre made the platform available to local groups and organized webinars.

up, in particular fear and death. In fact, even though we were in a privileged situation compared to those who had to face the lockdown in a city, alone and often in precarious medical, emotional or financial conditions, we were nevertheless in contact with our own fear and suffering and with the death of friends and practitioners very dear to us. As we know, coming into close contact with death can lead us to live life more fully, to grasp its essence and to step up, to open up and to feel closer to others, more than we would normally do. This is precisely what we shared here at the Centre. This inspired us and gave us the energy to put ourselves at the service of the need for connection and spiritual support of the Italian community of practitioners.

The fact that we were not engaged in hosting retreats created the space to

open to listening, creativity and the possibility of offering something new and much needed. Each one of us here at the Centre, without much overthinking and planning, based on each person's own talents and experience, made himself or herself totally available for the various activities that allowed the Centre to offer support to so many fellow practitioners around the world who were experiencing this challenging situation.

At the time of the lockdown, as a Centre we had already some previous experience with online activities. Last fall, we had hosted a series of online webinars offered by Kaira Jewel Lingo. We also had started a six-month online follow-up to the meditation retreat offered here at the Center in October by Helga and Karl Riedl. In this follow up, some thirty or so practitioners were and are still now participating in and, every two weeks,

listen to a Dharma talk offered during the live retreat in the fall, sit together in the morning for a guided meditation linked to the teaching and meet biweekly for Dharma sharing.

Thanks to these experiences, the Centre has been able to offer many other events geared towards the community of practitioners as a whole:

- First of all, it freely offered its Zoom Channels to about twenty local practice groups who could no longer meet physically. Initially, participants struggled with online meetings and then grew increasingly comfortable and were able to cultivate closeness and mutual support.
- With the technical and organizational support of the Centre, in the initial and more challenging period of the lockdown, three Italian lay Dharma teachers



How it could have been, but wasn't: shared activities between retreatants and monks and nuns in the Plum Village tradition came to an abrupt end.

(Adriana, Diana and Silvia) offered four webinars with questions and answers, attended by almost a thousand practitioners from all over Italy.

- Two other Dharma teachers (Letizia and Stefano), with the support of the friends living at the Centre, from the very beginning of the lockdown offered guided meditations online from the Avalokita Centre. This way, we created a boundless virtual meditation hall in which hundreds of Italian practitioners sat and continue to sit together in meditation three days a week at 6.30 am.

On top of these, which are just some of the local initiatives promoted by the Centre, we hosted several series of online meetings with Dharma teachers from Plum Village, from the EIAB and from other parts of the world. Hundreds of

practitioners from all over the world were able to benefit from the teachings:

- At the time of the lockdown, a series of four webinars on the theme „Skillfully Moving Through Challenging Times“ offered by Kaira Jewel Lingo was already underway. Kaira Jewel, besides offering us much inspiration with her Dharma talks, has been our mentor in the domain of online teaching offerings.

- Between April and May, we hosted four webinars on the theme „The Free Mind“, with talks on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. These were promoted together with the Italian WakeUp sangha and offered by our beloved Italian Plum Village monks, Br. Phap Bieu and Br. Hue Truc. This was also an opportunity to spread words of the nourishing and precious practice opportunities offered in Italy by Br. Phap Ban.

- At the end of May, we started a series of four webinars specifically dedicated to educators, promoted by the Avalokita Centre together with WakeUp Schools. Dharma teachers Richard Brady and Kaira Jewel Lingo offered teachings on the theme „Taking care of the present moment“. Thanks to simultaneous translation into two languages, many English and French-speaking practitioners from all over the world also participated.

- Finally, between the months of June and July, the Avalokita Centre was happy to promote and organize two webinars with Thây Phap An and Sr. Song Nghiem of the EIAB. Practitioners in Southern Italy welcomed most warmly these events, since they could not host the monastics for their regular yearly summer retreat in Puglia and Sicily.



Deeply connected: a small group of friends experienced the lockdown-phase in Italy together as a wonder, it felt like being part of a vast, worldwide organism.

All these events were offered in a spirit of generosity. Everyone has been invited to attend freely and independently of their economic situation, and only those who could do so with ease were invited to support the teachers and the Centre financially.

We experienced this widespread and unexpected attendance, still very active as we write, in the online activities that we offered as a kind of small miracle. We received letters from a number of attendees that bear witness to the many deep and beneficial transformations that took place in the lives of practitioners who followed these initiatives and, at times, also in the lives of their relatives (partners, children, parents). Being at home together, they also had the possibility and desire to join in these moments of practice.

We feel that these past months have been and still are for all humanity unexpected and deeply challenging, and at the same time surprising and extraordinary. So many of these little miracles have taken place all over the world. Specifically, the miracle that we have experienced here at the Avalokita Centre has been that of a wonderful spirit of

community life. We felt parts or cells of the same organism, composed of the seven of us who found themselves living together here at the Centre as well as of all of the friends scattered throughout Italy and the world, with whom we came into contact. The online activities hosted by the Centre have helped to establish a deep connection between all of us and a sense of mutual support and nourishment. Paradoxically, the fact of living this time secluded, thanks to the help of technology, has allowed us to build this sense of deep connection and mutual support with people and places everywhere on the Planet with whom we could not otherwise have come into contact.

Letizia und Stefano

„I Feel Connected“

Practicing with a Sangha in times of Corona

These are strange times, these Corona times. Suddenly in March 2020 we all had to go into lockdown. We have never experienced this before. We felt afraid, alone and sad. There was so much suffering around us and each day more bad news reached us. We could not meet anymore with our spiritual friends in our local sangha.

But then the sangha's in the Netherlands started with online sangha meeting in Dutch. We also joined it at these online sessions. I was present at a session with brother Pham Han, who gave a wonderful meditation and a dharma teaching. Seeing him on screen from Plum Village was so nice. We felt connected again and less alone. Furthermore we received spiritual support to cope with our emotions and stay calm and keep in touch with the present moment. In this session around 80 participants joined in.

After this session, we decided to start with a separate Dutch speaking online sangha for Belgium. That way we were able to be in a smaller group with people we knew better and connect with our local sangha's in Flanders (the Dutch

speaking part of Belgium). Myself and three other members from sangha Antwerp started with the first sessions. Later three more friends from sangha Leuven offered to help us moderate the online sangha.

We each took turns to lead the sangha meetings online each week on Thursday evening. We had a guided meditation, after that we read a text from one of Thay's books. After that we had dharma sharing in small groups. The advantage in online meetings in zoom, is that we can split up the larger group into little groups in separate virtual meeting rooms. That way the sharing does not take too long, as sitting in front of a screen can be quite exhausting. After the sharing in small groups we all came back to the common online meeting room. Then the moderator closed the session with bells and bowing, just the same as at a physical sangha meeting.

I am so happy that we are able to meet with our sangha friends online. This really helps me to keep on practicing and the dharma sharing gives me so much support to cope with the difficult aspects

of life in times of corona. Thanks to zoom, I can see the others on screen and I feel a connection. Everybody in the sangha feels the energy of mindfulness at these online sangha meetings. Even though we are not together physically, we can feel connected and supported by the sangha. This is a wonderful tool and we should be thankful for it. Maybe even after Corona, the online sangha meetings could continue? It would be a way to have a lasting connection between all the Dutch speaking sangha groups in Belgium, over and above the local groups.

Rebecca Müller
Nourishing Joy of the Heart



Breathe, You Are Alive ...

Reflections on the practice during a pandemic



Chopping wood in summer helps in order to keep warm in winter. Practicing mindfulness is of great help in the summer of our life, and even more in winter, when circumstances can be demanding. Practicing during a retreat and with our Sangha brings us warmth, compassion and understanding. Practicing in our daily life is the key to keep our hearts warm and open for compassion and understanding in pandemic times.

The worldwide Corona crisis was and still is a difficult time for many of us and this crisis has so many different faces. For some people the lockdown was almost like a retreat. For many others, like young people and workers in vital professions it was often a great challenge. Elderly people felt lonely, because they could not see their children anymore. People got sick, or died all alone, and for them

and their loved ones there was and is a lot of suffering. For many Corona felt like a brutal attack.

I was wondering which experience about the practice I could share. Looking back on these last four months three different issues came to my mind. Instead of forcing myself to choose one of them, I would like to share all three, because they interare.

Gardening

There was a lot of gardening figuratively and literally. Gardening is such a pleasure for me. Being in touch with Mother Earth has a deep meaning. She is in us, we are in her. Spring was beautiful with clear, blue skies. Being outside was refreshing, I could feel the wind, hear the birdsongs. The garden really needed some work, but instead of working too

hard or too fast –a habit–, I could do everything mindfully, aware of my breathing. Seeing the perennials and shrubs grow from their tiny little buds to branches, leaves and flowers gave me so much joy. I rescued a plant from suffocation. It once lived in my father's garden when I was a 12 year old child. He gave it to me when I had my first garden. Gardening reminded me of joyful working meditations in Plum Village and EIAB. Whenever my habit energy surfaced, I smiled: "hello there, I know you, I see you". So I became the gardener of my garden and the gardener of my habit energies. Impermanence and the stream of life are almost palpable in a garden. But there was more. Gardening comforted me, because there was also grief.

From Thich Nhat Hanh's book "Understanding our Mind" a quote about the gardener:

„Mind consciousness is the root of all actions of body and speech.

Its nature is to manifest mental formations, but its existence is not continuous.

Mind consciousness gives rise to actions that lead to ripening.

It plays the role of the gardener, sowing all the seeds. (vers 25)

The Five Remembrances

I am sitting at the bedside of my husband, who caught a – non corona – pneumonia. There are still the usual diseases. Sitting and breathing brings me back to the present moment. Knowing that everything that needed to be done, is done, I cannot but sit there very quietly. I have no idea what the next 24 hours will bring. I face fear from time to time and can experience deep peace too. It's so true: we are of the nature of growing old, we cannot escape old age. We are of the nature to get sick, we cannot avoid sickness. We are of the nature to die, we cannot escape dying. Sometimes I feel a strong resistance, at other times I just smile to these first three remembrances.

The fourth comes to my mind: “one day we have to abandon all we love and cherish”. Because I am not busy anymore I can feel the connection with my own past, with my parents and grandparents, other family members, who died, and with so many people who are alive now. It brings about deep feelings of shared humanity.

The fifth: the actions of body, speech and mind are our only true belongings.

The love that could grow during so many years just permeates me.

Today I feel very grateful for my husband's recovery, although it's not complete.

Breathe, you are alive.....

The Five Remembrances continued

Entering the dialysis unit in the hospital slowly, to visit a very dear friend, I am aware of my breathing and walking. I do not know what to expect. I am looking around until I meet the eyes of this dear friend, my former husband. Despite his dementia he recognises me and I recognise him, the moment our eyes meet. I know that this very brief moment could have gone by unnoticed, if I hadn't been really present. This is a moment in which I see Boeddha nature in him all of a sudden. He himself would have used other words, if at all. It's not so easy to describe moments like these in words. He watches a TV program about cooking. He used to be a good cook, but now he doesn't get it anymore. However, it's very peaceful, just sitting there. A few weeks later, right before the lockdown he is admitted to a nursing home. Again I come to see him. A warm and familiar feeling. Two days later visiting is not possible anymore. He becomes infected and dies from Covid-19 all alone. I'm gardening and Mother Earth accepts all this grief. Breathe you are alive ...

The Sangha of Zoomies

Days of mindfulness and retreats were cancelled one by one. Plum Village and EIAB closed. I remember seeing a documentary film about dharma teachers in another tradition just a few weeks before the lockdown. One of them uses Zoom and she greets every single person appearing on her screen warmly. I feel surprised and curious. I never saw this before. Now I smile. We had no idea that we would use this internet tool so soon for Sangha's, Days of Mindfulness and even retreats.

Sangha members are so happy to see each other again, as Zoomies on a screen. We meditate, and there is singing and sharing. Everybody sees something different on his or her own screen, which is sometimes confusing. Just like the deluded mind.

The online Plum Village retreat “Understanding our Mind” offers this amazing possibility of deep practice together with people from all over the world.

We've just started having wonderful meetings outside with our local Sangha with an hour walking meditations on Monday evenings. My other Sangha will meet in the open air a few days from now. We are so happy to be real 3D again, although I was very grateful for many zoom sessions.

Breathe, we are alive!

This last quote from Thay's book feels like a good summary to end this sharing:

„Transformation takes place in our daily life.

To make the work of transformation easy,

practice with a Sangha.

(Vers 38)

Hilly Bol
True Arising of Peace
3. Juli 2020



Practice@home

The online program of the EIAB during the corona crisis



New Year's Eve. I spend the last hours of 2019 together with my partner at a good friend's house, with raclette, board games and stimulating conversations. At midnight we go outside to let off a single rocket for all of us. It is our lucky rocket. All our hopes, wishes and good intentions have been written on it and we all agree: If only one or two of them come true, it will be a good year. As the rocket rises into the sky, I think about my plans. 2020 will be a very special year for me. A year to deepen my practice of mindfulness. Never before have there been so many opportunities for me to practice. The first stay at the EIAB in Waldbörl is already booked for the end of January. There will be a retreat with Thay Phap An and Sister Song Nghiem in Weyarn, a hiking retreat in Tirol and in between some courses in Waldbörl. And something very special: for her birthday I would like to give my mom a stay at the monastery in Waldbörl, so we can practice together for the first time, and I can share what is so close to my heart and has inspired me for years with her. But things are destined to turn out differently. From March at the latest, the world

seems to be out of joint. All the stays I've planned at the EIAB: Cancelled. And yet the last few months have been a time of practice for me. More intensive, more challenging and more difficult than I could have ever imagined on that last New Year's Eve.

When the crisis in Germany came to a head and the lockdown was finally introduced, I was deeply insecure and frightened, overwhelmed by the incessant flow of new information constantly breaking in on me. It doesn't matter whether I turn on the radio or the television or just want to check my e-mails. I only see and hear one word: CORONA. At night I toss and turn in bed sleeplessly, during the day I can't concentrate on anything anymore. I am becoming more and more aware that I am constantly feeding my mind with fear and frightful images, and one thing quickly becomes clear: If I don't want to go under, I have to take good care of myself and my fear, nourish my mind with something positive, mindfulness practice, and practice seriously in a way I have never practised before. I want to be there not only for myself, but

also for the people around me, to give my parents courage and confidence, to support my partner, to be there for my friends, to cheer them up when they are desperate, to help them, to give something that will help them through this time together. Once again I realize how fundamentally important it is to take care of my mind and my emotions. Because only when I am strong and stable, only when I nourish myself with positive thoughts, when I feel peace and tranquility within me, can I pass this on. I feel a sense of determination growing in me in a way I have never felt before in my life, a desire to turn to the practice.

Every day I try to build bridges of mindfulness, to be present, to be aware of what is. Sometimes I am a bit shocked to find myself standing in front of empty shelves in the supermarket, and I become aware in a much more concrete, tangible way that having food on my plate every day is not something to take for granted. Gratitude arises, a gratitude that comes from the heart, and spreads. Gratefulness for so many things, for the people who spontaneously greet me while walking,

although they do not know me, for a smile from the cashier in the supermarket, for all those who work day and night to help, for my own life, my health, for my work, for the fact that I too can contribute something. And yet, despite all the mindfulness practice, the weeks are draining me and my strength. Increasingly, I feel like the protagonist in the literary film adaptation „The Wall“, which describes the life of a woman who is cut off from civilization by the sudden appearance of an invisible wall. She describes what has happened with the words:

“It just couldn’t be true. Such things simply do not happen. It would have been easier to come to terms with a little craziness than with terrible, invisible things. I still thought of my situation as a temporary state. Then, finally, I gave up my senseless escape and faced my thoughts. I believe time stands totally still and I move in it.”

For me too, time has ceased to exist, everything has become a ghostly stillness. All of a sudden walls are growing around me, getting higher and higher. Walls called lockdown, social distancing and quarantine. Walls consisting of hygiene rules, veiled faces, of people who move away from me, whom I can no longer touch, no longer feel, who only speak to me out of a laptop.

Then April 9th arrives, the beginning of the Easter retreat for which I had registered days beforehand. I listen to the words of Sr Song Nghiem, who is able to dissolve the barrier of the screen with her presence, and her loving and gentle voice. At last I feel closeness, arriving, being connected again. I have the impression that she is looking directly into my eyes. Immediately I feel: this retreat will be different from all the other retreats I have experienced. A retreat that teaches me at home, to dive deeply into the practice in my own living room and to feel and experience the connection to the monks and nuns of the EIAB and the Sangha in a whole new way. Sr Song Nghiem’s

words are just the right ones for me at that moment: she talks about how we find ourselves in a challenging time that confronts us with great uncertainty, many fears and problems, and emphasizes how important the practice of mindfulness is in times like these. And in this retreat we want to develop a strategy to get through this time together. From the very beginning of the retreat I feel like I have received a great gift. How wonderful that we as a community can support each other, strengthen our positive feelings and think about how we can bring wisdom, courage and care to ourselves and our fellow human beings. The point, according to Sister Song Nghiem, is that we participate in this retreat together, hand in hand, with our hearts. That night, it felt as if the walls surrounding me had already thinned a little.

Then the next day the Dharma lecture by Thay Phap Xa. He smiles into the camera, talks about how unusual it is not to see anyone, but he knows that we are there, he can feel us. I feel it again: the pleasant, nourishing feeling of connection. As he reads the poem “Our True Heritage” by Thich Nhat Hanh, which I would like to share with all readers, I cry.

“The cosmos is filled with precious gems.

I want to offer a handful of them to you this morning.

Each moment you are alive is a gem,

shining through and containing earth and sky,

water and clouds.

It needs you to breathe gently for the miracles to be displayed.

Suddenly you hear the birds singing,

*the pines chanting
see the flowers blooming
the blue sky
the white clouds*

the smile and the marvellous look of your beloved.

You, the richest person on Earth who have been going around begging for a living,

stop being the destitute child.

Come back and claim your heritage.

We should enjoy our happiness and offer it to everyone.

Cherish this very moment.

Let go of the stream of distress

and embrace life fully in your arms.”

The words touch me deep inside and I realize I can now let go of the tension and fear of the last weeks. I am alive and that is wonderful. Every moment is precious, even when times are difficult, even when there is a lot of suffering. I am still rich. Rich and blessed by the many small and great wonders around that are there every day, and I all too often don’t notice.

As the retreat progresses, so my mindfulness increases, I start to feel. Especially the QiGong exercises (including the beautiful morning Waldböler bird concert) and the lovingly guided deep relaxation exercises by Sister Song Nghiem help me to come back to myself and my body, to listen to my heartbeat and understand deep inside that I am not alone. “We are all going through this difficult time together as a family” says Thay Phap An at the end of the retreat, during the question and answer session. I feel honoured to be part of this wonderful Sangha family.

When the retreat is over, I fall into the habit of some form of “exercise“. At first, I am not aware of it; I have neither thought about nor planned it. It has simply emerged quite naturally from a new, deeper connection with myself arising from my heart. Every evening, when I lie in bed and calm down, when I am wholly with myself, I feel my body, my heart-

beat, my breath and almost instantly a feeling of gratitude arises, which spreads throughout my body. It is not an intellectual exercise. I do not think about what happened during the day, what I could or should be thankful for. Rather, I feel gratitude; it arises from an awareness that I am alive and is simply there. I stay with this feeling, and become aware of how it flows into a feeling of love. Love that flows from the heart, envelops me and connects me with everything around. Every evening the same “exercise” and I witness how the “walls” around me begin to dissolve. There may still be restrictions, distancing and the need to wear a mask, but in a certain sense it all takes place on the surface of my mind. Yet beneath, when I am in contact with my inner being, with my breath, my bodily sensations, then a sense of freedom arises. Freedom that has always been there and will always be there, that never changes and is unshakeable. I think in Buddhism they call this freedom our „true nature“. So the question is not whether this freedom really exists, but whether I am aware of it or not.

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, they all carry me through this time and I can appreciate more than ever how wonderful it is to follow this path of practice with such a supportive community. So it makes me even happier to learn that this year there will also be an online Whitsun retreat. As I write these lines, I find it interesting take a look back at this retreat too. Often it is individual sentences, moments or meetings that remain in my

memory that nourish me and accompany me on my path.

I have to smile, because the first thing that comes to my mind when I think of the Whitsun retreat is the question and answer session. A 10-year-old boy asked the monks and nuns how to become a Buddha. Sister Song Nghiem, who immediately noticed the boy's calm and peaceful nature, answers with a question. She would like to know from him how he has lived his life so far, how he has managed to be so peaceful. He first thinks about it and then replies: “I haven't thought much about how I have lived. I simply lived it as it was.” That sentence and the boy's wisdom have never left me. Especially now, at this time, it can be so helpful not to think so much. Not to brood every day, to worry, to wonder when everything will be back to normal, when life will feel lighter again. Instead: ... let go. Accept what comes and let life be what it is.

This is exactly what I had already sensed in the meditation led by Thay Phap An. How pleasant it was for me to allow my mind to simply relax, dive into the stream of feelings, bodily sensations and sounds. To be rooted in the here and now and let go of the tendency of the mind to cling to something specific, like fear or the feeling of being in danger.

The talk by Sister Bi Nghiem on loneliness and relationships also left a lasting impression. Amongst others, she quoted the cardiologist James Lynch, who had

looked at the question of why loneliness causes high blood pressure. He observed that the longer babies cry, the more their blood pressure rises. However, the important thing is that the rise in blood pressure is not a pure stress reaction, but rather part of the infant's communication. Moreover, he discovered that when adults are listened to, when they are heard, their blood pressure falls. According to James Lynch, dialogue therefore involves the whole body, and language is not something separate from the body.

And, according to Sister Bi Nghiem, it is exactly this deep, healing listening, that we can experience in the Sangha during Dharma sharing, because it is a place where we do not have to hide or build protective walls around us, so that others do not see our vulnerability and weaknesses. The Dharma sharing offered by Sister Bi Nghiem once a week until the opening of the EIAB in July, is something I experience as deeply enriching and supportive, and helps me understand what a deep practice it is. My Saturday evenings have been reserved for this Sharing for several weeks now, and I notice throughout the entire day beforehand how much I am looking forward to seeing familiar faces, to practice deep listening and also to share about myself. I feel safe and secure in this space characterised by openness, understanding and compassion. I can be the way I am with all my doubts, pain, hopes and joys.

I have been on this path for 17 years, since I read my first book by Thich Nhat Hanh. If someone had told me then how much warmth, vitality, good heartedness, kindness and genuine, sincere love I would encounter on this path, I would not have thought it possible. I would like to thank all the people I have met over the past years and with whom I was able to walk a part of this path together from the bottom of my heart, and I wish that many more people will discover the EIAB as a place of healing, peace and love.



Mindful Breathing in Difficult Times

About the effects of the EIAB-retreats



Just like for many other people, my world was turned on its head in March 2020. Media reports spoke of an unknown Corona virus that had surfaced in China. This in turn led to people's freedom around the world being dramatically restricted.

I am concerned: What else could come my way? What's still in store for mankind? The Munich psycho-traumatologist Prof. Franz Ruppert says: „Right now, we are sitting in the middle of a trauma.“

In December 2019, my grandson was born. The parents are no longer together and it was unclear whether my husband and I would be able to have

any contact with the child. After a few weeks a friendly contact developed with the child's mother, and she increasingly began to drop our grandson off with us for a few hours. Since my husband and I had only adopted our three children when they were already somewhat older, this was a completely new experience for us: a little baby. What luck! What joy!

I also reduced my working hours, so as to have more time for little Leo.

Unfortunately, this only lasted a few weeks. When life in Germany began to draw to a standstill in the middle of March, his mother moved to her new

boyfriend on the other side of town, and withdrew contact for fear of infection. It was to be six weeks before we were allowed to see Leo again. Although painful for us, we were nevertheless pre-occupied with trying to understand the approaching tsunami.

End of February: A year ago I read the book „The Plague“ by Albert Camus again and ask myself, why so many big events are still taking place in our city. My 80-year-old parents and their friends still attend many events, while my husband and I have already started to curtail our social life. We lay out two large vegetable beds in the garden. Spring awakens with its breath-taking

beauty: the shining hazel bush, winter aconite, the light green maple blossoms, the delicate beech leaves, and later the alder and oak leaves will come. The birds seem to sing louder than usual. Nature's awakening is in stark contrast to the doomsday mood surrounding us with high death figures and the reports of catastrophe we are fed every day by television and newspapers. I try to break out of the thoughts circling in my mind, and think of Thay Phap An's words about how we are trapped in our „mental loop“ and the beauty of flowers and nature: „It IS beautiful - we just don't see it“. In association with our city's daily newspaper, I am launching a project for adults, teenagers and children: writing a diary in this extraordinary time.

I discover that „our dear friends from the EIAB“, as my husband and I always call them, now offer online events. Thay Phap An speaks of meditative hand washing and „hugging meditation“. There are two kinds of suffering: Being separated from the people you love and having to be with the people you don't love. I am lucky to live with my husband whom I love. I think of married couples who often quarrel and are now unable to avoid each other, families living in small apartments, the poorer old people who now have no visitors, young people who should be asserting their independence but now unable to distance themselves from their parents. My eldest daughter is separating from her husband at this time. At the river in our town, where I always go for a walk, I often see families with happy children. But there are too few. Where are the socially deprived families? Do the children just sit in front of a screen all day now that they can't go to school anymore?

As a lecturer at an adult education centre, from the beginning of March I was no longer allowed to teach. The decision came suddenly and I was no longer able to exchange contact details with the participants of my courses. Now it is up to everyone to get through the crisis alone. Even at the end of June, we are still not allowed to teach. How will the participants get through this time?

But at least I can now teach my private pupils daily via Skype for a small fee for a few weeks. We analyse many poems, among others the poem „Weltuntergang“ (End of the World) by Jakob van Hoddis: „The citizen's hat flies from his pointed head...“. Today, more than a hundred years after this poem was written, it seems to be highly topical - many citizens are shaken to their foundations. Some are afraid of the virus. Others are beginning to ask themselves questions:

When an extremely dangerous virus threatens the population, why not start by spreading tips on how to strengthen the immune system? Healthy nutrition, medicinal herbs, homeopathic and natural remedies, exercise in the fresh air, sun. Instead, at the beginning of March the recommendation of our Chancellor: „Stay at home!“ I call my three children and tell them: „Get out! Get the sun! Move yourselves!“

The pictures and reports from northern Italy are frightening. But why of all places are these two regions so badly affected? On the Internet I find the first studies pointing to a connection with air pollution. Also reports that scientifically explain the weakening of the immune system at high 5G exposure. I am confused. In northern Italy, in addition to chronic air pollution and high 5G penetration, there is an underfunded health care system with poor equipment that has been in ruins since the financial crisis of 2008.

These are all conditions that we do not have in Germany. Fear is the greatest immune killer - and yet it is fuelled. Why is so much fear being stirred up when the average age of those who have died of Covid-19 is 81 years and thus corresponds with current life expectancy, and when no distinction is made between whether someone has died of or with the coronavirus? Prof. Püschel, Prof. Streek, Prof. Bhakdi and many other experts speak out, but they are not heard. There is no public discussion with the star virologist Prof. Drosten, who was proved wrong in his assessment of the swine flu epidemic in 2009. Like a prayer wheel, it

says: „If you have any questions about Covid-19, contact the Robert Koch Institute and the Federal Centre for Health Education.“ Anyone who says otherwise is considered a nutcase.

Why? Why? Why?

I have so many questions to which I cannot find answers in the general media. There is a constant spread of fear and the same misleading and incomplete statistics are repeated over and over again; so now I watch and read less and less news. Sister Song Nghiem said at the Easter retreat that when you read during a meal you are ingesting the words just as much as the food. I have been a passionate newspaper reader for 40 years, and I remember the day when, for the first time, I did not take our national morning newspaper out of the mailbox in order not to spoil my breakfast. In the meantime we have cancelled the newspaper, and for breakfast I read something from Erich Fromm's book „To have or to be“.

My trust in politics has been deeply shaken. I write many letters and e-mails to politicians and journalists. For the first time in my life I have thoughts of suicide. Later, when I meet like-minded people at demonstrations, I learn that many people are suffering in just the same way that I am.

From the very beginning, however, I have had the feeling that my inner child is being triggered. Where did this constant strong anger suddenly appear from? My thoughts go back to the retreat on the inner child at the EIAB last autumn. The feeling of helplessness towards my parents. My war-traumatized mother. Me as the daughter seen as a naive idealist for whom money and success are not important. I miss respect. And now suddenly I am also written off as a crackpot by the media and treated like a child who cannot take care of herself by the state!

As a preventive measure against a viral infection my homeopathic practitioner prescribed meteoritic iron globules and Schuessler salt No. 5. I have also recommended them to my friends and even



sent the globules and salts to northern Italy, to the mother of an Italian friend who was locked down for months. The letter will not arrive for many weeks, but when it does, it will make her very happy.

I want interaction, but Bavaria is very strict and for the first few weeks we are not allowed contact with people outside our own household. Nevertheless, since I am often together with several friendly neighbours in our apartment building, I am worried I might infect my son, who works in outpatient geriatric care. He

often comes for lunch, and I would hate to have to deny him that. Hugging and physical closeness helps against fear and trauma. In Camus' „The Plague“, despite the high risk of infection and the much higher risk of death, people were not denied the blessing of human closeness.

*Breathing in I am aware
that I am breathing in.
Breathing out I am aware
that I am breathing out.*

I start to extend my morning gymnastic and eurythmy therapy exercises from the original 20 minutes to almost 90 minutes and feel connected with our dear friends at the EIAB. How are they getting on during this time?

A school friend told me about the funeral of her father, who died of a heart attack: only ten people were allowed to attend, and they were not allowed to meet afterwards. In April, an acquaintance visited us following the funeral of his uncle: he was 89 years old and had lived in a home for the elderly. Once the lockdown started he stopped eating and died two weeks later. How much suffering, how many deaths due to the corona measures! How many freelancers and self-employed people are full of existential fears! My colleague no longer answers the phone. The suicide rate is rising, and I am not surprised. I am speaking at a demonstration in favour of our fundamental constitutional rights, and an innkeeper, moved, shakes my hand afterwards: „Thank you. You really said what I have been thinking.“

“If I think of Germany at night

I put sleep to flight.

To close my eyes

*brings a flow of tears and
sighs.*

(Heinrich Heine)

I haven't slept well for weeks. I don't dream anymore, apart from once: I get raped. In the garden outside my window is a statue of Buddha, surrounded by lavender. In my mind's eye the Buddha sits in flames, stoic and immovable.

The EIAB Easter retreat is an oasis for me.

Sister Bi Nghiem gives a talk about sadness, dying and transience that touches me deeply. I feel deeply understood, and for the first time in weeks I can sleep better. It helps too that she talks about the grief of lost jobs and relationships.

And of the grief for all those in poverty, who are now suffering even more.

It touches me deeply that the monks and nuns of the EIAB have made such a great effort with so much creativity and imagination, when I know that they much prefer human contact over this kind of communication. My husband is an IT expert, and for privacy reasons I participate without video, although I am ashamed of it. Now that the majority of contact takes place online, coupled with the possibility of introducing a ban on physical contact at any time, total control of communication is now possible; the possibility of tracking movements through the Corona Warning App will be added later. Any former dictator would be green with envy at the new possibilities for control that are now emerging.

While the Church is bowing to governmental pressure and the Pope, for the first time in the history of Christianity, is celebrating the Resurrection Liturgy almost alone in St. Peter's, our dear friends from the EIAB are succeeding in making contact. This wonderful connection to a Christian, as opposed to a Buddhist, celebration touches me deeply. As does the way the EIAB addresses the profound themes of Good Friday and Easter: impermanence, suffering, dying, death and resurrection. I have often taken part in Easter retreats, but this online retreat in this extraordinary time is something special. It fills me with comfort, peace, gratitude and wonder.

Sister Song Nghiem talks about the rhythm of life of the monks and nuns at the EIAB. Finding peace in noble silence in the evening. Writing how I feel right now in a diary. Before going to bed, recall at least three moments of happiness during the day. What did I enjoy today? When did I do something good for someone today?

When I wake up in the morning, take the time to be aware of all the things I am grateful for. What opportunities do I have today? What would I like to do for others today?

At this time, I find it difficult to find peace and to feel gratitude and joy, when I see how much the world around us is changing and a "brave new technoworld" is being built, in which people should live at a distance and communication should be as digital and therefore controllable as possible.

Sister Song Nghiem also speaks about fasting. If I am more careful about what I eat, and let go of some unwholesome habits, it helps to keep my head clearer. And I drink a lot of tea.

During a nine-minute interview on the Tagesschau on Easter Sunday, Bill Gates explains that he wants to vaccinate seven billion people, namely the entire world population.

*Breathing in I am aware
that I am breathing in.
Breathing out I am aware
that I am breathing out.*

From Easter onwards, I meditate daily from 5 to 6 pm on the banks of a nearby river. It is meditation and prayer combined.

Moments of crisis are also an opportunity. We can grow and emerge stronger. Where is my opportunity to grow in the crisis?

I buy a lot of copies of my favourite children's books and give them to families with children. It makes both parents and children happy. Children are not allowed to go to school, and many just sit in front of the screen all day. The parents are left to their own devices. On June 3rd, the Federal Ministry of Finance writes: „The Corona pandemic will end when a vaccine is available for the population.“ It is becoming increasingly clear: Corona is not short-term. Everyone has to find a new rhythm in life.

A new language is establishing itself: fake news, fact check, new normality, „social distancing“, hygiene regulations, conspiracy theorists, solidarity, and proof of immunity. People now say „stay healthy“ instead of „goodbye“. People

no longer shake hands in greeting. People no longer hug each other. People no longer smile at each other – when they're wearing a mask you can't see it anyway.

My new rhythm of life now also includes regular attendance at the demonstrations held every Saturday in our city. The initially frightening police restrictions and the subsequent defamatory reporting in the newspapers are fortunately slowly decreasing. Meeting people. Speaking. I start bringing cakes for the children there and regularly experience hours of joy, laughter, human closeness.

At the Whitsun retreat, Sister Bi Nghiem speaks of loneliness and how this can also cause physical illness. But when we listen to people, hear their cries, then high blood pressure falls. Perhaps it was precisely this sentence that led me to so vehemently demand of my parents that they simply listen to me, that they listen to my feelings, needs and the suffering I am currently feeling without judging, without giving their opinion and without repeating what is constantly in the newspapers. At this moment something in me is healing. Being heard, as an equal voice. My skin is becoming firmer. After-



wards, my father withdraws a little and my mother apologizes: „We just can't leave our old world.“ I remember a similar occasion when we listened to each other almost 40 years ago. Now, almost 40 years later, another conversation in which I can speak to my parents about my feelings and feel understood. Even if they didn't really completely understand me - I „simply“ forced them to “simply“ listen to me - and let what was said just be there.

Listening. The Saturday night sharing Sister Bi Nghiem is offering and I can now participate in is called 'Deep Listening'. Perhaps listening deeply to each other without commentary is the most effective form of dialogue at a time when the distance between people is becoming wider and wider. This sharing does me good. I have the experience of being heard, being appreciated, being close - and afterwards, I have a very understanding telephone conversation with my grown-up daughter.

Deep listening could contribute to bridging the growing divide between people. I feel the anger and resentment of the people in the city. Suddenly, apparently out of nowhere, a “Black-Lives-

Matter“ movement is emerging. The atmosphere is not good in Germany at the moment. What would reconciliation look like?

At the Whitsun retreat, Thay Phap An said that there is a historical and an ultimate dimension. In the historical dimension we must strive for the good, the true and the beautiful. What is the good, the true and the beautiful in this time? The good is certainly not an implanted microchip or a compulsory vaccination with an insufficiently tested genetically modified vaccine for the whole world population. The true certainly does not consist of ignoring and defaming thousands of experts and people with dissenting views. Beauty certainly does not consist of fear and the prohibition of human closeness. I continue to write many letters and e-mails to journalists. They should not be able to claim later that they did not know what was going on.

“When the conditions are sufficient, things manifest,” said Thay Phap An. “We practice letting go in order to touch the ultimate dimension.” Because of their painful history, our Vietnamese friends have experienced personal and transge-

nerational trauma, and draw on the richness of Buddhism. To immerse oneself in the whole stream of experience: to feel one's own body, to be aware of the whole environment and thereby to connect with the earth. „Taking care of body and mind in difficult times“, „Being fearless in difficult times“ are the names of forthcoming courses. Thank you, dear monks and nuns of the EIAB, for your support in these difficult times!

*Held wonderfully in the arms
of the good*

*We look forward to what may
come*

*God is with us evening and
night*

*and with certainty for every
new day.*

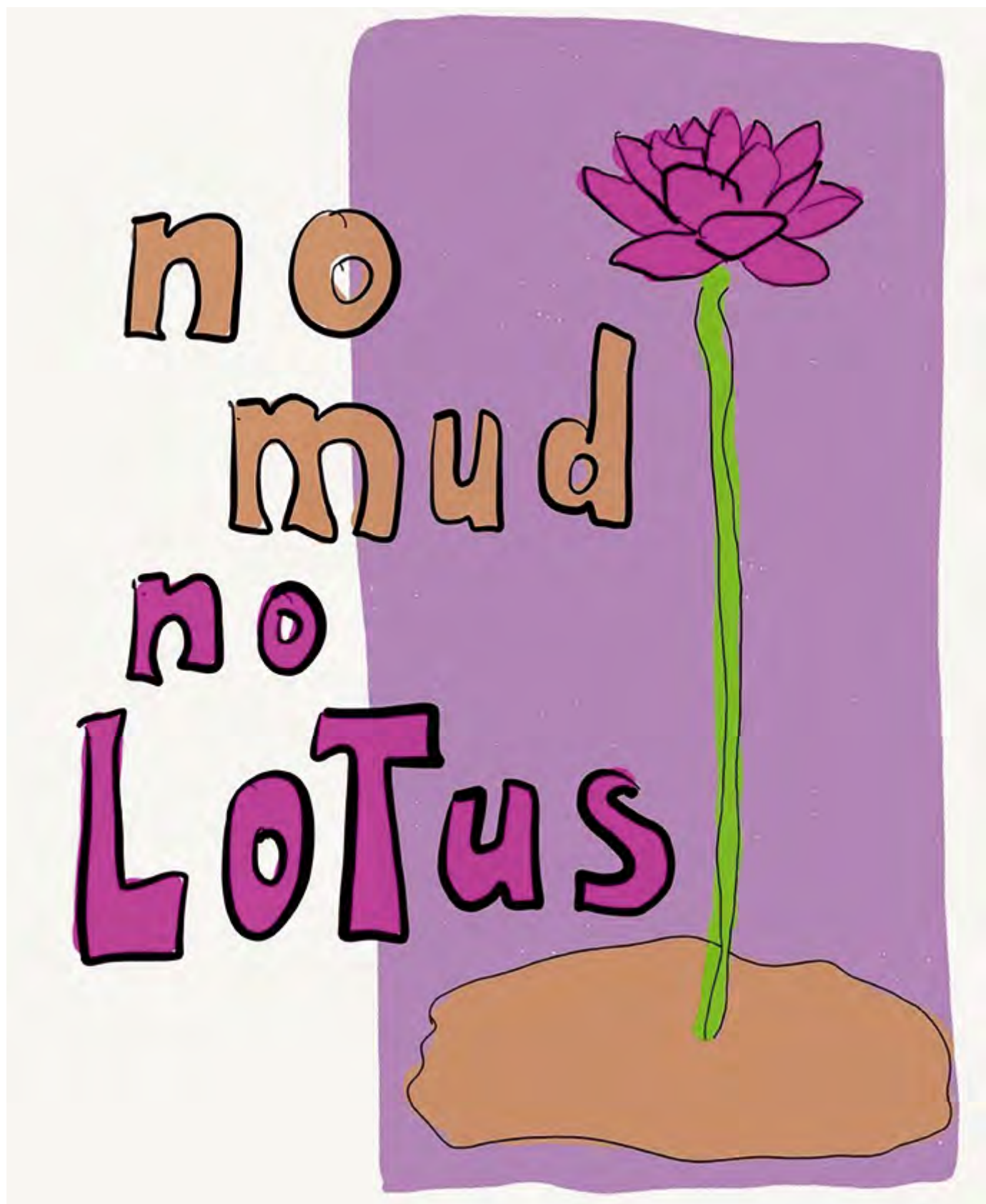
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1944)

Svenja



Completely Refreshed

How the pandemic opened my mind



Friday, 20.3.2020, 9 a.m., Press Conference: The Minister-President of Bavaria announces the closure of schools from Monday.

Friday, 20.3.2020, 9.30 a.m., Phone call: We (three children 9, 11 and 13), my mother (aged 84) and me will leave for 'our' farmhouse together with the owners and begin self-isolation.

Monday, 23.03.2020: There will be eleven of us – what we don't yet know at this time – we will spend the next 5 weeks on the farm separated from other people because my mother cannot return for health reasons.

In our luggage: Everything needed for home-schooling and home-office. Plus tuba, xylophone, flute and lots of games and puzzles ...

... and suddenly there is plenty of time.

... Time for what?

For a week I soak up the sun and drift through the day.

... and my goals gradually begin to become clearer: live healthier, learn, and enjoy my life.

Because of my previous illnesses and my obesity, I belong to the risk group for the Covid-19 pandemic. I knew that my overweight was unhealthy, but now I've got the official stamp for it: it can be fatal! Looking deeper (well, it isn't necessary to meditate on it that deeply), it is clear that I don't need a pandemic to help me die faster from overweight. But I had developed an awful lot of repression mechanisms in the past to avoid looking at my eating habits. But now with the sword poised above me, I was ready to tackle what I had previously avoided for so many „good“ reasons.

... and so I began to fast. Whilst doing so, I consulted books on nutrition and thought a lot about what my spirituality had to say on this topic. What best expressed my goals, however, were the '5 contemplations before eating' for child-

ren. I began to study them intensively, and to draw them.

Well prepared for my next meal, six weeks later I began to eat again.

3 months later and I am eating healthily and continue to lose weight. I feel good and am happy with my weight; I hope it continues.

At more or less the same time, I looked for courses in the areas of psychology, teaching and neuroscience. Finally I

could devote time to a more intensive study of these areas. I began with my favourites: with the psychologist Maja Storch and Gunther Schmidt who writes about hypnosystemics. Inspired by the pair of them, I also searched for videos of the neuroscientist Gerhard Roth.

Parallel to this I enjoyed the talks by Thay and the nuns and monks of the EIAB and Plum Village.

It was wonderful to have the Dharma illuminated from different perspectives; I





could see a connection between the different approaches. Gunther Schmidt explained to me in plain language (even though he probably doesn't know himself), what Thay meant with embracing our anger and frustration. And Thay puts everything into a larger spiritual context.

Here too I have tried to express my insights in drawings.

... and when two different approaches that I am following suddenly converge, that's a wonderful discovery.

Perhaps that all sounds a bit like hard labour, but it wasn't. I now feel completely refreshed.

... and could enjoy:

- The sun that shone and warmed us almost uninterruptedly for 5 weeks.

- The children, who missed their mother, but nothing else.



- My mother, who refreshed herself and enjoyed her walks.

Uli Lüttringhaus

- Sharing with my old mother about the '5 Contemplations' and about our true nature.

- ... my life!

Thanks to all those who made it possible.



Creativity Across the Zoomiverse!

Wake Up Your Artist retreat



Thanks to my experiences with Wake Up London's transition online and the willingness of my dear friend and Wake Up Your Artist partner Larissa Mazbouh to have a try, Wake Up Your Artist has just completed it's third online retreat of the lockdown. Thanks to all who have taken this journey with us.

This Body is not me

Early in April when news of the lockdown began to become a reality for European countries, Larissa I spoke about the possible challenges with holding the Retreat at the EIAB. If, as we would imagine, borders would close, meeting in person would not be an option. In London, meeting to practice was already a reality. Wake Up London had been running a few weeks already and with beautiful results; in my experience the silence, the sharings, the tears and joy still came – it worked and deciding to do this with WUYA, Larissa and I first had 2 main questions for each other – how to create presence and how to bring across the content of the course?

We first let go of trying to make it the same and named our elephants, much better you know and name what Elephants are in the room and better still, if you can befriend them! We had our fears of technical difficulties, not being able to reassure, encourage in our full bodied ways, responding to body language and voices and more. Once we got familiar and comfy though, if a bit squeezed by our Elephants, we felt better and began to play.

I love Larissa laugh and I like to hear myself laugh! Over the next 6 weeks, over many jars of peanut butter and cups of tea we played games, shared ideas, our aspirations and began to shape an online experience /experiments.

It felt like we were moving beyond the body, staying in it and at the same time finding a space between, a playground, a meditation hall, a studio where our artist bodies could meet together.

We were also joined by Philipp Hansen and Julia ***, former retreats who came to offer movement and impro theatre/drama respectively.

Into the space came the experience of these two art bodhisattvas, vulnerable and lovable in their willingness to explore with us.

As we got closer to each other and the date of the first retreat, I felt a sense of calm in my elephants and enthusiasm in my belly!

Call me by my true names

If you have ever been on our retreats you may know what the journey looks like, we look at the following: Inner Zen master, Inner Child, Self Compassionate one, Art Adventurer and Art Activist. We see these elements as part of the artist, moving from a foundation of mindfulness on the first evening to play (IC) being with difficult emotions (SCO), finding our flow (AA) and volition and message (AA).

For me, the lockdown has put me in a pretty contemplative space, sharings with friends I know it has been similar for others. Aware that it is a privilege to be in that place, to be financially stable has felt important to reflect on; in this way I felt that the retreat gave holding to these contemplations. How am I and how am I responding?

The bravery and openness of all who came inspired that in me too. Our shared journey with these 5 elements brought much support to my thoughts about where I am how I am being.

Thanks again my 3 friends here; as I remember now Philipp asking us to feel the lines of our devices and then our the lines of our bodies and then the room, Julia showing us how to let go, get things 'wrong' and laugh/delight at our



own silly dancing. And Larissa, painting from the heart.

The world is filled with precious gems

At the EiAB we open the Sacred Gallery space at the end of the retreat, a place where we share the wonders we have created - with the support of our website Bodhisattwa Simon Heereman we made a space online and again filled it with pictures, painted feet, woodland installations, ukulele songs, colours, shapes, prayers, poems, reflective words ... on 40 screens over 3 retreats from New York to Mumbai, London to Montreal we shared all these together.

There are so many gems with light shining through. (Thay)

The artist can do all this

In the Pocket Thich Nhat Hanh (Shambala Press) there is a page entitled Art. Thay says this:

"The artist, the actor, the film maker, the novelist may be

inspired by a desire to become a bodhisattva, helping with the awakening of our people, helping them to touch the seed of joy, of peace, of happiness in themselves, the artist can do all this"

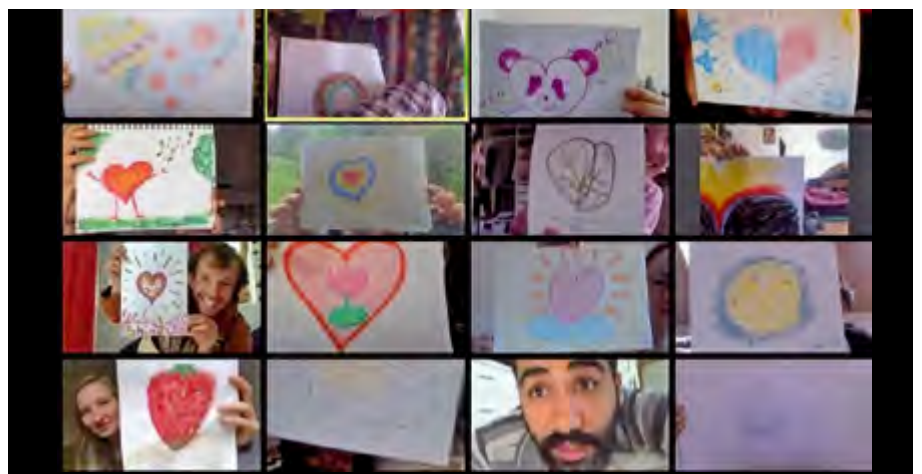
As a songwriter I feel this and as a WUYA (a Wake Up Your Artist) – I feel it even more!

I believe in our artists sangha, a community of understanding and love and may we all continue to inspire

each other and contribute as we feel to into the collective.

And ... if you're interested come say hello and join us, we'd love to see you..

Joe



Intense Learning

Experience with the online sangha

On 09.04.2020, during the online Easter Retreat, Sister Song Nghiem suggested writing a happiness diary every day to help us stay happy and healthy throughout the challenging times of the Corona crisis.

We can develop a diary writing routine every morning and evening.

We would like to offer the following suggestions for the morning and evening routine:

Morning Routine:

- Every morning write down 3 things for which you are grateful, and give 3 reasons why.
- How will you make today a wonderful day. Focus on the possibilities and opportunities the day offers.

Evening Routine:

- Write down the happy moments of the day, the wonderful things you have experienced today.
- Capture these happy moments and hold them firm in your memory and in your diary.
- What did you enjoy today?
- Did you notice something beautiful today?
- Did someone help you with something? Was someone kind to you?
- Did you succeed at something?
- Or was it simply a beautiful day?
- Did I do something good for someone else today? Every small act can bring joy. Doing something good for someone else, also makes us happy in turn.

What would I like to do better tomorrow? What have I learned today? What possibilities for improvement do I see?

In what follows Bea and Candida show us the fruits of their practice:

Since the crisis first entered our lives so



closely, and exposed us to situations we have never previously experienced in our lifetime, a very intensive learning process has been underway, for which we are extremely grateful.

Firstly, we were able to participate in two wonderful retreats, which were practically delivered to our doorstep (In the footsteps ... and EIAB Easter Retreat). Due to our financial situation we thought it would be a while before we could participate in a retreat again. However, we were always convinced that when the time was right, a retreat would manifest.

We felt a deep gratitude arise within us, not only for our brothers and sisters and teachers, but also for the technology that made it possible for these retreats to be delivered to us in our living room, and of course for all the people who make this technology possible.

As our mindfulness days had to be cancelled, we made the mindfulness days available online to our Sangha. We sent them texts to read, recorded guided meditations, songs and recitations. It was wonderful for us to feel the connection

despite the lack of physical closeness. This connection was even more powerful when we could see the number of participants all together during the live transmission.

Although we lead a very quiet life, the crisis made it even quieter and more peaceful, something we enjoyed and would like to keep. Writing a diary, as suggested by Sr Song Nghiem during the Easter retreat, helped a lot, and we are still doing it now. It is so pleasant to answer these questions in the morning and in the evening. Food for the good seeds of joy, happiness and compassion.

One of the things that has struck us most is just how present mental formations such as fear, anger, desperation and rage or hatred are in these times. Perhaps because we have much less opportunity to distract ourselves and also we spend more time with ourselves, in addition to which these feelings are very present in the collective. Being aware of these feelings so intensely, offers a chance to practice with them, namely to let them just be there in the first place, without judging them as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. When we succeed in this, we already feel a certain relief, and the next step is to embrace these feelings. Then it is usually relatively easy to identify the causes and roots. We are very grateful that this crisis has made it possible to come into contact with feelings such as fear, anger, rage and despair, sometimes sadness, so clearly and to be able to identify and transform them.

Many thanks for the opportunity to share all of this.

Bea und Candida
Sangha Pflaumfeld-Gunzenhausen

Candida's diary 20.6.2020:



20.06.20

MORGENS

zu 1.) Ich bin so dankbar für meine
Einsicht, gerade, weil so viel möglich
ist. Ich bin so dankbar.

IMMER WENN ICH BEMERKE,
DASS ICH UNACHTSAM BIN,
BIN ICH BEREITS WIEDER IN
ACHTSAMKEIT.

Ich bin so dankbar für diese
Stadt, voll von so viel, weil ich
dann heute früher sein kann.
Ich bin dankbar, dass wir heute
morgen lebend, und ohne Schmerzen
und Schmerzen waren, weil ich weiß,
dass es eine wunderbare Zeit, die
das nicht haben.

zu 2.) Ich bin dankbar, heute meine
Schmerzen und Schmerzen hat
Befreiung zu bringen, und mit
meinem neuen Kind zu
gehen und meine Liebe zu
mich haben. Ich bin dankbar.

ABENDS

zu 1.) Ich habe mich heute gefreut, dass
wir zusammen in unserer
Liebe, Freude und Freude.
Ich habe mich gefreut, dass ich so fast
unser Kind habe, denn ich kann
Freude und - schlafen und haben
sein.

Ich habe mich gefreut, dass ich heute
in Ruhe schlafen konnte.

Ich habe mich sehr über den schönen Regen
gefreut.
Ich habe mich sehr über unser leckes
Brot und unsere Schokolade
gefreut.

zu 2.) Der schöne Regen war so wunderbar
schön.

zu 3.) Die Liebe L. hat uns einen schönen
voll, leckeren, gemacht.

zu 4.) Der erste von Bernd's Geburtstag -
Sofort ist fertig und wir's gut
gelingen.

zu 5.) Ich habe den Baum off. auf
schlecht und mich bemüht, nicht zu
stehen, aber ich bin zu stehen.

zu 6.) Ich habe heute gelernt, dass ich
nicht kann, denn ich bin für
nicht schenken, aber ich habe
und das ist sehr schön und
ich habe auch gelernt, denn ich meine
Liebe, das ist sehr schön.

zu 7.) Ich kann morgen schön
sein und die Tage liebevoll
offen und schlafen.
Ich kann morgen meine Liebe, das
morgen, aufteilen, wenn ich sie
aussehen.

Ich kann morgen noch mehr, mit
meiner Liebe, können, sprechen, und
wenn ich mich alle Gedanken auf
die Freizeite - aber das weiß ich
schon.

Bea's diary 15.6.2020:

My wife is a very diligent and detailed diarist. I, on the other hand, have signally failed to keep up a diary writing practice for more than a few days. So it was all the more amazing to me that I have now been writing regularly since April 9th (after the Easter retreat)! Becoming aware at least twice a day of all the things I can be thankful for, what I can enjoy, what others have done for me and what I have learned and what I can do better for others is a wonderful help for my practice. And it helps me not to overlook the little things. I often sit there and think about what I have done for another person and I absolutely nothing comes. Until I think of the little things, a smile or just my existence.

Even though I am still rather pragmatic and minimalistic in my writing, it is unusually easy for me to stick with it.

Morning

I am ...

1. • grateful that I could sleep through the night.

- grateful that we are both alive.
- grateful that I have everything I need to make fresh pretzels.
- grateful that yesterday I could quickly notice my irritation over what I regarded as the premature easing of restrictions, and calm myself down.

2. Deliberately do something good for someone

Evening

1. I was happy ...

- that our garden centre delivered two sacks of earth and two glasses of honey today.
- that I had a good talk with Maria.
- that our car runs without any problems.
- that our Luise can once again walk without pain.

that I was able to speak to my mother on the phone.

2. The horse chestnuts on the 'yellow hill' are already almost fully covered in leaves and some other trees have a beautiful radiant green.
3. My loved one left me the last piece of Jean Bernard (cheese).
4. A cake in the electric oven.
5. I cooked my loved one an extra leek, because she doesn't like eggs in mustard sauce.
6. To wait longer in the pauses in conversation before I say anything myself.
7. Deep listening

Practicing in the **Midst of the Storm**

Everything can change in the next moment



This morning there is no program, no visits planned, no work scheduled and enough inner peace to let life unfold. It is Sunday and the center of the little town, around the corner of my studio, is calm and peaceful. Bird's song from trees two blocks away easily reach our ears. 'Every disadvantage has its advantage', a famous Dutch football player used to say. It sounds like a simple translation of Thay's wisdom that Happiness is possible right here and right now, as long as we are awake.

Everywhere around the planet life has changed drastically because of the Corona-virus.

On the 12th of March the Dutch prime minister announced the so called 'Intelligent Lockdown'. Two weeks before the OI members gathered for their bi-annual meeting. Some refrained from hugging already and everybody was aware that

something was about to happen, even though we had no idea how our daily life would look like a few weeks later.

Looking back, it seems everyone needed time to understand what was going on, what was needed and how to respond. "Should we cancel the celebration we planned with parents and children, the organizing team asked. You are in the age group that is at risk." It took us a week to decide.

Then suddenly on the evening of the 12th there was this acceleration: in less than a second, everything fell still. It was like magic; no cars, no planes, no loud voices late at night..... no noises anywhere. As if time suddenly disappeared....

This silence made me turn inside, intensified my meditation practice and brought about an immense inner rest. It felt as a blessing. The sky, free from air-

plane traces, was intense blue. The river meandered sparkling like silver. The weather was beautiful, and my daily walks nourished body and mind.

This magic lasted some weeks, then the social consequences began to take its toll!

The news showed the horrible consequences of lock downs in poor countries like India, where people had little chance to survive this crisis. They could choose between dying of hunger or of the virus. I felt helpless, powerless and so sad that this is the world we create!

When media pointed a finger at children who live in unsafe, violent families in our own country, I could feel the weight of this on my shoulders for days. "What can I do???"

When walking around the greenest areas in town, the collective fear fell on me like

a blanket. I realized walking meditation would calm me down, but often times I found myself 'running' with my shoulders bended down.

The fact that my studio had to be renovated thoroughly forced me to move out for a month. They moved my belongings to an apartment at the other side of the town squares. It was huge! Big enough for a family with 4 children at least. I began to feel lost, little by little. Almost all social contacts were digital, I had not met my granddaughters – teenagers – in two months and all activities with and for the sangha were cancelled.

The only way to get through all these changes were the basic practices of sitting meditation, walking meditation and nourishing joy! Embracing and accepting whatever arose inside.

Only by looking back I see how I lost 'myself' through the emptiness in this huge apartment. There were nights that I woke up being paralyzed by fear and the only way was to look at it, feel it, embrace it and breathe through it until sleep would take away the awareness.

There is story to tell about the anxieties, no images or words to describe them. But it felt like a cleansing of body and mind.

I feel privileged; I learned how to practice and even though I missed the local Sangha gatherings, EIAB asked me to guide some children's activities online, the Upper Hamlet streamed there sitting meditation sessions and Ordre of Interbeing members in the Netherlands bought and shared facilities to have online Sangha gatherings!

I feel blessed because the practice shows me the way out when things get complicated inside and around.

There is no way to know the future. The lesson learned by this pandemic is that anything can be completely different in the next instance! The only way to be prepared is to keep on practicing, so whatever storm is next, we will be able to face it.

Tineke Spruytenburg



Dharma-Teacher Rochelle Griffin: Loving Attention

Corona in the nursing home

Everyone in this world is currently facing the corona crisis. We deal with it directly because we have been sick, or are still sick, know people who are sick, or have taken care of people who were sick. Our professional life is totally upside down, video calling became the norm. We've had a lockdown and now we're all going to carefully step into the one and a half meter society.

In this time of crisis the webteam of Leven in Aandacht (www.aandacht.net) wanted to show the perspective of experienced practitioners. We made series

about how dharma teachers have dealt with their quarantine. Below the story of Rochelle Griffin.

Dharma teacher in the nursing home

Rochelle has been living in a somatic nursing home since the autumn of 2018. She had a serious car accident in 1980 from which she never physically recovered. As the years progressed, her physical complaints demanded so much from her and her wife that living at home was no longer possible.

Rochelle became a dharma teacher in 2004. Her dharma name is 'Chân An Quang' or 'True Light of Peace'. For years she has dedicated herself to the sangha, retreats, coaching and giving loving attention to people around her. In 2017 her health problems claimed her to such an extent that she could no longer be active in the Order of Interzijn and the sangha.

Taking refuge in strong Sangha hands



*My doubt and confusion
melt.*

With Thây's gentle smile

*The grip of fear
dissipates*

*My heart burst open
with Love*

*I notice golden leaves
dancing in the wind*

*I surrender to deep
Happiness I surrender
to deep Happiness.*

(Insight Gatha Rochelle 2004)

Now she shares her loving attention and dharma insights with her co-residents and staff in the nursing home where she lives. Rochelle lives together with 22 co-residents who have physical and sometimes cognitive disabilities. The nursing home is located in a beautiful wooded area where you can enjoy walking. A quarter of an hour's walk away is a first class restaurant with a beautiful garden where Rochelle likes to have lunch. I talk to her through FaceTime about what it is like for her to have to stay in a nursing home during the lock down.

After the quarantine came into force, all residents of the nursing home had to stay inside. By now, this isolation has been going on for about three months. All this time Rochelle had no physical contact with her loved ones and there was no freedom of movement. Rochelle is, even now, not allowed to receive anyone and is not allowed to go out for a nice walk in the woods. The pressure on the nursing staff and the residents is very

high. Rochelle experiences it as if they're all shipwrecked in a small boat and nobody knows where they're going. She is grateful for the safety that the nursing home offers her and her co-inhabitants (no one died of Covid-19 in this nursing home), but she pays a high emotional and relational toll.

Being present with your own pain and with the other person

Rochelle saw her partner twice a week and regularly came home to Hurwenen on weekends. Now they only call or see each other behind the window. When her partner came to visit she always saw her servicedog Prince. She raised and trained him herself. For three months she hasn't been able to cuddle and frolic with him. And Prince not with her. Besides the lack of contact with her partner and friends, also the lack of contact with her dog Rochelle gives a lot of grief.

When Rochelle notices that she is emotionally hindered, she feels in her body where the pain and tension is. She tries to identify the emotion to which this physical tension is linked. She then keeps this feeling in focus and breathes softly until the emotion dissolves and the physical tension decreases. Because she is experienced in the practice, she can cope better with her own painful feelings and she can be more present for others. And can she be of help and comfort to those who need it. Rochelle speaks the language of the heart. Some residents talk little or nothing, but in contact with Rochelle they can still make themselves understood by her. The nurse is grateful for her contribution in the resident group. Even if people are not familiar with Buddhism and the Dharma, the message comes across. So Rochelle remains a dharma teacher for life.

Taking responsibility

Her experience with spiritual practice gives her the confidence that even in the most difficult situations it is possible to take responsibility for your own pain and

create space. Whether these are minor or major difficulties, such as becoming seriously ill, becoming blind or dying.

Rochelle sees her co-inhabitants suffering and also sees that some have a tendency to complain themselves. She has compassion for them. For her, however, it is also a reminder that our lives are too precious a gift to linger in self-pity. With her practice, she can prevent herself from feeling victimized.

People around her say that Rochelle radiates so much tranquillity. She likes that, but even more she likes the fact that she can often experience this peace for herself.

Peter van Leeuwen

In My Garden

How the humble carrot shows me the way

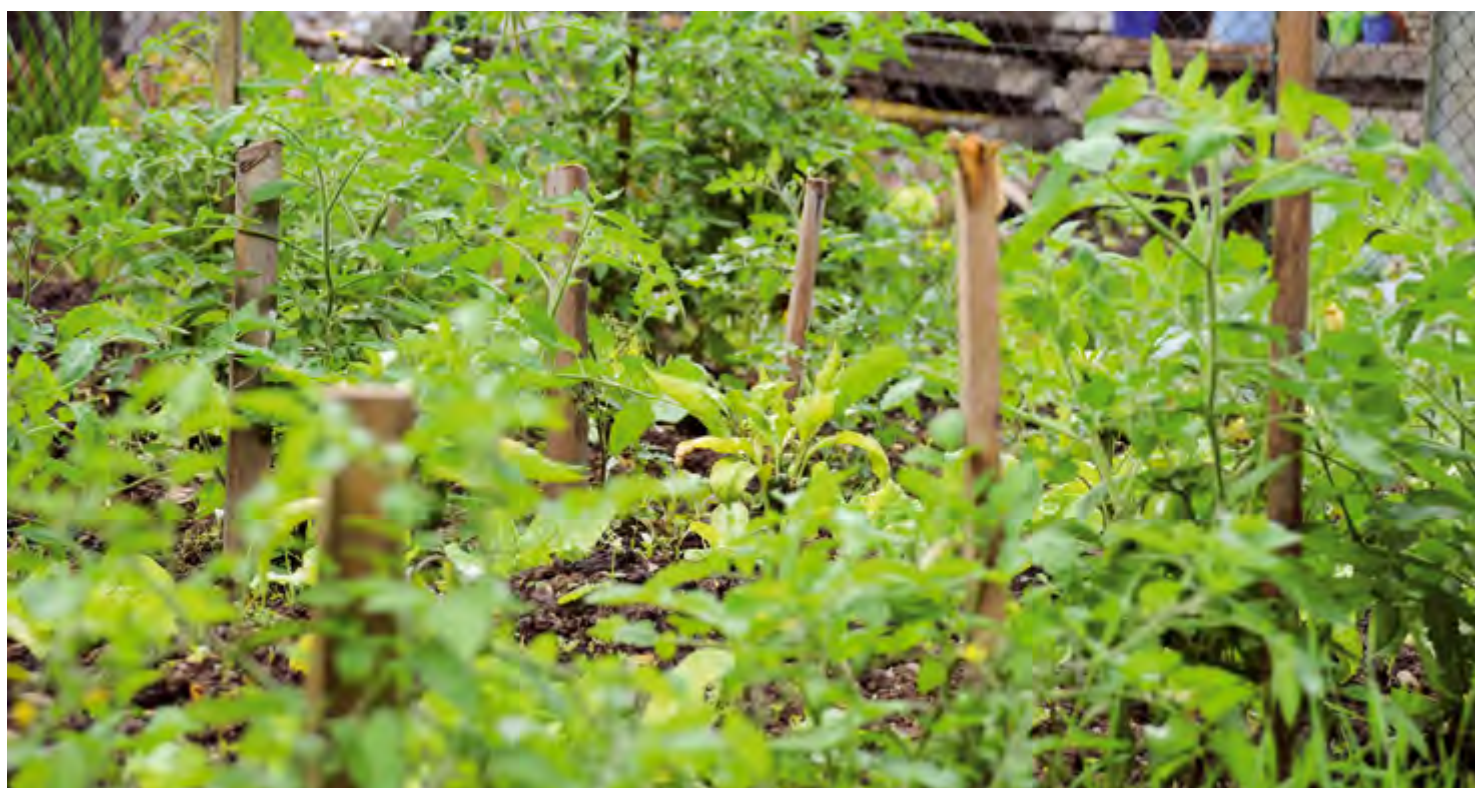
What I have heard discussed so widely during these past weeks and months during the lock-down, is how many of us have taken up gardening and growing vegetables. Some have dug up their lawns to make a vegetable patch, allotments, window -boxes and tubs on balconies, pots on kitchen window sills, abandoned plots and rough ground , all of them dug over and planted up. I hear that sales of vegetable seeds have soared like never before during this time. Everyone speaks of the pure enjoyment, the exercise and fresh air, of being in touch with the soil, giving a sense of well-being and fulfilment.

In my veg patch I grow are carrots. I confess there was a time when I was unimpressed by the carrot, a dull, boring vegetable I thought, and yet I often peeled and chopped a few for a stew to add a little colour. That was until I began to grow my own. As you know the seeds are tiny, and I sowed them in March when it was cold ,the days still short, when sowing anything feels like an act of hope. Sprinkling the seeds thinly into a pot of finely sieved compost, I water them in and cover the pot to keep them warm. Then ... nothing happens, or so it seems, until one day some weeks later, I detect a pale green fuzz across the

surface of the compost, and my heart soars. They tell me 'Spring is coming and we are ready to manifest'.

I have contemplated the carrot over time, and looking deeply to see that a carrot is complex, to be able to grow it needs warmth, soil, water, sunlight, the care of the gardener . It also contains passing time, night and day, the phases of the moon, Spring and Summer, all are present. We move from early March into Summer, and now I can enjoy easing the carrots out of the ground with their lovely long feathery tops. I see the complexity present in the carrot on my





plate, I enjoy them grated raw in salads. Nowadays, rather than dull, I know that carrots are small, bright, sweet tasting miracles. When I notice handsome carrots displayed in the greengrocers I marvel at the skill of the grower.

The evening of my arrival at Plum Village, my very first visit in May 2000, all was quiet, there was no one around. I went into the kitchen where a sister was sitting alone, peeling a carrot, she looked very peaceful, happy. She kindly warmed some supper for me, and I watched her peel another carrot. I looked closely at the peeling, it was one long spiral from

the top to the base, it was skilful, beautiful, raised the carrot into a work of art.

The carrot has a lot to teach me, it is humble, and yet, the humility of getting back to the Earth, this is our way forward, something so many of us have instinctively recognised lately. Thay has spoken of the need for collective awakening for a long time, we need to wake up and at the same time to wake down, I listen to the wisdom of the earth, tend the earth and be in touch with the rhythms of nature. It has been said that no one is too small to make a difference, not even a carrot.

Lesley Collington
True Lotus of Joy

Living Holistically in Demanding Times

Corona as a chance to appreciate afresh our own conditions for happiness



My wife Alex and I, Marco, have been living on our beautiful old farm near the EIAB for 7 years now. The focus of our life is very much on sustainability, closeness to nature and practicing the Dharma. We lead a vegan lifestyle, which helps us to live healthily. And growing a large proportion of our own vegetables, eating many wild herbs and drinking our own spring water means we don't have to shop for much. Together with our animals, which graze the orchards, we cultivate our land carefully and mainly by hand. This way of life, which allows us to spend a lot of time in nature, seems to us to be the most holistic way to live our lives.

Living in an atmosphere of togetherness with our animals, free from the demands of farm-animal husbandry, enables us to feel a constant connection to the animal and plant world, a great gift for us. Of course, our life also requires a lot of work and is very time intensive. Activities like gardening, tending the land, taking care of the animals and spending time with them mean that most of the time we are heavily involved with our farm, and that trips, retreats etc. have to be planned well in advance. Sometimes we can observe

the seed of desire for more spontaneity germinating in us.

However, the practice always helps us to recognise these thoughts and find their origins and roots. Then we call the words of Thay to mind, who never ceased to emphasize that we always have more than enough conditions for happiness. In March this year, the world seemed to be turned on its head and was completely and suddenly dominated by the topic of the Corona Pandemic.

From the very start, we decided to media-fast, to avoid the influence of too much blanket media coverage. Initially, we believed that these new developments would have a significant influence on our lives. In certain areas this also proved true, as a project developer for renewable energy my work was now restricted to home office and telephone or internet conferences.

The weekly sangha evenings had to take place via Zoom. The EIAB had to close down completely and a personal visit there was at first no longer possible. And our regular visits from Sangha friends to stay for a few days had to be postponed

indefinitely. However, when we looked a bit closer, we realized that the changes and restrictions that Corona brought with it, did not change much in everyday life, with its focus on a sustainable, energy efficient and self-sufficient way of living.

On the contrary, the restrictions imposed by the pandemic now meant that the seeds of the desire for more spontaneity and flexibility could no longer be watered now that there was no possibility for it anyway, and these thoughts gradually disappeared. Perhaps this is the reason why we experienced an even deeper connection with nature, accompanied by great sense of inner peace and serenity. The wonders of nature were and are so clearly and indescribably beautiful.

It helped that we were supported by a broader collective and atmospheric calm, as the result of less air traffic and less general activity. Nature and our Mother Earth have had the chance to take a deep breath, as have we, so that a real retreat atmosphere has developed.

All in all, we have learned to appreciate our own way of life even more. This

experience seems to have confirmed once again that the path we are following, of sustainability and Dharma practice, is exactly right. We do not allow the seeds of fear and insecurity associated with the dangers and consequences of the pandemic to find fertile soil here. Of course, news about the suffering experienced by people as a result of the Corona Pandemic has also sometimes reached us, and also touched us.

We have found that the shared metta meditations on Sunday and the chanting of the Avalokiteshvara Mantra have helped us a lot. It has brought us in touch with many Sangha brothers and sisters and we have been able to feel the wonderful energy of compassionate kindness and send it to all living beings.

Although we had no direct physical social contact whatsoever, we got the impression through phone calls and e-mails that many people felt a desire for change and a realignment. Suddenly, on our walks in the forest, we saw more people than ever before, obviously people who felt a newly awakened connection with nature.

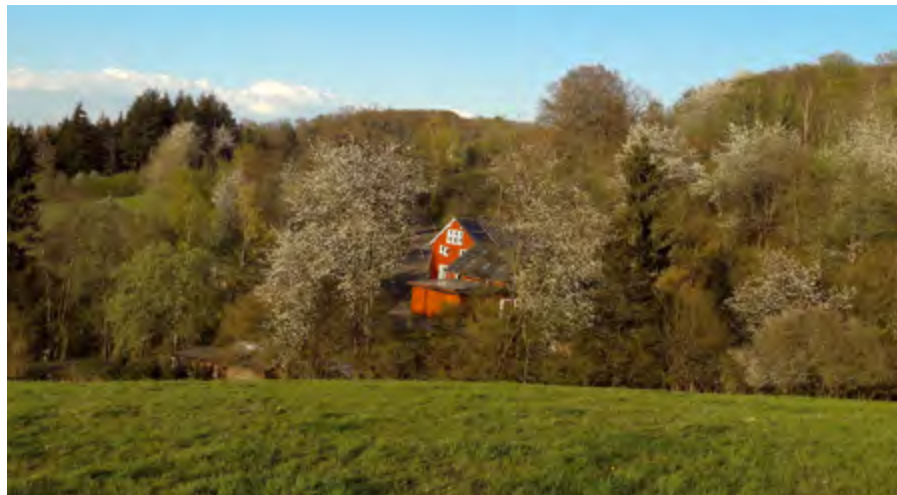
Again and again, people came and wanted contact with our animals, something that has filled us with real joy. We also sense a more positive attitude and greater interest and openness towards a vegan way of life.

As the leader of the German branch of the organization: Dharma Voices for Animals, we have in recent months received significantly more mails with questions regarding animal welfare and veganism in connection with Buddhism, as well as seen a significant increase in membership. All these developments have nourished the hope and optimism in us that in last few months many people have experienced an awakening of sorts and started a change towards more respectful treatment of the most wonderful thing we have, our Mother Earth with all her creatures.

At the same time, we are very happy that we now have the opportunity to practice together with the monastic Sangha as well as with our Sangha brothers and sisters, outside of the virtual space, as well as within.

With a deep bow to Mother Earth and a lotus for you!

Alexandra Pelkonen
Continuous path of the Heart
Marco Stromberg
True merit of virtue



What Next After Corona?

How can we support each other?



The question could also be: How can we live a dignified and worthwhile life after Corona? The Corona situation makes it clear that we are dependent on the solidarity of communities that in turn need a spiritual direction. For those seeking to maintain their individuality, life will most probably become somewhat more difficult in the future. One reason for this is that there will have to be more decentralised solutions for the supply and disposal of everyday items. The environmentally damaging logistics of harvesting potatoes in Germany, flying them to Italy for washing, then flying them back to Germany for distribution to shops and markets is not a sustainable use of resources.

The same is true for central sewage treatment plants versus bio-treatment plants in villages, or drinking water dams versus local drinking water sources. With our know-how and new innovative technology, we face the challenge of creating individual local supply systems.

This means starting to take responsibility for ourselves as well as for our fellow human beings.

We can no longer hand over this responsibility to centralised hospitals, sewage works, waterworks and large suppliers. We must learn to take over responsibility for supply and disposal in our own homes and neighbourhoods, and do it collectively. This leads to a situation in which we do what is important to us, what we enjoy and like doing. As a result, we will live more of our own potential, and no longer do what others tell us every morning to do. We are called on to act creatively.

At the same time, if we are to survive, it is important that we live more modest lives. Nature needs what we consume as input for its life cycle. Everything has a natural impulse towards balance. Here we have a guiding principle to help us:

How would the divine part of us act?

It is not about reacting to anything, but about being active and creative. This allows us to give the divine in and around us the necessary respect and devotion, which in turn nourishes us and everything around us. If we treat nature

without respect, we treat ourselves without respect. We can only love ourselves, if we begin to treat nature with respect.

One future solution will be to grow and harvest vegetables ourselves as a community, on our own doorstep. We, as communities, will have our own greenhouses, local medical support and in particular, we will each take care of our own health. Doctors will no longer prefer to work in big cities, because life there is simply not safe and dignified. Scientific research can also be decentralised and networked. This applies to all professions.

Living without boundaries

In a way, we are returning to our own indigenous forests. Living in skyscrapers and cobbled courtyards without a clear view of nature makes life unbearable for humans. For this reason alone, life in rural structures is far healthier and worthwhile. This does not mean renouncing culture. We will simply face the challenge of making music and art, and becoming more creative ourselves. We are more than just our work. We have more than just one talent. We are far richer than we have been led to believe. Ultimately, even if we live in this limited body, we are life without boundaries.

The Middle Way

“Yes is the answer and yes is the way“ sing Satyaa & Pari. Daya Mullins of The Middle Wy – Daya Mullins Foundation, says: „When we say yes, the universe gives us the strength we need“. It is precisely with this inner attitude that we can achieve everything together. Successes, victories, discoveries: achievements of any kind are never individual achievements. They are always the work of many different people and living beings. This means that in the future we will need to

become more aware of the interrelationships involved in achievement, recognize them with humility and gratitude, and by doing so make them useful. Once we recognize this, then to a certain extent there is really nothing more to do.

We are just conduits for something greater. What we do, and what wants to find expression through us, becomes a blessing for the people and the community around us, and thereby also for ourselves. The point is that the potential within us, freed from pressure and stress, seeks expression. This expression of our potential is part of our liberation and part of our destiny. We are created in God's image. With this awareness, we can look forward to the future with confidence and enjoy every new moment. In this way we can joyfully greet and master the challenges of the present and the future. It is the task of all of us to attain mastery. This is part of what it means to be human.

The earth will continue to exist, and we will too. We can now either make an evolutionary leap or continue to 'enjoy' the Corona situation. I say enjoy and not

suffer, because we have the choice between an evolutionary leap and suffering in the corona situation. We are clearly called upon to make this leap. Transformation and healing is happening right now. Nature is taking a deep breath. People are being forced to calm down and take time to re-orientate. Time that wants to be used. „Don't waste your time“ says Thay Phap An, the Director of the EIAB in Waldbröl, the European Institute for Applied Buddhism. The Latin says: Carpe diem. Seize the day, but also enjoy the day.

The Divine will never intervene in what is happening around us. This is why we have been given free will. What we make of it is up to us. We can let ourselves drift or give our lives direction. Our task is always to ask ourselves, how would the divine presence in us, and in beings who have attained liberation, solve the present task? What would they decide to do? If we ask ourselves these questions, we will get the right answers and take the right steps towards the solution. If we allow ourselves to follow this inner divine guidance, then we will always be on the right

path, the middle way, and always liberated. What a gift. Wow.

In deep gratitude to each of you who reads these lines.

Your friend and companion

Frank Jungjohann-Feltens



Practicing Compassion in Times of Pandemic

How can I help in this crisis?



Corona and *karuna*

Our monastery for nuns at the EIAB is called '*karuna*' = Monastery of Great Compassion.

Since the start of the Corona-Virus the word Corona is in everybody's mouths, and I often confused the two words – Corona and *karuna* – until at some point I had the insight, Corona is *karuna*. Both inter-are. Because of Corona, *karuna* can blossom!

Corona offers us the chance to practice *Karuna*.

The word *karuna* = compassion; in Pali and Sanskrit it describes a state in which we feel a slight trembling of the heart in response to the suffering of another being. We feel a need to act wholeheartedly to help soothe the suffering of other living beings.

We cannot bear to see someone suffering physically or mentally, or to remain

passive in the face of another living being's need for help. We want to give a part of ourselves, to give something from our inner or outer wealth in order to help.

To give something to someone else and to experience joy and happiness as a result is a great gift. Over and again, the joy of giving cements the bond between us and other living beings.

Generosity plays a central role in Buddhist practice. It is the first of the six Perfections (paramitas) and is regarded as the basic practice of a Bodhisattva. The spirit of a Bodhisattva is directed towards helping all feeling beings in every possible way. This gives the expression 'generosity' a much broader and deeper meaning, a limitless perspective.

To live generosity by serving other living beings, to help them and be open for them, is also the vow of monks and nuns. By focusing our mind on the Bodhisattva ideal we want to be ready to help each

and every being at any time, whatever they may need.

In the Plum Village tradition the practice of generosity is one of the 14 mindfulness trainings of the Order of Interbeing.

"Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, we are committed to cultivating generosity in our way of thinking, speaking, and acting.

We will practice loving kindness by working for the happiness of people, animals, plants, and minerals, and sharing our time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.

We are determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others.

We will respect the property of others, but will try to prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other beings."

We can give materially as well as immaterially. For this reason there are endless possibilities to help, to give, to be generous in these times, e.g. we can give love, understanding, joy or freedom from fear. We can give our stability, our equanimity, our non-harming in a difficult situation or our cheerfulness, our time, our attention, our hospitality, our knowledge, our talents. The form of generosity practiced most by nuns and monks is 'to give the teachings'. It is helpful to give material things, but of all the possibilities, teachings are considered the most important aspect of generosity. Through the teachings people understand the causes of their suffering, and this helps them to reduce and to free themselves from it.

The Buddha believed in the untarnished nature of every human being. He was convinced that we all carry our original goodness within us. Each of us also has generosity within us as one of the 10 perfections.

In these difficult times we can always find new ways and rituals to help people, to reach them, to comfort them, to convey confidence, to inspire hope, to encourage them, as well as to give them advice on how to get through the crisis and especially to give them the feeling that we are with them, that we are there for them.

We also enjoy and benefit from the generosity of others. Who does not like to be treated generously by others? Who is not happy to receive a cheerful welcome? Who objects to being helped? Or doesn't enjoy receiving the answer to the question what the help costs: „That's alright, it was only a little thing“.

Generous people make our lives more beautiful; they surprise us in pleasant ways. When someone treats us generously,

we rejoice inside, we are happy and experience our life as rich.

And when I look around me in this time of the Corona crisis, I find many role models: I am surrounded by generous people, friends, acquaintances and strangers ... people who are willing to share the best they have and who are happy if others enjoy it and are feeling good.

I would like to share some examples from my own experience of the generosity of others, so that we can inspire each other; we can learn and practice generosity and, fortunately, it is also contagious!

Celebrate these examples together with me and discover for yourselves how generosity flows into your own life and the many possibilities we have to cultivate this spirit of generosity that is part of our true nature that we all carry within us.

Heartfelt thanks to the innumerable people who support us in so many different ways with their wonderful donations!

We are very grateful and deeply touched by the great love and support we have received from our friends* throughout the time of the Corona crisis. You have all taken such good care of us, often in very creative ways.

We have received many loving letters, mails and phone calls asking how we are. Not only did people send us food such as rice, noodles and vegetables, but we also received financial support as well as praise and appreciation in all imaginable forms.

Your help means a great deal to us. It encourages us and enables us to continue on the Bodhisattva path to help and serve people.

We cannot personally thank all those who have helped us, as we don't have all the addresses. But now we would like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to all of you for your love and

generosity. With your help we will together be able to offer the EIAB community and our practice as a gift for a mindful and peaceful world.

All those who have participated in our Online Activities:

Bodhisattvas of deep listening

The lockdown in the current crisis has confronted us with a variety of new issues. We have had to learn how to offer the courses and Dharma talks of the EIAB in a secure way online.

This has not always been easy and we are happy that so many friends of the EIAB have taken part in online retreats and our Sunday online days of mindfulness.

Thank you for your patience, the effort you have put in and your interest in the teachings of the Buddha, and also that you have followed our retreats and meetings on your screen.

We are happy that we have been able to maintain the connection between our monastic community and our friends outside the EIAB using digital technology for the online talks. We hope that our lectures will succeed in offering deep insights and practical advice during this current time of crisis.

We would like to thank all of you who have shared with us how important the online talks are for you. Many friends have been able to use them to deepen their bond with Thay and the EIAB and to use the contents to help them deal with the challenges of everyday life.

We would like to thank all participants for your patience (when the online technology once again played a prank on us), for your love and financial support, and for your interest in the Buddha's teachings.

Bodhisattvas of translation and skilful language

The online Dharma talks and all other online activities (such as guided meditations, deep relaxation, touching the earth, questions and answers etc.) have been given in a variety of languages and then translated (into German, English, Dutch and Vietnamese). We can only do this thanks to the many friends who help with translating. We would like to thank Rottraut Haentjes, Gabrielle Gassen, Jillian Jakobi, Susanne Stech, Harald Timpe and Klaus Schick for their loving commitment. You have given us and the participants many hours of your time, your energy, your talents and your patience.



Here is to languages

*Song
Melody
Rhythm
And beauty
Heart*

*Home
Without words
And words
So precise
And full
Of wisdom
And poetry*

Here's to translating

*Two rivers
One flow*

*Building bridges
Of understanding*

*With humor
And deep joy*

Susanne Timpe

The Lay Sanghas round about: Numerous Bodhisattvas of Generosity

Numerous members of our lay Sangha here in Waldbröl and other local sanghas have given us a lot of practical support in this Corona time in all sorts of different ways: a friendly conversation through an open window, bringing flowers, giving food, working in the garden, financial advice and support. Help with our everyday work ... Especially Frank Jungjohann-Feltens, Lothar Wippich and Barbara Nissen. We would like to thank you all from the bottom of our hearts – your presence and your support brings us joy and makes us stronger!



Numerous Bodhisattvas with skilful, diligent hands at the sowing machine

I have great admiration for many of my Vietnamese friends in Germany, as well as in the Czech Republic, who spend many hours sewing thousands of face masks from fabric, and even pay for the material from their own pockets, so they can donate the masks to hospitals, churches, firefighters, the police, nurses or social institutions etc. The EIAB sisters have followed their example and are also sewing masks for others. We have always enjoyed handicrafts, and sewing with the machine as part of our mindfulness practice gives us great joy. It is wonderful to make something with our own hands that directly helps other people to stay healthy. When we sit at the machine, we always imagine how the fruits of our work will help to protect the lives of many people.

Although we give away face masks, we also receive many masks from our Vietnamese friends as gifts. On top of this, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, an international charitable foundation set up by the Buddhist nun Dharma Master Cheng Yen from Taiwan, has also given us masks. We would like to take this

opportunity to express our deep gratitude to all of them.

It is so wonderful to give the gift of protection to each other.



*Annabelle Dagmar Zinser:
A Bodhisattva of everyday generosity*

We are on holiday for a few days, an hour away from Berlin, in Saxon Switzerland. We are enjoying hiking in shady but bright forests, swimming in small lakes. It is wonderful, but despite the holiday I have brought my computer with me so that I can lead two zoom meditation evenings for the Sangha.

- In front of Rewe supermarket I see an elderly Roma woman sitting on the floor. She smiles at me. I smile back. I know that the Roma are finding life particularly difficult in these Corona times. I look in my wallet for change - but it has all flowed away. Then I give her five euros and enjoy her radiant smile, and wave goodbye to her.

In the morning while taking a morning walk, a big white BMW-SUV crosses my

path. I think: "Couldn't he drive a smaller car to help with the climate crisis?" and feel an irritation rising inside me. Then I remember the calligraphy of Thay in our centre: "Letting go is a source of

happiness"... This Gatha works wonders. I wish the driver a happy day.

Annabelle Zinser





David and his Team: Bodhisattvas of nourishing bread

In 2012, exactly four years after our arrival in Waldbröl, David Lee Schlenker, the owner of the DLS wholemeal mill bakery, contacted us and asked if he could support our work by giving the nuns and monks and our guests his wholemeal bread and baked goods. Since then we have been receiving his tasty bread every day for free, even when we have several hundred guests for several days at our big retreats. Everyone has a chance to enjoy and appreciate his nourishing organic bread. Every year, for our EIAB birthday or for other big events like our New Year's celebration (Western or Vietnamese New Year), Buddha's birthday (Vesak celebration), he calls us to find out what kind of cake with what kind of decoration we would like to have etc. We feel cared-for and happy to receive so much love and support from him and his staff at DLS*. Because he thinks our work at the EIAB is so valuable and helpful for so many people, he wants to contribute in his own way: he helps us because we help other people. In this way he makes our hands bigger, so we can receive and reach more people.

David does not just show his generosity to us at the EIAB, but also to the 'Hennefer Tafel' and their workers. All of them get to enjoy the tasty nourishment of DLS-organic bread and baguettes.

He does not just give us his bread, but also his joy and his humour. Whoever meets him is infected by his cheerful laughter, his striking Santa Claus cap or

his funny clown beard (does a clown ever wear a beard?); whenever we meet he is full of joy, a person who nourishes the seeds of joy and happiness within us.

David is not only a master baker, but also a Zen Buddhist and poet. Let us enjoy his words about generosity:

Let us enjoy his words about generosity:

It is not the times that have changed.

New circumstances and conditions have manifested that demand we change some of the ways we act. But for the largest part of our human existence the conditions remain the same.

For me this is summed up simply by two small words: **Give and share.**

(In the last four months we added the word with four letters: **Give more** and share **more.**)

In uncertain times we need concentration to continually find our way back to **Giving and Sharing.**

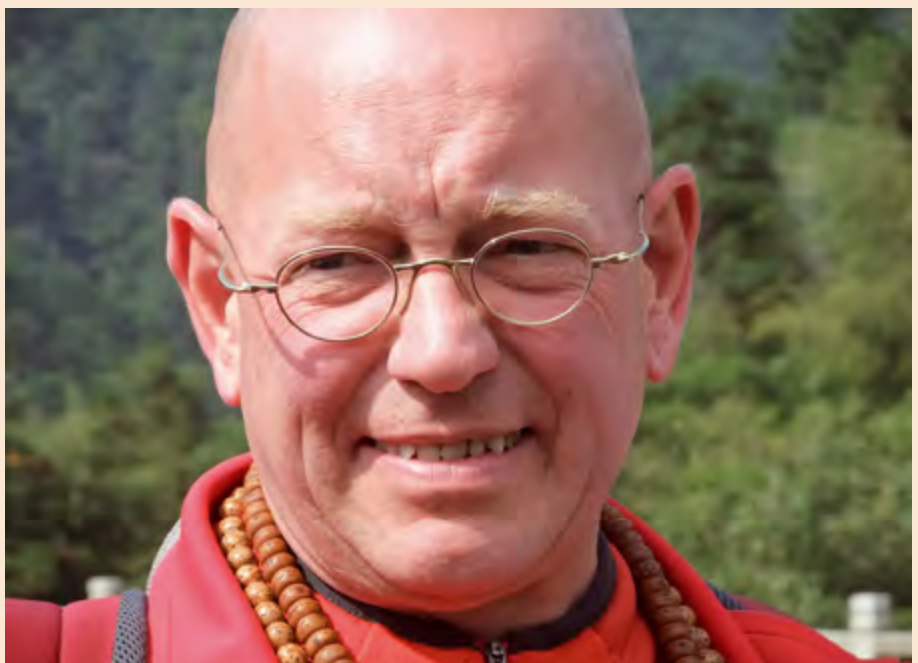
Giving means to give freely without wishing for anything (without the expectation of receiving something in return, without strings attached): Give what you can, give what is needed. Each of us has a lot to give; it is not a question of 'enough or good enough'. It can be music, time, prayer, work, ideas, love, care, management, money, friendship or even a poem. Be creative!

Sharing means sharing your knowledge, sharing your experience, sharing your beliefs. Be a safe harbour, a secure refuge in a storm.

Generosity is a function of the heart. When the heart opens, then generosity flows. Giving and sharing are like two hands.

Just like other qualities, some people seem to have a natural gift for them, but for the rest of us generosity is something we have first to learn.

First of all we have to practice; practice makes perfect. From a certain point onwards, when the heart opens, then generosity will flow completely naturally.



Janina Egert:
A Bodhisattva of generous action

I am helping and encouraging someone who has irritated me, because I know she needs help.

When I bake a cake, I give everyone in my residential community a piece of it.

I bring fruit and vegetables from my mother's garden, which I take care of, and give them to the women in the house.

In the garden of the "Quelle" (Source), I work completely voluntarily and also plant vegetables for our helpers, so that they can also enjoy the edible fruits of the garden. I would also like to teach them something about planting vegetables.

I visit my elderly mother once a week, and, alongside the work I do for her, give her my attention and compassion. I try to teach her what she should pay attention to when she walks, bends down and does other things, as she has a chronic illness that increasingly restricts her movement. And I try to encourage her

and give her the feeling that she can rely on me. She always asks me: "Are you coming again next Friday?"

Janina Egert



Sr. Tri Giac:
A mindful Kitchen-Bodhisattva

Since the outbreak of the Corona virus, our sister Tri Giac has become a kitchen bodhisattva at EIAB.

The Corona travel ban meant she was unable to travel home, and instead stayed at the EIAB. Even though she is now the oldest sister (in terms of ordination), she stays in the kitchen all day long and tirelessly helps our brothers and sisters with cooking. The brothers are especially grateful for her help.

Sister Tri Giac uses all the leftover food so skilfully that we do not waste any.

She teaches the young nuns and monks to be careful with food and be economical with it in order to preserve and cultivate our spiritual merit.

Again and again, she reminds us of the many people in the world who at this time are experiencing hunger.



Sr. Doan Nghiem:
A tireless Bodhisattva of the Teachings

Sister Doan Nghiem is a senior nun in our tradition. In February she participated in our monastic retreat at the EIAB, but because of the corona lockdown she too got stuck at the EIAB and couldn't fly back to Australia.

She has taken the time since to teach Buddhist psychology, and how to practice the monastic rules to the younger sisters

at the EIAB, and also introduced them to the art of calligraphy. She gives many online teachings for Vietnamese monastics and lay people in Germany and France. Why does she do this? In answer to this question she replies:

"It fills me with joy to see that the teaching is needed and that there is such a great interest in learning it."

And it is a great happiness for her to be able to pass on her knowledge and skills.



*Thay Phap An:
A wise Bodhisattva of vast,
empty Space*

I give myself the gift of my own vast and empty space. This space that has the capacity to heal me and others. In this wonderful vast and empty space we have the possibility to let go of all our pre-occupations, our search and our continual back and forth. We become deeply immersed in ourselves and in the wonder of the here and now.

Thay Phap An



*Klaus Schick:
A helpful Bodhisattva of Mediati-
on and Photography*

In my circle of friends the corona crisis has provoked a fierce dispute about the necessity for corona protection measures. With the help of Thay's skilful language I have been able to help so that we now listen to each other and support each other - even if we have very different views.

Following the cancellation of all my exhibitions and courses, I have had to close my photo studio for financial reasons. I have donated the numerous exhibition objects to the EIAB and the „Corona Help Bielefeld“ to help alleviate the material suffering.

Klaus Schick
Kraftvolle Weisheit des Herzens



*Sr. Song Nghiem:
A joyful Bodhisattva of Joy and
Ease*

I would like to share all my cheerfulness, joy and ease with everyone.

I look at myself in the mirror in the morning and give myself a friendly, loving smile.

Behind the face mask I give everyone a friendly smile, and often I notice how they recognise my smiling eyes and offer a smile in return.

I tease my old and sick mother, and cheer her up with my jokes.

Sr. Song Nghiem



*Martina Stammerjohann:
A Bodhisattva
of joyful encounters*

On this particular Tuesday I was visiting Bonn in the most beautiful summer weather. Amazed, I noticed how many people there were; it looked like before Corona. The tables in the cafés and restaurants were all full. Every now and then I saw a passer-by wea-

ring a mask. On my way back I had a pleasant encounter with a homeless man. He smiled at me in response to my glance and offered to sell me his newspaper. I gladly accepted his newspaper, but I felt I had „far too little“ change in my wallet. When I said this, he replied that the amount of money wasn't important to him; he was just happy that I had noticed him. We spoke for a short while, and as I

left he thanked me sincerely for our chat and wished me good health.

Martina Stammerjohann

Collected by Sr. Song Nghiem



*Flowing as a River:
The Waldbröl Sangha*

There is a slight hint of the exotic attached to being a 'Waldbröler', or at least we get a sense of that when we reveal at a retreat or course that we live so close to the EIAB: yes, there are people who have the chance to visit the monastery every day, to share the practice with the monks and nuns, and to enjoy their presence. Some have even moved here for precisely this reason. We are all very happy and grateful to be able to participate in this community as often as we can.

Many regard being part of this particular Sangha, with the monastic support we

receive, as not just mindfulness practice, but as being part of a joint project that involves helping the monks and nuns with everything that needs to be done, when it needs to be done. This can be in the kitchen, garden, helping with cleaning or with building work, or even dealing with the authorities, and last but not least helping the monks and nuns to speak German.

So, the lay Sangha and the monastic Sangha flow as a river – sometimes calm and relaxed, sometimes navigating our way through choppy waters. Several of us have experienced the Corona time as an example of this, and we are now happy to be able to meet again in the grounds of the EIAB.

One of our Sangha friends, Uwe from Bonn, has thought up an innovative way of collecting for the EIAB. He has put out collecting boxes in several shops and supermarkets and also collects for the EIAB at flea markets.

Nicole Ritter



Admirable Friendship

The building site Bodhisattvas



The builing site team Frank (2nd from the left), Lothar (2nd from the right) und Rainer (r.) with supporters.

In our tradition, the second Mindfulness Training gives expression to the Buddhist ideal of generosity, Dana:

"I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need."

As lay people we have a chance to practice this when we are at the EIAB by doing working meditation: during almost every retreat there are a few hours in which we can mindfully and calmly clean the toilets, bathrooms, stairs, hallways, weed the garden or cut vegetables. So, we are not only practicing a different way of working, with self-awareness and perhaps even with a sense of joy, without rushing and without being focused on the result of our work. This can be a very healing process, particularly if we manage to practice it at home and integrate it into our everyday life.

There are, however, many other aspects to this. One of which is that our work

really does serve and help the fourfold Sangha. Those who need our time, energy and material resources are our monastic brothers and sister, above all now in the difficult times of the Corona crisis. It is not easy for the monks and nuns currently living at the EIAB to manage the enormous amount of work created by the two large buildings and the large, wonderful grounds: everything has to be maintained and taken care of. This requires an awful lot of time and energy, as well as material resources, which the monastic community simply don't have. Over the last twelve years, we have all made donations to make it possible to undertake the necessary renovation work on the Asoka building, the construction of the new kitchen and dining hall, the Stupa and the creation of the Zen garden. Some of us have also actively helped in certain areas, for example in the creation and care of the Zen garden.

Since the symbolic 'ground-breaking' in February 2018, the third phase of con-

struction, namely the renovation of additional parts of the Ashoka building, has begun. Our friend Frank, who has been a member of the Sangha at the EIAB since the very beginning, took over responsibility for planning and implementation. As a professional architect with the necessary know-how, he is ideally suited to take over this large and important project for the Sangha.

And, as already mentioned: work always has a spiritual component. In the case of the building site Bodhisattvas, the spiritual component is so impressive and remarkable, that it deserves a special mention. Over and above the work done, this great commitment also resulted in the manifestation of a wonderful friendship.

Half of the Holy Life

Ven. Ananda said to the Blessed One, "This is half of

the holy life, lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie."

"Don't say that, Ananda. Don't say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is the whole of the holy life. When someone has admirable people as friends, companions and comrades, he can be expected to develop and pursue the noble eightfold path."

*Uppadha Sutta
(Samyutta Nikaya 45:2)*

Many of us know, or can guess, how heavy the responsibility for the building and the entire project weigh on the shoulders of Thay Phap An, the indomitable Sister Song Nghiem and the entire monastic community. Frank took on the burden of responsibility for an important part of this: the construction site. And he did it in a way that makes clear his many years of spiritual practice. First of all a friendship developed between Thay Phap An and Frank, which although I can hardly describe it I can see from the outside. I can only



say, it is as wonderful as a rainbow in the sky, deep and from the heart, and very nourishing for the two of them and everyone around them. And just as a stone falling into water creates ripples that become larger and larger, so does their friendship.

Although as an architect he had engaged a number of craftsmen whose work he knew to carry out the work professionally, Frank felt a bit isolated to start with. Then somehow Lothar and Rainer appeared. Starting with the „Love in Action“ retreats they offered their spiritual practice, time, energy and material means for the benefit of the Sangha.

This brought them so much joy that they also began to help Frank with all other kinds of tasks. For months they took over the basic cleaning of the construction site, helped prepare for the following day's work, so the craftsmen could get started straight away. They cleared out the rubble, made sure that the containers were „properly filled“ (please separate rubble, wood, metal and mixed materials ;-), disposed of scrap metal and radiators, old cables and lead pipes. They repaired water damage, maintained the machinery and repaired defective tools or wheelbarrows. A lot of time, love and effort was put into polishing the marble floors, cleaning the huge windows and taking care of the garden with the help of other friends, who unfortunately cannot all be named here (the merit is yours!!!).



Lothar and Rainer both live in Cologne and have free time at their disposal. They have enough strength, energy and know-how to be able to deal with the many and varied challenges that the construction site and the building itself presented and Frank asked them to do. Lothar, who friends of the practice in Cologne and Waldbröl have known for many years as a quiet and faithful friend who walks, breathes and smiles in the footsteps of Thay: never in a hurry, always from A to B in walking meditation, never involved in „meaningless chatter“, always present as a friend

where support is needed. And who always carries a bell in his brown shoulder bag, the very best friend a practitioner can have: “I’ll invite the bell first.” Stop, breathe and smile. Something we can do in every moment, a gift to ourselves.

Rainer took his first spiritual steps on the hiking retreats and then saw the “Love in Action” retreats as a chance to go deeper. He has a gift for friendship, and first made friends with many young monks who teach and inspire him, and for whom he has become a fatherly friend. He loves to sit with the monks in the meditation hall in the early morning, listen to the chanting and then enjoy the sitting meditation with the community. He reads and thinks a lot, but does not like to talk a lot. He always has an eye open for suffering

and how he can help to alleviate and reduce it. And he likes to be active, to get down to work and to do the things that need to be done. Or as Frank says: “Rainer is someone who sees the work. To be more precise, he not only sees the work, Rainer can smell the work.”

These three men met at the EIAB and discovered how well they complement each other, how well they can work hand in hand and how they can grow spiritually and help each other’s spiritual growth. A beautiful friendship has developed over the last year and a half between these three bodhisattvas of the building site thanks to their work together, which is the essence of Sangha building. The nuns and monks are filled with gratitude and love for these three people, who have been so actively

involved for so long and have made “Love in Action” their path. The monastic community has asked me to express this on their behalf.

Anne von der Lühse
True Inclusiveness of the Ocean



The EIAB During the Corona Crisis

New hygiene concept helps the EIAB to reopen

To my great regret, the effects of the current pandemic did not stop and wait at the doors of the EIAB, meaning that courses and retreats had to be cancelled. Like many other popular institutions, it had to close for a long while.

It wasn't long before I noticed something was missing. So I was overjoyed, when I received a request from brothers Phap Xa and Phap Tri to come to Waldbröl at the end of May to consider possibilities for reopening the Institute. My background: I have an engineering company for occupational safety, hygiene and environmental protection in Bonn and work as an advisor to the EIAB.

To begin with we met at the EIAB to discuss the situation, after which the Sangha discussed it amongst themselves. A working group was then created with Brother Phap Xa, Brother Phap Tri, Sister Gian Nghiem, Sister Chieu Dieu and me, Christian Hilbig-Rose. It was a pleasure to be able to participate. Other nuns and monks were also always ready to help and always interested. Spontaneously, a few things were discussed with Sister Song Nghiem and Sister Bi Nghiem. Our goal was to follow the regulations and implement all the necessary measures, whilst also preserving the character of the Institute. We wanted to make as few changes as possible, namely only those that were necessary and prescribed by law. So we undertook the usual review, established which materials we needed, made risk assessments and then began with the hygiene concept. On top of this we also organised the necessary training sessions to ensure the nuns and monks were informed.

So everything was very similar to normal business life. The basis for our work was the „Corona Protection Ordinance NRW“, in particular the „Hygiene and Infection Protection Standards of the CoronaPrOrd



NRW“, and the information provided by the German Hotel and Catering Federation (Dehoga), in addition to the experience we were gaining as we went along and much more ...

Was everything laborious and normal? No, there were differences. For me, the atmosphere in our small group was extremely pleasant, not rushed and based on mutual respect. There were always fresh cherries from the „monastery garden“ and Vietnamese tea, whose name I still cannot pronounce, but which tasted fantastic. My family at home told me I always come back more relaxed when I go to the EIAB. For me this “Corona work meditation“ was Buddhist practice.

The finished concept was sent to the local public health department, who gave us the terse reply: „the hygiene concept corresponds to the current status of the Corona Protection Ordinance“. So we were ready to go.

How does life look like at the EIAB in Corona times? Outwardly very similar to anywhere else: keep your distance, wear a mask on the paths etc., so nothing unusual. We will serve ourselves as normal from the buffet, after first disinfecting

our hands, and – who would have thought it – wearing a mask. These instructions will be sent to you after you have booked and don't need to be listed here.

On the outside, it is certainly all a little different from what we are used to. However, the atmosphere of mindfulness and peace, which brings us to Waldbröl again and again, is still very much present, and can be felt and experienced,.

I hope that the change will not lead to „social distancing“ but only to „spatial distancing“ and that we will continue to 'inter-be' at the EIAB.

I have been very happy to be part of the reopening process, and I am looking forward to seeing you all again.

Christian Hilbig-Rose



Generosity Around the World

Christianity: Charity • Islam: Zakat/Sadaka (Arabic) • Judaism: Tzedakah [ts(e)da'ka]
(Hebrew: תְּדָקָה/Gerechtigkeit) • Hinduism and Buddhism: Dana



The Dead Sea in the Middle East receives fresh water, but it has no outlet, so it doesn't pass the water out. It receives beautiful water from the rivers, and the water goes dank. I mean, it just goes bad. And that's why it is the Dead Sea. It receives and does not give. In the end generosity is the best way of becoming more, more, and more joyful."

(Desmond Tutu)

Some of those in the global, four-fold Sangha with a connection to the EIAB have told us the different ways they have been practicing generosity during the Corona time. We hope this collage will inspire and motivate us all to look deeper into the different forms generosity can take, and show us where we are already giving more than we think or where we can embrace new forms of generosity..



COMPASSION

Lilian Cheung

CONNECTEDNESS

Remain in contact, listen with the heart, share our joys and cares with each other. Alone but never lonely.

Golden Age Sangha Hongkong



BEGINNER'S MIND

Corona nourished the curiosity and joy of experimenting – looking afresh, learning, questioning normality, living more locally, fasting and finding new criteria... This has also altered the way I work in the Sangha, the Order and in the Network for Mindful Business. New forms of practice – virtual recitations, eating meditation, sharings and impulse evening – have emerged that enrich and deepen the path we share, how wonderful, who would have thought it ...

Kai Romhardt

AN OPEN HEART

Some of those in the global, four-fold Sangha with a connection to the EIAB have told us the different ways they have been practicing generosity during the Corona time. We hope this collage will inspire and motivate us all to look deeper into the different forms generosity can take, and show us where we are already giving more than we think or where we can embrace new forms of generosity.

Bettina Romhardt



PRESENCE

In times of isolation and great uncertainty, community and being there for each other are a great help. To give our presence to those around us, to be interested in how they feel enriches our own hearts and those of others.

Werner Heidenreich



REJOICING WITH OTHERS

William Chan



DILLIGENT MINDFULNESS



REBEL FOR LIFE

What do we do when confronted with a dying earth? What can we do, right here, right now ... when we really know what is happening to mother earth?

Rebel For Life is a film about young practitioners of mindfulness in the tradition of the Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, who get off their meditation cushions and demand a change to the system. They rebel against extinction, they rebel in support of life. Evermind Media will release the film of this gripping and rebellious story in the course of the year.

Wouter Verhoeven, Filme für die Praxis: www.evermind.media



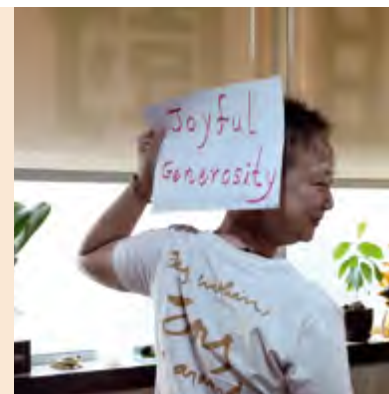
JOYFUL BEAUTY



STAY CONNECTED, BE WELL, MISS YOU.



CONNECTEDNESS



JOYFUL GENEROSITY



RIGHT FOCUS

Inviting in ethically healing states of mind for myself and others and focussing on the present moment have been healthy alternatives to distraction and dispersion during the Corona time. It allowed me to create generous spaces for myself and my relationships: fearless, joyful, and collected.

Malina Saf



COMPASSION

I have offered financial support to members of my charity who have lost their jobs, with allowances for rent, living expenses, pets, psychiatric consultations and counselling.

Mrs. Chan



Buddhist for black lives matter (Ivan) # hatred never ceases by hatred., but by love alone is healed (Melanie)

At the "Remember-Them" monument in the inner city of Oakland (USA). We want to support the realization of genuine human dignity and respect by finding ways to make people aware of and transform systemic and personal anti-black racism wherever it rears its head.

Melanie Gin & Ivan Trujillo Priego



TOGETHER

The Sangha created a WhatsApp group, so that members could inform others of their social activities and ask for or receive support from brothers and sisters. Together with members of other Buddhist traditions we set up a hotline for people who needed friendship and support. Zoom-conversations and sanghas, in which local teachers offered the Dharma, in particular for seniors and those who didn't yet know the practice.

Shelagh Shalev, (True Precious Peace), Community of Mindfulness in Israel

Baruch Shalev (True Precious Heart), Juliet Dabbikeh Karkabi, Ossim Shalom
– Social workers for Peace and Social Welfare, Israel

TOLERANCE

In my view, Corona generously offered opportunities to look at and consider the elements, in others as in myself, that encourage anger. In dealing with anger in others, I was helped by the Sutra: "5 Ways to End Anger". My own anger was dampened by the Sutra on "Measuring and Reflecting", deep relaxation and walking meditation. In relationships burdened by misunderstandings, the peace treaty, beginning anew, or even reflection helped. Thay's guided meditations from „Blooming of a Lotus“ (p.109. Looking deeply-release) also helped to look deeply into anger.

Aron Samson



Since the beginning of the Corona crisis, I have once again been practicing the five remembrances in the morning before getting up. I do not just contemplate my own fragility and mortality; I also practice for our society and civilization, and feel how beneficial this is.

Breathing in, I know that our civilisation is aging. Breathing out, I know that our civilisation cannot avoid old age.

Breathing in, I know that we are all subject to illness. Breathing out, I know that we cannot avoid illness, regardless of how careful we are.

Breathing in, I know that our civilisation will die. Breathing out, I know that our civilisation cannot avoid death.

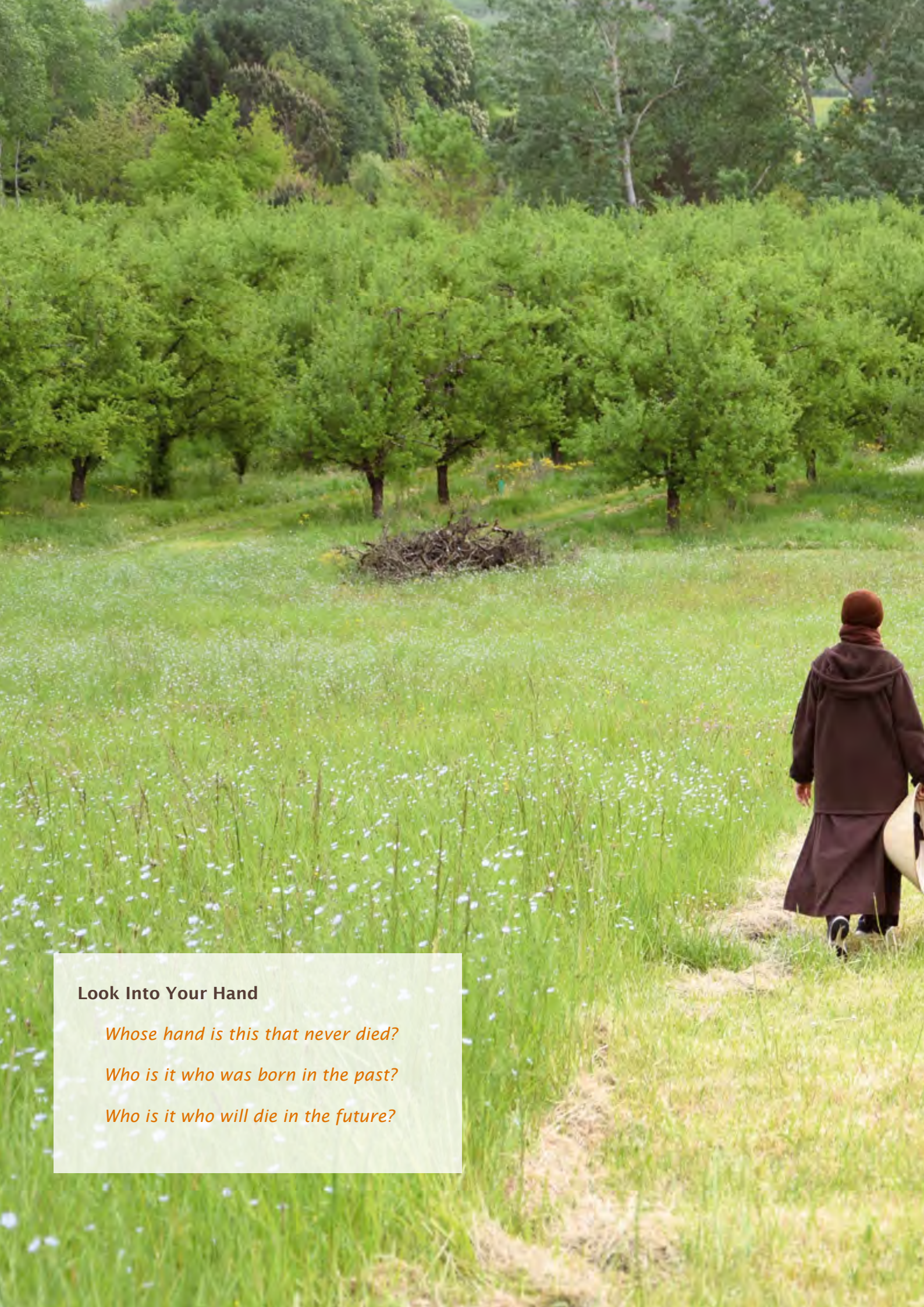
Breathing in, I know that as a society we must let go of everything that is precious to us. Breathing out, I know that as a society we cannot avoid having to let go of everything that is precious to us.

Breathing in, I know that our actions are our sole possession. Breathing out, I know that we as a civilisation cannot escape the consequences of our actions.

Breathing in, we as a society are increasingly willing to lead a life of deep mindfulness. Breathing out, as a society we begin to recognise the peace and joy of a life in mindfulness.

Anonymous from the Fourfold Sangha

Collected by
Aron B. Samson
Deep Courage of the Source



Look Into Your Hand

Whose hand is this that never died?

Who is it who was born in the past?

Who is it who will die in the future?



Every Step Is Peace

New Hamlet sisters during Corona Crisis



**Dear Respected Thay,
Dear Sangha and Friends,**

We have experienced something together, as a Human Family, on our beautiful planet Mother Earth. A tiny virus, unseen with the naked eye has traveled to 188 countries, infected 8 million people, and has changed our lives.

For the first time in the history of Plum Village, we had to close our doors and practice confinement. When France entered into lockdown on 17 March, we could no longer have Days of Mindfulness together and it also meant that we could not receive retreatants. We felt sad, but we adapted and accepted this change.

This was a challenge. How could we continue our practice of mindfulness and strengthen our Mind of Love, our Bodhicitta, under these new conditions?

In New Hamlet, our Days of Mindfulness had new “flavors”. The younger Viet-

namese Sisters took the opportunity to share, in Dharma talks, panels, in interview sessions, and in Question and Answer Sessions, about themselves and their lives of practice. We learned more about one another, and with more understanding Sisterhood became much deeper. Creativity flourished with presentations from the Sisters of Asian and Western countries, about the culture, history, music, traditions and food from their countries. We appreciated learning about our New Hamlet international sangha comprised of Indonesian, Japanese, and French members who gave the presentations. We also have Vietnamese, Korean, Taiwanese, Chinese, and Hong Kong sisters and friends here, as well as Sisters with “two cultures” based on their parents having immigrated to Australia, France and the United States.

We also followed a regular “Spring Retreat schedule” There was sitting meditation, Touching the Earth, reading and chanting sutras, exercise time, walking meditation, eating together in silence, working mindfully and courses in Buddhism and studying languages.

Our Days of Mindfulness on Sundays and Thursdays were done at home. But we really missed having the presence of the Fourfold Sangha and especially the Lay Practitioners coming here to practice with us. How much our Lay practitioners contribute to our happiness and aspiration to practice and share our practice experience with you, maybe we can’t fully express in words. In our hearts we know your presence is so important to our lives, just as the laypeople in the time of the Buddha, were a source of inspiration for the Buddha’s Dharma talks, as well as an important support to the monastics by providing food, medicine and clothing. Even now, 2,600 years after the time of the Buddha we remain wholly dependent on you for our lives, and for this we are ever so grateful to you for your ongoing compassionate care and generosity. This is our shared life of Interbeing that we treasure so much.

During the pandemic, as the world was suffering, suffering also manifested in some of us, in unexpected ways. We were worried about our family, friends and sanghas around the world. Were they

safe and healthy? We sometimes experienced helplessness with the rest of the world. We couldn't visit, and offer support to the sick and dying. Internet became the vital link of communication during this time.

Some of us experienced the suffering of our ancestors. Our ancestors had lived through previous pandemics, hunger, deaths, confinements, wars, uncertainties, loss of jobs, economic collapse in the past, and these seeds of ancestral memories of: fear, anxiety, panic, despair, and loneliness were transmitted to us, and manifested for us to recognize and tenderly embrace. So we took refuge in our practice, of mindful breathing and mindful walking, and the teachings that Thay has given on recognizing, embracing, holding tenderly and looking deeply to understand the roots of our feelings, so as to be able to live deeply with more understanding and compassion in the present moment.

Living fully in the present moment was an important practice for us.

At New Hamlet we cultivated and created happiness together by enjoying a Plum Blossom Festival, in the adjoining Plum

Orchard when it blossomed delicate white blossoms. There was music and singing, violin and guitar playing and enjoying drinking tea together. We appreciated the arrival of Spring.

In the modern Greek language, the word for Spring is η άνοιξη, which also means "open". We witnessed the beautiful opening of flowers, the opening of the day with the songs of birds, the opening of our hearts to the beauties of life, that were available when we opened the doors of our senses, to live in the present moment. As we learned from Thay, with every step we make, joy and peace are available. Each step is nourishing, each step is healing. Each step is peace.

The challenge before us now as France and other countries, are ending the confinement period, and resuming daily life, is how to heal from the frustration and anger that may have been watered during the confinement period, originating in part from our Ancestor's suffering in the past? There has been anger, discrimination and violence on the part of those whose suffering has been immense. There has been fear and killing as a reaction to suffering that has not been understood or embraced by understanding and compassion.

Thay's teachings are so important to us now. He lived through War, and he has taught us from his experiences that understanding, love, compassion and forgiveness are the ways to go forward. Let us practice inclusiveness together as a Four-fold Sangha. Let us be strong in our determination to continue together as a Sangha of Spiritual Friends, offering our understanding and practice of Metta, our Mind of Love, our Bodhicitta, to all living beings.

"May you be happy and peaceful"

May we be happy and peaceful together, and go forward together far into the future, smiling with Thay and our Spiritual and Blood Ancestors for the sake of all our Descendents.

Sr. Tu Nghiem, Plum Village, New Hamlet



Locked Inside

As a nourishing experience

For me, these past few months turned out to be a lock-in more than a lock-down. I did not feel afraid or immobilized, but rather I had a very precious chance to look inside. One thing I noticed over this quarantine period, is that the trees in front of the hut where I have been staying never stopped swaying joyfully in the wind, and every morning I was greeted by the songs of the blackbirds. Nature continued her cycle without any apparent revolution. The winter turned into spring and the spring into summer. The sun rose in the east and set in the west. The rain felt fresh and the night sky was filled with stars. When you look at things with this perspective it is hard to believe that the world has been through a pandemic.

In these past few months I spent a lot of time in silence. I contemplated and enjoyed practicing sitting meditation a bit longer than usual. I felt happy and centered and I could touch things within my own mind that I never was able to touch before. Being in touch with nature I slowly began to have the clear sensation that in this period there isn't anything more scary or more dangerous than usual. This drama and its backlashes were just a creation of the human mind. Just another grand manifestation of our collective karma.

Old age and death are not more real today than they were ten years ago. The reason why they feel more real, is because for some time we have forgotten to pay attention to them. We have allowed our wealth lull us to sleep, and we have dreamed of a world where we can be always successful, beautiful, and healthy. I think that rather than trying to find who is responsible for the covid-19 pandemic, we should try to find who is responsible for putting us to sleep for such a long time.

Toward the beginning of the pandemic I had a feeling of apprehension and longing for the people I love. My family and my close friends. I practiced for two or three days with this sensation and slowly I saw it transform itself in a feeling of appreciation and gratitude. That's right! Apprehension and worry is just the flip-side of gratitude. This is the gratitude for having had people who loved and cared for me, and who underwent difficulties for the sake of my own wellbeing. I began to look at my situation with the awareness of what I have, rather than with the awareness of what I could lose. This gave me a lot of energy and inspiration to put into the practice and from then my lock-in became a very nourishing experience.

This was my personal experience, but many friends also shared with me that this period of quarantine helped them to stop and to take a good look at their life. Do we need to run so much? Do we need to buy so much stuff? Is it worth to work so many hours a week? These questions are the very essence of what we call "spirituality" and unfortunately humanity,

and particularly the west, was never so spiritually deprived as we are today. I pray that we will be able to keep these questions alive and that we will be able to re-invent our lives and our society.

Pandemics are a part of nature, they have always happened and they might happen again, but there are many problems, like the climate crisis that is glooming at the horizon, that are exclusively man-made. To be awakened, simply means to be able to avoid the problems that we can avoid, and to accept the problems that we cannot avoid. I hope that the gratitude for what we have, will take the lead over the desire for what we don't have; and if we have never been able to do this, then this could be a good moment to start. Wherever you are, I send you my energy and I pray that you will be well and overcome all the challenges of this difficult period.

Chan Phap Bieu





*In the woods, trees stand,
guarding stillness.
Moved by wind's gentle teasing,
countless leaves sing songs of love.
In the mind, joy blooms,
bringing freedom.
Soothed by mind's peaceful presence,
precious body sheds stories of fear.*

Maria Moonlion

Don't Know If ...

No Plum Village this summer

Actually Marleen should have been in Plum Village by now, to receive the lamp on the 21-day retreat. Previous editions she had not been able to go because she still had studying children in the house who needed her attention and care in June. This edition she would definitely go... "Are you sure? Corona threw a spanner in the works and once again life turned out to be unpredictable.

Vor Five years ago Marleen gave up her permanent job to be able to realize her dream: a practice of her own to live and propagate the path of love and understanding. She gives individual psychotherapy and mindfulness training. She also organizes more and more small retreats. At the Leuven Mindfulness Institute in the university city of Leuven, she is involved in research into the effects of mindfulness on the lives of school-age children and young people with a chronic disorder.

All that came abruptly on hold after the start of the Corona crisis. Ongoing training sessions were completed by means of video calling under the motto: "better something than nothing". As far as possible, individual routes were also continued by means of video calling. Although she started it with some resistance, it turned out to work miraculously well with people with whom a bond had already been formed. Corona literally brought the practice for them at home, in their home and not in the consulting room or group room, which was experienced as an added value by the participants.

Financially speaking, the crisis has obviously had an impact. Marleen initially, understandably, had her worries about this, but thanks to the practice she was able to surrender to the course of things. "I have enough" was a helping thought. In the meantime, cautious steps are again being taken towards physical retreats and individual trajectories.



The sea gives and the sea takes

Marleen sees how the quarantine causes stress and problems in her environment. People who get into financial difficulties or young people who suddenly see their social development inhibited by the restrictive security measures. However, in her personal life Marleen has not experienced many problems with quarantine. She lives with her partner and has continued to meet her friends on a one-to-one basis. With her mother she kept daily contact by telephone or video calling. The contact has become different because of the physical distance, but no less of quality. Sober, but rich. The diary remained empty. Priorities were easier to set. One's own small environment became more important in every respect. Marleen got used to it easily. Corona has pros and cons. Just as the sea gives and the sea takes ...

*Corona takes
Corona gives
What does it matter?*

My breath is your breath,

*Full of compassion
I don't know.*

*This is it
That's how it is now*

*I follow the eternal stream
Breath after breath*

*Full of compassion
I don't know.*

*This is it.
That's how it is now.*

*Corona takes
Corona gives
What does it matter?*

The Eternal Flow"

(Marleen Van den Bosch)



Corona as a teacher

Marleen experiences Corona as a teacher. It gives an increased visibility and therefore an increased awareness of the vulnerability and transience of mankind. "We're not all in the same boat, but we're in the same storm." This palpable collective vulnerability evokes compassion at Marleen.

Interaction has become more of a collective reality. "We can get sick of each other's breath and the economic crisis shows how the world economy is intertwined and interdependent". A big lesson is also to learn to live with not knowing. Not knowing the impact of this crisis. Don't know how long it's gonna be over. Don't know if everything's gonna go back to normal. Don't know if the virus will blossom again. Not knowing is an

open invitation to be more and more present in the here and now. "Do I have a problem now?"

These lessons can be an invitation for society to slow down more. Striving for simplicity and investing in the surrounding area. Whether this involves dealing with people or our economic activities. Learn to enjoy this one dish more instead of getting lost in an extensive menu.

Stop

As a dharma teacher Marleen hopes to share these insights of the Buddha. She sees that this crisis offers opportunities. Stopping is an important and often difficult step in the practice. Now we have all had to stop and experience living with more simplicity. That's a good breeding ground.

When society gets back on track, there will probably be less room for simplicity. Agendas will fill up again and we'll all speed up again. Marleen thinks it is important not to mourn the end of that austerity and stillness, or to cling to it. As a practitioner, the art is to consciously choose for oneself. The Path to Go

Peter van Leeuwen



Plum Village Was My First Love

Interview with Bruder Chan Phap Huu, abbot of Dharma Cloud Temple, Plum Village, Frankreich



Brother Chan Phap Huu, “True Dharma Friend”, first encountered Plum Village at nine and by 12 had decided to become a monk – an unusual choice for a boy who grew up in Canada in the 1990s. Then at 24, he became the youngest abbot in Plum Village history. But don’t think that you will only find him in Dharma talks and ceremonies. You are just as likely to pass by him on the basketball court, or rapping music with his monastic brothers and sisters.

What made Br. Phap Huu choose and stay on this path? How did he rise up to the challenges of being a young abbot in a diverse community? And how does he see the community carry forward Thay’s legacy in a creative and authentic way?

First encounter with Plum Village

My Dad was the one who brought us to Plum Village France in the summer of 1996. He left Vietnam as a boat person and it was a tough journey with a lot of fear and anxiety. He needed a spiritual refuge and Plum Village was that refuge for him. It saved his life.

My first encounter with a Plum Village monk was at the train station. He was very young, very bright. When he saw us, he joined his palms and bowed. It was the first time in my life being greeted by a stranger with so much presence and respect! Even though I was just nine, I felt that was special and it left an imprint on my heart.

My family is Buddhist and we grew up going to traditional temples for chanting and praying. These temples represented well being and goodness, but my sister and I didn’t enjoy going because the ceremonies were so long and we did not understand them. Plum Village was different. There were children from everywhere! All we did was play with the monks and nuns in the children program. For a whole week, I did not watch television or play computer games. Nobody tried to be someone else. Nobody tried to impress. That was really powerful for me because even as a kid going to school, I had to take care of my appearance. But in Plum Village that was not an emphasis.

Thay gave a Dharma talk each day and always dedicated the first 20 minutes to children so we could understand. I fell asleep throughout the talks. But just through the way he was, the way he walked, the way he addressed us, and the way he put his care and love into guiding us, we felt his peace. We did walking meditation with Thay every day and only children could hold his hand. I felt like I didn’t have to do anything and suddenly, I am in that zone of mindfulness, of love and tenderness.

Mom, I want to become a monk

Everyone has a seed of spirituality. If we have the conditions around us, that seed will be nourished and watered. A retreat has the function of watering the seed of

spirituality. There is also a seed of monasticism and for some of us, we let that seed grow and devote our whole life to this path.

I came back in 1999, then in 2000 to spend more time here. That’s when I really got to know the community, to see the monks and nuns outside of retreat mode and I just saw how happy they were. That’s what really impressed me. I felt so happy here. I said to myself, if I could join this community and do a little to offer happiness to the world, it’s worth it. Even though I was only 12, I had that insight and deep wish. I wanted to join the crew!

My Dad was very supportive, but when I called my mom who had not yet been to Plum Village, she said no, you are too young, you have to come home and finish school. I was so sad. It was like heartbreak. Plum Village was my first love. There was something deep that I felt so connected to.

I came back to Plum Village a year later, reluctantly actually. I had grown into a rebellious teen and did not want to spend a month of summer holiday in a monastery. But the moment I was dropped off in the brother’s hamlet, I felt so at home – like fish belonging in the sea, I belong here. I dropped my luggage and ran around to hug all the monks I knew. Some brothers were repairing the deck of Thay’s hut. I just asked for a hammer and some nails. I wanted to help! I wanted to be a part of this!

I felt once more that I wanted to be a monk. This time, I asked many monks and nuns for advice. They answered that if your heart is really calling for it, of course you can do it. I called my mom again to ask for her permission. Thay always teaches us that before we make a



As a child uring walking meditation with Thay in Plum Village. Phap Huu is the boy in the Nike-shirt.

phone call, breathe in and out three times – we already know what we want to say, those three breaths make sure that we have peace and are stable.

I asked, “Mom, I want to become a monk. Would you allow that to happen?” There was a silent pause. It felt very long. Then I heard my mom say, “if that’s what really makes you happy then mom will support you.”

I will do anything to support – becoming the youngest abbot

I became the vice abbot at 21 and I had no idea that I was becoming the vice abbot! I was only two years as a bhikshu (a fully ordained monk), and not yet a Dharma teacher.

A Plum Village centre had just been established in Vietnam and in two years, 400 young people ordained as monks and nuns. Thay was nominating elder brothers and sisters from Plum Village France to move to Vietnam to train this younger generation. Br. Nguyen Hai, our first abbot, was one of these elders and

he asked Br. Phap Don to be his replacement. The new role required a lot of learning as the community was adjusting to an absence of many elder brothers. The sangha was looking for a vice abbot to support Br. Phap Don, but I was not aware of this. One day after lunch in the Upper Hamlet, I saw Thay speaking with Br. Nguyen Hai and they kept looking my way. I knew they were talking about me and I was so scared.

I thought I was in trouble. I was only 21 and together with the other young

Brother Phap Huu s a novice just after his ordination together with other young monastics. They called themselves „baby monks and nuns“ und received great support from Thay and the Sangha





Thay Phap Huu together with Thay.

monks, we had a reputation for being a little mischievous.

That evening, Br. Nguyen Hai invited me to his room. In the Southeastern Asian culture, people often do not tell you directly what they want. They go around the bushes and you have to listen and interpret. I was really humble and ready to be reprimanded. But he kept talking about how Br. Phap Don will need support and please be there for him. I had a very close relationship with Br. Phap Don; he was the one who taught me how to be a personal attendant to Thay. Naturally I wanted to support him because I have a lot of love for him. Br. Nguyen Hai even instructed me on what I could do, and I readily agreed to learn this and learn that. Then at the following Day of Mindfulness after informal lunch, Thay announced to the whole community that Br. Phap Don will be the new abbot and Br. Phap Huu had agreed to be the vice abbot. I was in shock, and so was everyone! That was the moment I became vice abbot.

Three years later, for various reasons Br. Phap Don needed to relocate to our centre in the US. He asked Thay for permission to go. Thay said that is fine,

as long as Br. Phap Huu agreed to become the abbot. I think my character is to support my brothers, and I agreed.

An abbot is a spiritual friend, a listener, and a gardener

Thay's vision of an abbot or abbess is someone who can get along with the majority of the community, who is a bridge for everyone, who has the capacity to be open, unbiased, listen to new opinions, and has enough good relationships with the elders to make sure their experiences are brought into decisions.

I guess I have this quality just like my Dharma name – “True Dharma Friend”. When Thay gave me this name, he said, when you grow, you learn to be everyone's friend. You learn to grow your heart and accept more people into your life and make them a good spiritual friend. If you know how to develop that, you will also be a good friend for others.

It many years developing my capacity of listening. That has been a key for me. In whatever situation, if there is not enough harmony, the first thing is to create a listening session for people to share what is going on, what is not working. You

listen and from there you can map out what you need to do. If you don't listen to your community, that means you are no longer connected to her.

I also remember Thay teaching us that an abbot or abbess is like a gardener. She sees each member like a flower, sees what beauty and fragrance that flower offers, then puts that flower in the right place so it can flourish. We have very diverse talents in the community. Some monks and nuns were doctors, architects, nurses, musicians ... how do we bring all that talent together and let it continue to bloom in monastic life? For some, if their talent grows their ego, then we have to say, wait, let's focus on your development as a practitioner first – learn the fine manners and basic practices, then leaning on that and your talent will support you and the community.

Growing from criticisms and love

One of the toughest things for me was that at times I felt judged for being too young, that I was in this role because I had been close to Thay. It was painful, but I did not allow it to overshadow my growth. I said, ok, the only reason why others had this view is that maybe I was

still showing instability, still not able to hold a meeting, or still grasp to situations. Instead of letting it wear me down, I decided to grow in those aspects. So I did more homework before meetings, and was more present during meetings to listen to understand all that was said and unsaid. It became my training since there is no manual for being an abbot!

At the same time, I knew there was a lot of love for me in the community. Often when we hear something negative, we lean towards it and think that is how everyone sees us. But part of the practice is to also see the goodness in life. In these moments, I have to see that I have so much support; many brothers and sisters openly shared with me how much they loved seeing me grow as an abbot. I reminded myself to be humble and patient, that as time passes, I will learn more and become more confident.

How do we continue, with authenticity and creativity?

This is a good meditation for us young monastics as we continue our teacher's legacy and carry the Plum Village tradition into the future. Whenever we create something new, we need to ask: have we understood this path? It is important to understand our teacher, his legacy, his dream, and what he has already developed; then we can see where it should head. When we are new to the practice and still learning to make it part of our daily life, it is a virtue to be patient and not create new things yet.

What does meditation mean? Meditation is a practice to help us stop and live more deeply in the present moment. That is the essence of the Dharma doors Thay created through 38 years of Plum Village existence, and even before that because he had long been honing the practice of mindfulness. Everything we do in Plum Village is to help us come back to the present moment. It is only in the present moment that we can see the past and plan for the future. One time Thay told us that when he found the Sutra on Mindful Breathing (Anapanasati Sutra), he practised the breathing exercises for

many years before sharing it with his students or on retreats. Thay wanted to make sure that it helped him to return to the present moment, to transform. When we develop anything new, we need to do so in that spirit.

When we create something as a sangha, we have the insight of the community. As one person, we have just one view and we have blind spots; but the community has many views, many insights. When a living community is in harmony, then the Buddha and the Dharma are alive. That is why the Sangha Jewel is one of the Three Jewels. For me, the Buddhism that has helped me grow as a monk is very down to earth. I can recognise my breath, my wellbeing, my sufferings, and the suffering of my ancestors in me. Mindfulness practice helps me be in touch with the suffering of the world and not be overwhelmed.

Thay has a big vision for Plum Village and for Buddhism itself. He believes it will take many more years for Buddhism to really take root in the West. Thay knows how to blend the tradition in the culture, and not just take something from the East and paste it onto the West. How is the Dharma engaged when we create something? How does it help us connect more, develop our meditation, and understand more? Thay has added elements like the violin, cello, guitar, and drums into our chanting. All of that could be in the realm of Buddhism. That is Thay's openness. We should inherit that – a creativity where there is a boundary, and no boundaries.

My brothers and I used to have a “monk band” with a vocalist and two rappers. Often during celebrations like the Full Moon Festival, we would offer a song. One particular year, there were monastics that had just come from Asia and they were shocked to see us rapping! One day, I was attending Thay and making tea for him. Thay turned to me and said, “Phap Huu, I heard you and the younger brothers did a performance at the Full Moon and people loved it.” “Yes Thay, we did these two songs.” “You know, some monastics came to share with Thay their concern,

how it is not appropriate for a Buddhist monk to perform like that. You know what I told them? I told them: that's Thay's Buddhism.”

Thay wants monks and nuns to have a role in society and not feel like we live in the mountains and forests, cut off from the world. Thay always talk about the Tran and Ly Dynasties in Vietnam where Buddhism really flourished and was a foundation for the country's ethics. Monastics were part of the country's well being as they helped the kings and queens make right decisions based on spirituality.

Thay saw that our century needs a lot of spiritual healing because of the poor reputation of spirituality through religious organisations. We have to skillfully open new spiritual Dharma doors so people can re-engage with their seed of spirituality. We all have and we all need this seed. We cannot sustain ourselves without spirituality, and it has no boundaries between religions.

Thay has a lot of hope for us as his continuation. The Plum Village sangha was created through Thay's sweat and tears. He saw the destruction of war and was accused and exiled from his own country. Yet he had the courage and love to continue to renew Buddhism because if not, it would die. If young people stop coming to our monasteries, that means we are very old fashioned, we are not up to date with the suffering of the world.

Thay has given us a legacy, a path. We have to now recognise our own aspiration and a lot of the time, it links to Thay's because he is our teacher. If we did not link to his aspiration, we would not have come here. As a young community, we have to have aspiration as our nutriment and a vision for our community, for our own life.

Thay Phap Huu



A Life Full of Devotion

Memories of Brother Phap Luong

On July 24th, 2019, our brother Thay Phap Luong saved a person from drowning and in doing so lost his own life.

Memories of Sister Song Nghiem



In the following article Sister Song Nghiem would like to once again bring us close to Thay Phap Luong, whose practice was so still and quiet. His friend Trang from the Munich Pagoda Tâm Giác also offers loving memories of him, as does his biological sister Hang, and Sister Chuan Nghiem from the EIAB, who today continues to care for his collection of bonsai trees.

I first got to know Brother Phap Luong in 1989 at the “Tam Giac” Pagoda at Rotkreuzplatz in Munich. At that time there was a group of more than 30 young people devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the Buddhist practice, and the man who was later to become our Brother Phap Luong was one of them. He was 30 years old then, and by some distance the oldest in his group. It was moving to see how the group took care of all that needed to be done in the

Pagoda, from clearing up and cleaning the centre to washing up after every event.

Before his ordination as a monk, Brother Phap Luong was called by his first name of ‘Binh’. In the group of young practitioners there were two people with his first name. To make it easier to distinguish, our brother Phap Luong was given the nickname ‘Binh Rau’ (Binh with the beard), because at that time Brother Phap Luong had a beard. As far as I can remember he wore a beard up until the time of his ordination.

Later, the young group, together with Brother Brother Phap Luong founded another Buddhist centre for their group in Moosburg. However, they continued

to help wholeheartedly at the Buddhist pagoda Tam Giac in Munich. At the centre in Moosburg, I had the opportunity to get to know the group and also Brother Phap Luong better. The young people treated each other on the basis of the ideals of the Buddhist teachings. They were always friendly to each other and willing to help. Amongst themselves they used loving speech and listened very deeply. Their activities were carried out in harmony. Brother Phap Luong in particular behaved as his future ordination name suggested (Phap means ‘Dharma’ and Luong means ‘generosity’), and he showed a generosity that came from deep in his heart to everyone. At that time, Brother Phap Luong was already employed, whilst the other young people were either pupils or students. So, Brother





Memories of former times: Br. Phap Luong generously supported the Pagoda in Munich and the young people's group.

Phap Luong generously shared his food and his shopping with them. Very often he bought expensive cans of vegetarian spread and gave them to us. At that time vegetarian food was regarded as exclusive and was expensive. To Br. Phap Luong it didn't make any difference that I was already earning money and his young friends were not. He gave me every bit as much as the others. Often, after sharing out all he had bought, there wasn't anything left for him.

Brother Phap Luong was very quiet. We didn't often hear him talking. He remained this way until he left for Plum Village. This is why he was so inconspicuous for me. He didn't praise, he didn't complain or criticize and always remained calm and relaxed. Apart from his generosity in giving and sharing with the others, I barely noticed him. When I organized events for the monks and nuns from Plum Village, I always had to transform the course room of my company into a meditation hall in a great hurry. I had to carry out all the chairs and tables, put down mats and cushions and set up and decorate the Buddha altar. For me Brother Phap Luong appeared unannounced at these events like a saviour. Without saying a word, he took the flowers and transformed them into a wonderful flower arrangement, beautiful and Zen!

During the Dharma talks of the monks and nuns he would go to the kitchen and

prepare tea for the guests in the break. He did everything without anyone ever asking. He saw what needed to be done and did it. When everything was over he helped me to bring the chairs and tables back to where they should be – without any great effort or a lot of words.

I have to admit that to my eyes Brother Phap Luong's flower arrangements looked much more beautiful than all the arrangements that I had seen up to then by our sisters. His flower arrangements were very simple, every flower, every leaf, every branch was in just the right place. He didn't need so many flowers in his arrangement; he gave every flower, every leaf, the space that it needed, so that every part of the arrangement was a manifestation of its own unique beauty.

Once, when I was the attendant of our teacher, he showed me the art of flower arranging. Thay said: "Do you know, we don't need so many flowers for an arrangement, or so many elements, because each one should have all the space it needs!" Then Thay pointed to the flower arrangement on his small tea table and said: "This arrangement has all the elements it needs: Bamboo for solidity and stability; this fern leaf is soft and supple and stands for flexibility; this flower is fresh and beautiful. We don't need anything more, we can see the beauty of everything!". Looking at the flower arrangement on the table of our

teacher, I thought of Brother Phap Luong's flower arrangements.

This was just like Brother Phap Luong's art: very Zen, not too much, not too little, everything had its place and its role in life. This is also how I know my Brother Phap Luong, he was not envious, had no inferiority complex, no arrogance and did not compare himself with others.

Later four lotus flowers blossomed from our group and became monks or nuns. Three were ordained in Plum Village, one in the Pure Land tradition.

From the very beginning Brother Phap Luong felt drawn to monastic life. Every time we had a retreat he was to be found with the monks. During walking meditation he was always at the front at the side of the monks. He was always fascinated by the monks and it was no surprise at all when I heard that he wanted to become one. When the time came he left our group to become a monk in Plum Village in the same manner he had always behaved, still and calm; there was no farewell party, no big announcement. He became the second person in our group, after Brother Phap Can, to become a monk.

I arrived in Plum Village to become a nun in 2004, 3 years later. There the three of us, who were searching for something true, beautiful and healing, met again. Brother Phap Luong was

living in Upper Hamlet. I lived in Lower Hamlet. These two monasteries are about 3 km apart. We met every so often on the days of mindfulness, exchanged a glance with each other, but rarely talked.

But life brought us back together. On 18.02.2008 Thay opened a new centre in Paris: 'Maison de l'Inspire'. Thay sent three monks and three nuns to the new centre among them Brother Phap Luong and me. In this small house we lived very closely together. There I enjoyed very good contact with Brother Phap Luong. To start with we did not have much money. We had to save, as we only wanted to ask for as little money as possible from Plum Village. Each time I received a little money from my family, Brother Phap Luong and I went shopping at an Asian grocery store. We were both hungry for Asian food. We had never understood each other so well and we shared everything in Paris.

However, just 6 months later Thay called us back to Plum Village, in order to send us to Germany: Thay had founded a new centre in Germany: the EIAB. So, all the

monks and nuns who originally came from Germany were to go to the new centre.

So we met again at the EIAB. In the eleven years that we lived here, there were so many experiences that we shared with one another. I could write innumerable memories of Brother Phap Luong. He knew my biological family very well, I on the other hand barely knew his family up until the time of his death, when I searched for his family in Vietnam to bring them the sad news.

Brother Phap Luong could spend all his time tendering plants and flowers. When he went into the woods his gaze would always seek out what for me were unspectacular plants, that he would dig up and turn into beautiful bonsai at home in the EIAB.

I knew of his love for plants and was happy when I could do him the favour of inviting him to accompany me to the garden centre, although I knew he would spend hours there and I really didn't have much time. Brother Phap Luong always liked coming with me to the garden centre. Sometimes he would just wander

around for hours on end without buying anything. Sometimes he arrived at the checkout with a trolley full. I viewed the plants with a feeling of respect; he had a great knowledge of plants – and what he bought was always expensive. But once home he would always cut the precious plants into larger and smaller parts and he would turn magnificent plants into tiny little bonsai trees. The best thing for me was to close both eyes so I didn't feel sorry for the poor plants. However, what grew from these tiny parts was really incredible, unimaginable: bonsai cherry trees, bonsai-kumquats, bonsai-Bodhi trees, bonsai-lemon trees ... And all these tiny bonsai trees always blossomed at exactly the right time, as if at his command!

Recently, I received a small pomelo tree as a gift. It made me think an awful lot of Brother Phap Luong. If he were still here, I would really like to give him this little tree. He would certainly manage to cultivate pomelos from it and we would be able to enjoy the fruits together!

He transformed a part of our EIAB building, which had not yet been renovated, into a bonsai garden. And he would often exhibit the bonsais in front of our small garden house. There they found 'admirers' who, without our knowing, took them away. Once Brother Phap Luong told me that the thieves were so choosy, that on their next visit they would exchange the stolen bonsai for the new ones, when they saw that the replacement trees were more beautiful than the ones they had previously stolen. He was completely unperturbed by it, as though nothing bad had happened. And when I asked him how valuable his bonsais were, he answered that they could cost between 50 and 200 Euro!

Our teacher Thay recognized Brother Phap Luong's talent for cultivating plants and encouraged him to give bonsai courses. After thinking it over for a long time, Brother Phap Luong finally agreed. The bonsai courses were a great success. Our participants liked him a lot and also learned a lot from him!



There was something distinctive about Brother Phap Luong and photographers liked to choose him for their photos. A large number of newspaper articles about the EIAB were printed with pictures of Brother Phap Luong in them. Perhaps the journalists saw his gaunt face and calm nature as being typical of a Buddhist monk?

In our Sangha the young nuns and monks lovingly called him 'Bo Luong', which in North-Vietnamese means 'Fa-

ther Luong'. He liked to spoil his younger brothers and sisters. With his pocket money, or money he was given by friends, he always bought food for them. He was always generous, as his name says. We admire Thay, our teacher, so much for the way he so often seems to find just the right name for his students. The name that Phap Luong received: 'generosity', describes exactly the core of his character.

Our Brother Phap Luong chose his path: the path to truth, healing and beauty and wherever he is he will always follow this path.

In memory of our beloved 'Bo Luong' with love, with gratitude and with a touch of melancholy.

Sister Song Nghiem

Memories of Sister Chuan Nghiem



Dear Brother Phap Luong,

Every time I visit the bonsai garden, I take a close look at every pot and think of you. I know that to have created such a beautiful bonsai garden, you must have had a great love of bonsais. There is such an incredible variety of plants and trees here: from Bodhi, pine (with four different species), hibiscus, azaleas and camellia, to willows. There are still more, many of which I do not know yet. Your talented hands have shaped the plants and trees into beautifully formed bonsais. There are Bodhi trees which, thanks to your creativity, have their roots crawling over rocks, which looks especially spectacular. When I see this bonsai garden, I sense how it reflects a part of your monastic life.

Apart from your love for bonsais, you always tried – despite your advanced years and leg problems – to help the other brothers and sisters with various tasks as much as possible, whenever your health allowed. You had great sympathy for the sisters, and voluntarily took over the arduous cleaning that needed to be done at the end of each day. You even sharpened the blunt knives, so that we could cut the vegetables more easily.

Although you were not in the kitchen team, every now and then you liked to cook not just for yourself, but for everybody. Your favourite dish was soup with kidney beans and peppers – every time you cooked it, we enjoyed a more colourful meal that brought a smile to our faces.

At weekends, when we had many visitors, and needed lots of crockery, you were always the first to notice and would immediately prepare everything before anyone else had even thought about it.

But you weren't just a hard worker, you were also a great entertainer. You took part in different activities with younger sisters and brothers – like dancing, singing or theatre. I still remember your role as the moon princess, it was so sweet and funny that the entire audience broke into joyful laughter.

Although you are no longer here with us today, your presence and everything you did is held lovingly in our hearts. Your bonsai garden is still here and looks the same as before; we take great care of it and tender it with much love.

One day I noticed that the garden surface was a bit uneven and bumpy, so I tried to flatten it out with earth. The next day I saw that it was uneven and bumpy again. It turned out that the small black birds had been digging up the earth in their search for food. I told the birds they should look for their food somewhere else and not dig up the earth, otherwise the bonsai trees will die. But they didn't listen to me. I didn't know what to do, so I asked Brother Phap Kinh if he knew of a solution. He said the answer was very simple, to make a mannequin. I asked if he could help me make this puppet figure, and of course he happily agreed. The mannequin looked so genuine that every so often I even found myself being startled by it.

As a newcomer to the EIAB there is still plenty for me to learn. The first time I watered the garden, I carried the water one can at a time. When Brothers Phap

Tri and Phap Kinh saw me doing it, they set up the garden hose so the water flowed more quickly and made my task much easier.

The bonsai garden is very different from a normal garden. Here there are tiny, sweet bonsai pots that stand on old tree stumps with an average height of around 40cm. Over the course of time, many of these stumps have rotted and had to be replaced. The brothers are happy to help me with this. On one particularly windy day a tree was uprooted. Brothers Phap Tri and Phap Kinh sawed the tree into sections and brought them to the bonsai garden. At the end, we had replaced all the old rotting stumps with new ones from the fallen tree.

Although I only recently began here as a newcomer, it is clear to me that everyone had a great love for you and your happy smile. You always had a wonder-

ful aura that left a beautiful and warm feeling in our hearts.

We promise to continue with and pass on your spirit of compassion and enthusiasm. In the future we will carry you with us.

**From the depths of my heart,
Your**

Chuan Nghiem

Memories of Hang – Phap Luongs youngest biological sister



Bother Phap Luong with his biological sisters.

Dear Thay, dear Brothers and Sisters at the EIAB and dear Plumvillage Sangha, my name is Hang (Dharma name: Dieu Ha). As the youngest biological sister of Brother Phap Luong, I would like to share with you the thoughts and words I carry in my heart about my dear brother.

We were a family of six children, four daughters and two sons. Brother Phap Luong has an older sister, an older brother, and three younger sisters. The relationship between us is very close - we love each other. Above all, as the youngest sister, I was loved so much by my brother. Both my brothers are gentle and educated people, but brother Phap

Luong smoked quite a lot, more than our older brother.

He liked to play football, was an excellent goalkeeper, and spent every weekend playing. As well as that, he was also very good at table tennis and played every day after work with his friends or nephews.



Brother Phap Luong with his family on one of his rare visits to his home country.

In 1980 he was called up for military service. My parents were worried about him and cried a lot. They knew that military service at that time meant death and only a minority of soldiers would return. With this in mind, they tried to find a way for him to avoid service.

At that time our sister-in-law in Vung Tau found a possibility to go abroad, and was already planning her escape by sea. My parents discussed with her whether he could go too. Having compassion with my parents, she sacrificed her chance to go abroad in order to give Brother Phap Luong this opportunity.

At home he was called Binh, in his official records he is called Hoang Xuan Soai. When he was already on board and the owner asked him for his name, he said "Soai" (in Vietnamese it is a homophone for "mango"). The superstitious owner of the boat replied: "Well, go home. I don't want any sour mangoes on board, you're not welcome." He didn't want "sour mangoes" on board because

it was a matter of life and death. My brother tried to persuade the man to take him along and argued: "No, I'm a sweet mango, please take me along". After much hesitation and consideration, the man finally relented and allowed my brother to stay on board.

A month after his departure, my family received his first letter informing them that he had arrived in Germany. My parents heard this news with mixed feelings: On the one hand they were glad that he was still alive, on the other hand they cried, because they knew that from that moment on there was an infinite distance between us.

In Germany my brother had to apply for his documents. He found the nickname „Binh“, which he used at home, better than his real name "Soai", and therefore took this as his first name. He also combined his name with the first names of his other brother, namely "Mai" (in Vietnamese: "tomorrow, future") and „Hoa" (in combination with "Binh" this means

"peace"), and so finally had the full name "Hoang Mai Hoa Binh". He explained this choice to his friends in Germany as follows: "I experienced the suffering of war, death and a ruined land. Therefore, I dream of a peaceful future for my home country Vietnam." He asked us if we liked this new name. The name implied not only his dream of peace, but also the combination of both brothers. This made him very happy and content, and finally made him smile.

Time passed quickly. He worked hard and was able to provide the whole family with financial support. However, we had no idea whether he already had a girlfriend. My parents were worried because he was living abroad alone and it would have been better if he could find a partner. He reassured them by saying: "Don't worry, I'll find you a good daughter-in-law."

There was a period when our oldest sister's family had problems. Although he had a lot of sympathy for her, he could

do nothing to help, and as a result started drinking a lot and for a long time hardly contacted the family. After a while, he apologized to our parents and promised them that he would never disappoint them again.

One of his letters contained a photograph of him standing next to a woman. He asked us, "Do you think she's nice? If so, then I will ask her to marry me." My whole family was very happy to read that. After a month we got another letter from him. He apologized to our family, and said he didn't want to marry after all, but wanted to become a monk. However, he needed the permission of his parents, without that he wouldn't dare to realize his dream. My parents were in shock and cried a lot. My mother wrote back that he didn't need to apologize. She had never imagined that one day he would choose this path. Afterwards she cried without end, but because she was happy that he had found the right path, one she never thought he would take. Afterwards, in 2000, he went to France to become an aspirant. He was ordained on 28.06.2001. From then on he was no longer our "Binh", but Brother Thich Chan Phap Luong.

In 2004, he was able to fly with the Sangha from Plum Village to Vietnam. Finally, we had a reunion, which the whole family and all friends had been looking forward to very much. In 2007, he again flew with Thay and the Sangha to Vietnam. This time I was there to help him: "Younger sister Hang buy me this corncob, cherimoya, sapoche, mangosteen, pomelo?" The whole family sat together and listened to his stories about the pagoda, what he had learned and his happy life as a monk. On departure day, he told us to take over his role and take good care of our parents, for as long as he could not be with them.

In 2012, my father had a stroke. My brother worried a lot, but because of the distance he could do nothing except phone our parents. Although all the siblings had a telephone, I was the one he called most often to ask if our father

was feeling better or if he could eat something. After one month our father died. Phap Luong couldn't fly home, the last time he had been able to see his father was via live video. He was very sad and said: "Dad, I am so sorry that I cannot be with you during your illness and now when you say goodbye to your life. Forgive me." After the death of my father, my mother was very lonely, sad and increasingly deaf. Every time my brother called her, the phone had to be right next to her ear so she could still hear him.

On the day of her death we tried to give him the news, but he was not there. It took us a week to get him on the phone. The first question he asked us was: "How is Mama? Is she alright?" His question touched my sadness and I told him in tears that she left us a week ago. The only thing I heard was his silence. It took a few moments before he asked me why I didn't call him directly. He loved our mother with all his heart. Every month or every time someone from the Sangha flew to Vietnam, he always sent money to care for our parents. He said, because he lived so far away from home that was all he could do to help take care of our parents.

In 2015, he had wanted to visit our mother's resting place, but had not been able to fly to Vietnam and had to stay in Plum Village in Thailand. For this reason, all his brothers and sisters flew to Thailand so that we could have a second reunion after 8 years. This was a happy and also touching meeting for all of us.

After this trip he suggested that we borrow money from the bank and renovate our parent's house because it was no longer in a good condition. The house could be divided into many rooms, which could then be rented out afterwards, and the rent could be used to pay off the debt to the bank. He said, that it would be especially nice if he could get a room when he came to visit us in 2020. We were very happy and also of the same opinion. From the very beginning of the renovation work, he called us frequently and reminded us that all the changes had to be carefully implemented and we should

not forget that he would soon be flying to Vietnam.

One day during his trip to the Czech Republic, he talked to me on the phone and told me about this great trip with many experiences. During the conversation, I wished that he could be present at the wedding of my child, so that the family would be complete. Unfortunately, it was impossible, but he promised he would fly to Vietnam next year after the New Year's celebration.

During the next phone call he asked me, if I was doing well, how my business was going and if my family was happy. He didn't think my marriage was okay, and suggested that my husband and I should talk to each other, and either live happily together or separate in peace. He was very caring towards me, his younger sister, but in this particular case he could not help much except to calm me down and give me some advice. During this conversation he also asked me to arrange a room for him. A week later he phoned my older sister in the USA and shared with her his concerns about my unhappy family. He told her that he wanted all the money from his account to be paid out to support us, and hoped that we could meet again soon.

I always stayed in contact with him, but did not know that he had problems with his legs. It was only when I heard it from the dear nuns and monks who flew to Vietnam that I found out about it. When I asked him about it, he said that it was nothing serious and had already got better. Worried, I asked him to take good care of his health, because we lived so far away from each other. He laughed on the phone: „Don't worry. This is my home. All the sisters and brothers live together as a family, they love me very much and have always taken good care of me with all their hearts." I knew that, but as his sister I couldn't let go of my worries about him.

He mentioned several times that he wanted to invite me to Germany sometime, so that I would have the opportunity to meet all the dear nuns and monks

of the EIAB, and enjoy the beautiful landscape around the Institute. He also wanted to invite me to ice cream parlours, and said I could eat as much ice cream as I wanted. Unfortunately, this promise was never fulfilled ...

That was the last time we spoke on the phone. A week later I got a call from Sister Song Nghiem and Brother Phap An. They said many things, but the only message I was capable of understanding at that moment was the fact that Brother Phap Luong was leaving us.

I was dizzy, almost in a faint, and could not understand words anymore. I just wanted to look up into the sky and shout out loud: "Oh brother, you promised to visit us when the renovation was finished. Now you won't ever call me again..." My tears fell.

Over the next few days, despite the many things to be organized because of the funeral service, Sister Song Nghiem and Brother Phap An called me often. All the ceremonies and memorial services were recorded and sent to Vietnam, so that the whole family could be part of it all. Despite the distance, I felt as if I had been present at the funeral.

Thanks to the invitation from Plum Village, my sister and I were finally able to fly to France. First we stayed in Plum Village in France for 2 weeks, and then flew to Germany.

In France we visited the Suoi Tue monastery. We were so happy and surprised when we met Sister Chan Khong. She embraced us with all her heart: "You dear, poor sisters!" At that moment we couldn't say a word and burst into tears like two children crying for the first time in their lives. Sister Chan Khong remained silent and continued to hold us in her warm arms. After a few moments we sat together and talked about Brother Phap Luong. Thanks to the stories I could feel how loved my brother was by his sister. I was completely immersed in the touching stories and wished that they would never end, then the sister told us to go back to our

room to rest, as a ceremony was to be arranged for him the next day.

In the monastery the number of nuns and monks was still small, but I nonetheless felt the energy of compassion very clearly. The ceremony took place in the cosy atmosphere of a spiritual family. Although I cried a lot, I felt very happy - thanks to the love and support of Sister Chan Khong and all the sisters and brothers of Suoi Tue Monastery for Brother Phap Luong, as well as for both of us.

The next day there was a retreat for Vietnamese people. It was pure luck that both of us could participate in the retreat. We found it so valuable, because so many Vietnamese, especially young people, were also there.

After a week at Suoi Tue Monastery, we visited Hoi Tho Nhe, the home of Sister Chan Khong. Here we organized the ceremony for the 6th week after the departure of Brother Phap Luong. I would like to thank all the nuns and monks from the bottom of my heart. In spite of their busy daily routines, they were thinking about and taking care of my brother and now also of us. The next day we had a sightseeing tour of Paris accompanied by the dear sisters.

After returning to Plum Village, we stayed in the village of Ha. Here we were warmly welcomed by all the nuns. The landscape with the birch forest, the bell tower and the lotus pond was beautiful and peaceful. I was surprised to also find lotus flowers in France, and the sisters told me that there was a lotus pond in each of the three hamlets. Although I immersed myself in the beautiful landscape for long and deep moments, I thought only of Brother Phap Luong.

In the afternoon, Sister Sach Nghiem accompanied us to Upper Hamlet. When we entered the room and saw the altar, the photo and the urn with the ashes of our brother, we could no longer hide our emotions. The only thing we could do in that moment was to take the urn with his ashes in our arms and cry.

We stayed until the commemoration of the 49th day after his death. After the ceremony in the meditation hall Nuoc Tinh „Still Water“ in Upper Hamlet, we scattered his ashes. I still remember the touching moment when Brother Phap Ung - with the urn in his hands - guided us along the path to the Buddha Hill. Shortly before we arrived there, he gave me the urn, and I knew that the moment had come. I felt like I had a heavy stone in my heart. It hurt us so much that we had not attended his cremation. Now you are free. Brother Phap Luong, my brother, I miss you so much.

After our stay in France we visited his second home, the EIAB.

When I arrived at Frankfurt airport, all I could think about was my brother, and once again my tears flowed. I did not stop crying until I saw Brother Phap Tri and two sisters at the airport. The first person I met upon arrival at the EIAB was Sister Song Nghiem. She accompanied us to Brother Phap An. Before that we were very tired because of the flight, but after arriving at the EIAB our tiredness disappeared as we finally met the dear sisters and brothers there.

After resting, Brother Phap Tri accompanied us to the altar of Brother Phap Luong. Entering the meditation hall I burst into tears. Finally I was able to „meet“ him, but without his presence. I sat in silence before his altar for hours. A painted picture of him was hung there. Probably the person who painted the picture loved my brother very much.

The first night my sister and I cried a lot. But thanks to the generous love and compassion of the dear sisters and brothers at the EIAB we were able to sleep peacefully.

The next day we visited Brother Phap Luong's old room. When we opened the door, I got a big surprise: the photos of our parents were lying there on his table. All his things gave us a warm, pleasant feeling, as if he was still there. We were speechless and started to cry. Then a monk joined us. He asked us if we were

the biological sisters of Brother Phap Luong. We answered yes and he said that it was because of him that Brother Phap Luong died. We could only cry.

A tea meditation was organized especially for us, during which we shared beautiful memories of Brother Phap Luong. We sat in a circle, felt as comfortable as in a close family, and all the stories made us feel safe and gave a feeling of togetherness. Here was my brother's family, where people loved and supported each other. Now I understood why he told me that I did not have to worry about his injured knee, because all the sisters and brothers were already taking care of him. The thought that from now on I have a spiritual family warms my heart. In my thoughts I thank Brother Phap Luong very much for deciding to become a monk, so that I have this precious opportunity today.

Over the next few days we visited many places in the company of Brother Phap Tri and some of the sisters. Germany is a beautiful and peaceful country.

Although we only stayed four nights, or three days, at the EIAB, we were very grateful and were touched by the welcome and generosity of all the people. Our stay there was an unforgettable and happy experience that will remain in our hearts forever. We will always remember Brother Phap Luong, and we know that his death is a part of our life.

Dear sisters and brothers!

The 23.07.2020 will be the anniversary of Brother Phap Luong's passing. As his youngest sister and a representative of our family, I would like to thank all the sisters and brothers from the bottom of my heart for taking such good care of

him the whole time up until the end of his life.

With my best wishes

Hang

Two of Brother Phap Luong's sisters visited Plum Village and the EIAB after his death (on this picture with Sister Chan Kong).



 Memories of Trang



In Munich, he first joined the Tâm Giác Buddha pagoda, and afterwards became part of the local Buddhist young people's groups.

He was always open and friendly, and willing to help other friends whenever they needed it, such as moving house, making small repairs in their apartments, laying the floor or listening to his friends' concerns and worries. Brother Phap Luong knew very well how to listen to others talk about their suffering, so that they felt relieved and safe afterwards! For the young people at the Buddha pagoda he was like a true big brother, warm and always trying to reconcile people with each other. He always helped in the various activities at the Buddha pagoda with all his heart.

He was a great lover of flowers. One year the epiphyllum plant in Tâm Giác produced three large and incredibly beautiful flowers. To celebrate he organized an evening for the young people's group with tea and sharing to observe the flowers unfold. It was a very joyful and unforgettable occasion.

Before his ordination, he was always very happy to talk, explain and discuss emptiness (sunyata); and nobody could really understand what he was talking about!

When he told us of his decision to become a monk in Plum Village, we, his

friends, thought that he wouldn't last long there and would soon be back amongst us, as at that time he was very laid-back, a free spirit who enjoyed going out a lot.

After his ordination, Brother Phap Luong often came to Munich and visited his old friends at Tâm Giác.

If he visited someone at home, he always came unannounced. When he arrived in front of the door, he would simply ring the bell, usually surprising his host who was not prepared for his visit and not able to offer him a decent meal or somewhere proper to sleep. But this wasn't important to Brother Phap Luong. He came and went unannounced, just as he did the last time he was here.

Once Brother Phap Luong became a novice, his friends noticed many changes in him, above all in the way he walked, talked and laughed. He no longer went to a lot of trouble to try and explain emptiness. It was only his carefree attitude and outward appearance, e.g. clothes, shoes, that he wanted to keep! Once my girlfriend Yen was out and about with him, and afterwards she said, somewhat indignantly, to me: "It's more than possible that one day Brother Phap Luong will end up walking with only one shoe, just like the Patriarch once did."

With love and respect

 Trang


This Is It

Seeing the Wonders Close By

I experienced the same as a lot of people: weeks of increasingly alarming reports about the rise in the number of Corona infections (a disease about which we knew a lot less then than we do now), followed by the lockdown in Germany, which finally arrived on 23 March. Time to stop and think about how to live with the virus, to come to terms with it. Because everyone who listened attentively to the scientists soon realized that this would not be a matter of a few weeks. Little by little, more information became available on how to protect ourselves and others without becoming over-anxious. For me getting used to behaving this way everyday became a form of practice.

Things in Germany became noticeably quieter. My diary was suddenly empty. Like many others, I experienced this time, without the usual run of events, as a relieving deceleration; as a time to rethink and question. Or to find out what is really important and where I want to focus my energies and go deeper. For me this was (also) meditation practice. My routine is more settled now than before; more settled because although I have been meditating for many years, I have also „played hooky“ again and again. Now, since the beginning of March, I get up early in the morning with the motto: sit, 30 minutes; observe whatever thoughts come, let them go ...

After sitting, I take a tour through the surrounding area – my form of walking meditation. I was very thankful that the German lockdown did not entail a curfew like in Italy or Spain, but that our government trusted its citizens to be disciplined and responsible. This helped me avoid the feeling of being locked up. On the contrary, I gained something new: an awareness of the diversity of my immediate surroundings and the chance to enjoy it every day.

My route starts just outside the front door: in just a few steps I'm already in the countryside on an ancient pilgrimage route – the Way of St. James from Cologne in the direction of Trier (and from there via France and northern Spain to Santiago de Compostela). I like to



think many pilgrims have passed this way over the centuries, step by step, breath by breath, right up until this moment (and hopefully I will hear their steps again soon).

Since it is a suburban area, I also have to cross a motorway: in March/April quite quiet, but now there is more traffic once again. I then take a public footpath across a golf course and along quiet roads with gardens. Altogether my walk is 3.7 kilometres long, and takes me about 45 minutes. Not slow walking meditation, but rather the joy that comes with feeling the body moving, the breath, the wind in my face, my strength in every stride, the firm ground under my feet, the open view over the fields.

In the morning there are only a few people about, some with their dogs, young parents with small children, from time to time a jogger. On the golf course, which was closed for weeks, initially there were only a few gardeners there, now I see a few golfers in the morning. The family homes express the variety of life within them: homes with toys on the

lawn and all sizes of shoe in front of the door, the window of a child's room with a rainbow drawn with coloured pencils saying: „Everything will be fine“.

Elsewhere, elegant gardens and expensive cars. Lushly blooming gardens contrast with 'low-maintenance' concrete slabs or fantasy worlds with animals and gnomes. People are renovating, hammering, hauling bin bags to the gate. Some stand outside the front door on the phone: Home-office outdoors.

In these four months, I have witnessed the transformation in nature: from the icy cold of late winter to the warmth of summer; after the long dry spell with nothing but blue sky there is now a gentle summer rain, trees and shrubs are becoming greener by the day, blossoms opened, glowed in the light, then faded or can now be admired in their full glory. The crops in the wheat fields are almost ripe, with a sprinkling of poppies and cornflowers in between. Flowers along the



pathways, a Flanders poppy forcing its way into the light through a small crack in the paving – a small wonder. Everything comes into focus, the small things, nothing goes unnoticed, everything has its place: everything is a manifestation of life.

In the entrance to my apartment there is a calligraphy by Thay: **This is it.**

Gabriele Gassen

White Awareness Sangha

A journey to the seeds of racism in our store consciousness

In the United States, grief, rage and despair are roaring, inflamed by the police murders of innocent Black people and the structural racism they are embedded in. On the European borders, many Black people and People of Color (BPoC)¹ are left to die in the Mediterranean Sea or forced to live in camps. The global distribution of resources, opportunities, and recognition are still reflecting (neo)colonial legacies. Many, if not most, BPoC in Europe are still facing discrimination when looking for work, at work, in education, or in housing.² And, in Germany, for example, more than one hundred people were murdered for racist motives in the last 20 years alone.³

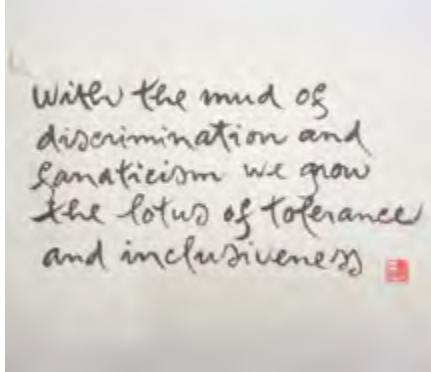
Many of us have taken the Five Mindfulness Trainings, in which we commit to look deeply into and relieve the „suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression“. How can we see the roots of racism and take mindful and effective action to transform them? Which individual and collective practices support us on a practical level in doing so? How can we do this as white people? How do we deal with feelings such as shame and guilt? And is it possible to look deeply into this in a spirit of love, joy and community?

We would like to offer you a little peek into the both challenging and deeply nourishing journey of a small Sangha of white monastic and lay friends looking into these questions.

“With the mud of discrimination and fanaticism we grow the lotus of tolerance and inclusiveness.”

(Thich Nhat Hanh)

Our White Awareness Sangha started in Plum Village at the 21 day retreat in 2018, as a group of people from five Euro-



pean countries and a US American friend. For the past two years, we met every month online to support each other in learning, reflecting, and putting love into action. We followed a Dharma and racism study curriculum⁴ designed to accompany white people in spiritual groups, adapting some of its valuable structure and material to our specific European contexts and histories. We read texts, watched films and had very vulnerable dharma sharings on how racism shaped us as white people and affects our society.

In February 2020, we organized a small retreat for ourselves, for which we invited trainers from Phoenix e.V.⁵, a BPoC-led association based in Germany, which has been offering transformative and empowering learning spaces in anti-racism and white awareness for nearly 30 years. They work in a very unique way, which has a deep spiritual foundation aligned with Plum Village practice. Our group was welcomed by the Healing Spring Monastery near Paris, allowing us to ground ourselves in the collective energy of mindfulness throughout the training.

Are you Sure?

As white people, it can be a challenge to even only start the conversation about racism and privilege – with ourselves, with others, or within our Sanghas. It is an effort – a Sangha effort – that we decided to show up for, breaking the

taboo that was compelling us not to see, not to hear, and not to speak. Part of white privilege is that white people are not forced to think about racism every day, because their daily experience is not determined by it. Or so we thought.

With ever so gentle guidance, the online curriculum and our trainers from Phoenix, Mutlu and Maria, led us to see our ancestors, our upbringing, and our conditioning as white people with new eyes. Through carefully crafted exercises it dawned on us that many of our ways of seeing or doing things were not universal for all people or completely individual to ourselves, but were actually learned by us as part of our upbringing as white people in a racialized society. By reflecting on our own experiences, we came to see how racism is inscribed into our everyday ways of thinking, speaking, acting and understanding the world, as well as how we create and do Sangha. *“In the safe space of our group, it was a relief to share and recognise similar experiences, similar emotions, similar wrong perceptions received from our schools, the media, children’s stories, etcetera throughout our lives. The safe space we created made it easier to hold and take in the often devastating information.”* shares Sister Tam Muoi, one of our monastic members.

As long as we (as white people) don’t actively choose to look at the seeds of racism in our store consciousness and how it is watered by society, we will perpetuate racism, although we might not realize or intend to do so.

One lay member of our sangha shares about this: *“Before looking into racism, I thought it consisted of intentional aggressive acts of harming or insulting people – now I learned that the suffering is caused as much by a culture of prejudice, often unintentional acts of discrimi-*

nation and by unequal opportunities. This showed me how much deeper racism is rooted in society – and in myself.”

Another member adds: *“I now see that my unconscious biases and my self-image of not having any biases often stand like two different walls between me and People of Color. This way I can neither see who they really are, nor how I unconsciously contribute to racism. I sense that these walls are in the way of true empathy and action. Unfortunately this has also happened with a Person of Color in my local Sangha. When I realized this, shame came up, then sadness arose, and lastly I felt some hope that it is possible to slowly break down these walls inside me.”*

Often it was not easy to show up for, and stay with, discomfort, shame and confusion. When they came up, we tried to embrace these feelings with tenderness and listen to them like listening to wise teachers or hurt children. When these feelings were really heard, they transformed to show a new path and gave the strength to take the first small steps on it. Together, we travelled from the head to the heart – from intellectual understanding, to feeling, to embodiment. None of this would have been possible without the collective mindfulness practice, Thay’s teachings on Interbeing and the accepting and non-judgemental guidance from our wonderful teachers, who held our process with so much patience and kindness. *“By the end, although uncomfor-*

table for me, I felt something had shifted inside of me, bringing a feeling of confusion and ‘not sure’”, Sr Tam Muoi shared.

Where do we go from here

After an intense weekend, both inspiring and profoundly humbling, we were sent back out into the world with a renewed desire to uncover blind spots in our own lives and in European history and continue the work of racial healing. And with the dream of sharing our journey – a journey, which has only just begun; a journey, which will continue for the rest of our lives; and a journey to which we would like to invite other white people, to walk together, especially in Europe.

In the near future, we hope to contribute to offering a similar space of mindful and compassionate inquiry into racism and whiteness to the wider white Sangha, in a retreat at one of the European Plum Village practice centres. In parallel, there could be a retreat by and for BPoC practitioners, similar to the Colors of Compassion retreats that Thay led together with other Dharma teachers of Color in the US.⁶ These retreats hold space for BPoC practitioners to look deeply into their experiences of racism and their ancestors, to co-create healing communities and to support each other in taking empowering action.

Meanwhile, as the violence caused by racism continues to hurt BPoC commu-

nities and individuals, may we (especially as white people) put our love into action and show up for racial justice with our hearts and eyes wide open.

For questions or more information on upcoming retreats, please write to: whiteawareness@gmail.com or to plum-villageBPOC@gmail.com.

Authors: Tashy Endres (PoC Rainbow & Friends Sangha Berlin), Simone Fenger (Wake Up Freiburg and International Queer Sangha)

- 1 Black and People of Color (BPoC) is a self-designation taken on by people who racism has turned into ‘others’. By making it clear that it is the unseen white ‘norm’ that stands at the centre of racism, we want to express our respect for BPoC and help to make their perspective the central one.
- 2 Report by EU Agency for Fundamental Rights – <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/being-black-eu>
- 3 <https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/rassismus/todesopfer-rechter-gewalt/>
- 4 In this article we put ‘white’ in italics in order to remind ourselves that there is nothing ‘natural’ about this category, no sense in which it represents ‘unseen norm’, as racism would like us to believe; rather that ‘being white’ is a (very empowering) social construct, which privileges certain people and oppresses others.
- 5 White Awareness Insight Curriculum for Uprooting Privilege (WAIC UP): <https://tinyurl.com/waicup>.
- 6 See phoenix-ev.org

Our White Awareness Sangha training at the Healing Spring Monastery, from right to left: Mutlu, Br. Mountain, Tashy, Annica, Chloe, Br. Duc Pho, Reli, Flo, Simone, Maria, Miranda, Conny, Jassy, Sr. Tam Muoi, Anthony, Ida.



Children of God, Children of the Buddha

The EIAB in the St. Benedict Church in Munich

On July 8, 2020, from 7 pm to 8:30 pm, Reverend Thomas Thanh Liem Le (Leader of the Vietnamese Catholic Community) and Dr. Thomas Barth (Chairman of the Community for Mindful Living (GAL), Bavaria) organized a meditation evening with Brother Phap An in the St. Benedict Church in Munich.

The following is a letter from Reverend Thomas Thanh Liem Le to an Italian monk from Plum Village (France).

Footnote: Together with another priest from the same order in Germany, Reverend Le visited Plum Village, near Bordeaux in France, in March 2017 where he met Brother Phap Bieu.

Dear Brother Phap Bieu,

In February, I took the opportunity to spend ten days in silence during which time I listened to many of the lectures from Thay that you sent me. I am extremely grateful to you for this, although

I also have a slightly bad conscience for not having contacted you since.

Recently, Brother Phap An, Sister Song Nghiem and Sr Chieu Nghiem came to our church for a meditation evening, about which I should write something. I find writing difficult. I find it even harder to write about this event, which I was involved in. So I decided to tell you about it in this letter. I picture it in my mind, as if we were sitting and talking under a tree in Xom Thuong.

I have long cherished the thought of welcoming the Brothers and Sisters to our church, and our Vietnamese Catholic community. As I didn't expect my dream to come dream in the near future, I had the idea of inviting both sanghas as well as friends and acquaintances to share an evening of meditation with the EIAB.

“Dear Master Jesus, dear Thay...”

These were the opening words that evening. I am sure that Jesus, Thay and other spiritual teachers were present. Their seeds are in each of us.

„Dear Sisters and Brothers. I would like to welcome you to this meditation evening in this church: members of both the German and Vietnamese sanghas, members of the Westend Parish Association, members of the Vietnamese Catholic community, friends and acquaintances. I've never seen the Church so colourful before.“

I'm very excited. There is so much joy within me that I can scarcely believe that we have students of Thay present with us in our church.

„For the incense ritual I have decided to sing a hymn that virtually every Christian from Vietnam knows. The song speaks of the love and mercy of the Virgin Mary, yes, the love and mercy of Buddha and Jesus, whose hearts know no bounds. This boundlessness is also in each of us.“

At my invitation, the whole congregation focuses its attention on the incense burner in the central aisle before the altar. Full of mindfulness and reverence, Sr. Chieu Nghiem enters the altar room. She lights the incense sticks and holds them in front of her forehead.

„May the sound of tonight's bell spread far and wide so that suffering everywhere may be alleviated. May the smoke fly so far that all beings may experience peace. May all beings experience this happiness.“

Such a moving picture: in front of the altar in a Catholic church in Germany, Buddhist monks and nuns, and a Catholic priest perform the incense ritual, to the accompaniment of a hymn. I cannot find any words to describe my feelings.



I try to hold back my tears. I don't want to see myself crying. At this moment, I remember the words of Thay: „our country will have a good chance if Buddha's children and God's children can come closer. There are many misunderstandings, hurts and divisions between the two religions in our country ... If we do not strive for healing, our country will never find peace... (Hay nam lay tay nhau, Sen no troi phuong ngoai. Trang 30)

In his teaching, Br. Phap An shares with us his experiences with the Christian faith. He is touched by the song to the Virgin Mary, as well as the chanting „Quan The Am Bo Tat (Avalokiteshvara)“. Br. Phap An tells how his mother sent him to church before his flight from Vietnam to ask the Virgin Mary for help and protection. And that is what he did. So he believes that thanks to the help and protection of Mary, he succeeded in escaping.

Dr. Thomas Barth, Chairman of the Community for Mindful Living, describes the evening in the Church as an inter-religious meeting of Christians and Buddhists: „It is very healing to seek contact and listen to each other. We can learn so much from each other. It helps understanding to develop and grow, and makes it possible to build bridges and open the way for people to be together in harmony“.

This evening is not only an inter-religious meeting between Christians and Buddhists; it is also an international meeting of Vietnamese and Germans. And here too, it is very healing to seek contact and listen to each other. There is so much we can learn from each other.“

I sit there and listen. I remember what Thay Phap An says, what Mr. Barth says and how Sr. Song Nghiem translates. Yes, I'm here. But at the same time, as you can see in the photos, I am surrounded by colours: the bright yellow, a deep lotus violet, humble earth brown ... and each colour wants to tell me a story. So, I am here, and at the same time I am with the pictures: people praying before the immolated Thich Quang Duc in

Saigon, women and children crying in the Vietnam War, the young monk Thich Nhat Hanh next to Martin Luther King, people screaming at a demonstration against foreigners, the loving gaze of Jesus on the cross ... When my eyes turn to a mother in the congregation all these images disappear. She carries a child in her hands.

Aren't these reasons enough to sing „Hallelujah“? At the end, we all sing joyfully together.

Dear Phap Bieu, although many people will read this before you, I believe you will receive this letter with joy. You will certainly understand that I am writing this letter to you, to a monk whom I hold in high esteem, as well as to all the sisters and brothers who practice living in accordance with the teachings of Thay in many monasteries and sanghas.

I hope we will meet again soon.

In brotherhood

Best Wishes

Reverend Thomas Thanh Liem Le
Head of the Vietnamese Catholic Community)

Address by Dr. Thomas Barth

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends,

In the name of the Community for Mindful Living, Bavaria, I would like to welcome you to our meditation evening with Thay Phap An, Sister Song Nghiem and Sister Chieu Nghiem from the EIAB.

I am very happy that this evening, here in this church, we are able to have an inter-religious meeting between Christians and Buddhists. It is very healing to seek contact and listen to each other. We can learn so much from each other. It helps understanding to develop and grow, and makes it possible to build bridges and open the way for people to be together in harmony.

This evening is not only an inter-religious meeting between Christians and Buddhists; it is also an international meeting of Vietnamese and Germans. And here too, it is very healing to seek contact and listen to each other. There is so much we can learn from each other.

Many of you already know Thay Phap An, but as some of you don't I would like to briefly introduce him to you. Thay Phap An was one of our teacher Thich Nhat Hanh's first monks in Plum Village. And when Thich Nhat Hanh decided to found the European Institute for Applied Buddhism in 2008, an Institute which teaches Buddhism as a practice and a way to use the teachings of the Buddha to help cope better with everyday life, he asked Thay Phap An to lead the Institute. And this is what Thay Phap An has been doing very successfully since 2008, as Director and Director of Studies at the EIAB.

Thank you very much, Thay Phap An, Sister Song Nghiem and Sister Chieu Nghiem from the EIAB, for coming all the way from Waldbrohl near Cologne, and taking time for us this evening.

And many thanks to Father Le for taking the initiative and inviting us all here.

And now I wish us all a contemplative evening with the monks and nuns from the EIAB.

Dr. Thomas Barth
(Chairman of the Community for Mindful Living, Bavaria)

Small is Beautiful

Dana – the cycle of giving and receiving love



A sweet series of events unfolded locally at the start of the lock-down, simple, local, small, but nonetheless they brought a lot of joy and inspiration to us and we wish to send this on, to where it belongs, to the much loved monks and nuns at the eiab.

My planned journey with Sangha friends to the eiab was cancelled as it coincided with the sudden start of the lock-down. But the eiab remained in my thoughts, I recalled some wonderful retreats there which seemed all the more precious now that such journeys had become impossible. I recalled too the times monastic brothers and sisters had travelled from the eiab to us here in England and locally in Dorset too, leading wonderful retreats, their generosity and beautiful teachings continue to resonate with us. Touching this sense of interconnectedness was a source of strength and inspiration to us in our local Sangha at the start of the covid crisis, but how could we reach out to our brothers and sisters at eiab and ask 'are you well, safe, and thank you for being there.'

A couple of us decided to donate the money we'd saved for the trip, and as Sangha friends heard about this, wished to send dana. And so the sum grew, grew larger than we had ever imagined, and along with cheques came cards and notes of support and gratitude for PV & eiab. The beautiful thing has been, not only raising much needed funds, but also the renewed awareness of the interbeing of our local and international sangha.

In addition, and somewhat unexpectedly, cards and notes arrived with cheques from friends and neighbours here in the local community. I offer meditation within my local community, many who come are self-isolating, who have a serious, chronic illness, some in their eighties and nineties. Some have expressed concern that they may not survive the crisis. Via the telephone we come together, we practice to follow our breathing, and hearts have opened to Thay's teaching. And so they too have wished to express their gratitude.

Here in the UK we are now well-organised with a national fund-raising scheme to support Plum Village monasteries, and are able to claim gift-aid.

But in those first few days of the covid crisis, a small, local, humble initiative brought a lot of joy and connection and gratitude.

Lesley Collington
True Lotus of Joy

Other Centres

Frankreich

Plum Village France
Lieu dit Le Pey
24240 Thénac
plumvillage.org

Frankreich

Healing Spring Monastery
2 Rue Pascal Jardin
77510 Verdelot
healingspringmonastery.org

Frankreich

Maison de l'Inspir
8 Rue des Fans
77510 Villeneuve-sur-Bellot
maisondelinspir.org

USA

Blue Cliff Monastery
3 Mindfulness Road
NY 12566 Pine Bush New York
bluecliffmonastery.org

USA

Deer Park Monastery
2499 Melru Lane
92026 Escondido California
deerparkmonastery.org

USA

Magnolia Grove Monastery
123 Towles Rd
Batesville Mississippi
magnoliagrovemonastery.org

Australien

Stream Entering Monastery
221 Marias Ln
VIC 3373 Beaufort
nhaplouu.org

Hong Kong

AIAB
Lotus Pond Temple
Ngong Ping Lantau Island
pvfhk.org

Thailand

Plum Village Thailand
Pong Ta Long | 30130 Pak Chong
District Nakhon Ratchasima
thaipumvillage.org





European Institute
of Applied Buddhism

eiab

European Institute of
Applied Buddhism gGmbH
Schaumburgweg 3 | 51545 Waldbröl
+ 49 (0)22 91/907 13 73
info@eiab.eu | registrar@eiab.eu
www.eiab.eu