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Peaceful Happiness: A Meaningful Way of Living

Life seems to pass very quickly, which inspires me to contemplate what I find to be most meaningful about it. And it is this: being peacefully happy. Actually, being peacefully happy is our true

nature. This kind of happiness depends little on conditions outside us. Rather, it depends on our attitude to receiving and dealing with the different events in our life. If we have the right attitude

and learn to live with life, as the years go by, our peaceful happiness becomes deeper and deeper. We also learn the art of letting go which makes living truly a blessing.



The drawings were painted by Josephine Cheng, Hong Kong, for this article.

A group of teachers and students of religion once visited our Institute to be with our monastic brothers and sisters. They wanted to explore the Buddhist way of life. At the end of their stay, we had an exchange. A bright young man asked: "Please answer me yes or no. In many text books I've read about Buddhism, it is a pessimistic religion, as the Buddha taught only about suffering. Yet today you've never talked about suffering but only joy and happiness. So are you really practicing Buddhism?"

The Buddha indeed taught about suffering. But more importantly, he helped us experience our true nature: peaceful happiness. The Buddha-to-be was concerned with the problem of existence: does our life, our existence, have any meaning at all? In different discourses (*sutta*), the Buddha told us of his contemplation about life – about ageing, sickness and death. This had been when he was a young prince and it had prompted his decision to leave home to look for an answer.

On ageing, he said: "Whilst I had such power and good fortune, yet I thought: 'When an untaught ordinary man, who is subject to ageing, not safe from ageing, sees another who is aged, he is shocked, humiliated and disgusted; for he forgets that he himself is no exception. But I, too, am subject to ageing, not safe from ageing, and so it cannot befit me to be shocked, humiliated and disgusted on seeing another who is aged.' When I considered this, the vanity of youth entirely left me."¹ The Buddha expressed himself similarly on sickness and death. These were, indeed, depressing thoughts on life.

"Before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisattva, I thought: 'House life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open. It is not easy, living in a household, to lead a holy life as utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. Suppose I shaved off my hair

*and beard, put on the yellow robe, and went forth from the house life into homelessness?'"*²

*"Later, while still young, a black-haired boy blessed with youth, in the first phase of life, I shaved off my hair and beard — though my mother and father wished otherwise and grieved with tearful faces — and I put on the yellow robe and went forth from the house life into homelessness."*³

*After experimenting with different philosophies and spiritual practices of his time, the Buddha-to-be still could not find an answer to his concern. After six years of searching, he decided to abandon all philosophical and spiritual speculations. Instead, the Buddha-to-be tried a different path, namely, returning to himself; taking good care of his body, observing the activities of his mind, discovering how it functions, and how this leads to suffering. He was finally awakened and able to touch the peaceful happiness within him. On that day of final understanding, the Buddha-to-be "(Siddhartha) gazed at the (morning) star and exclaimed out of deep compassion, 'All beings contain within themselves the seeds of Enlightenment, and yet we drown in the ocean of birth and death for so many thousands of lifetimes!'"*⁴

He had found his answer. The existential problem was only a construct of his mind. Certainly, there is suffering from old age, sickness and death. But these are not the only experiences of human life, even if our mind, attitude and confusion have made them the only significant experiences. The Buddha declared

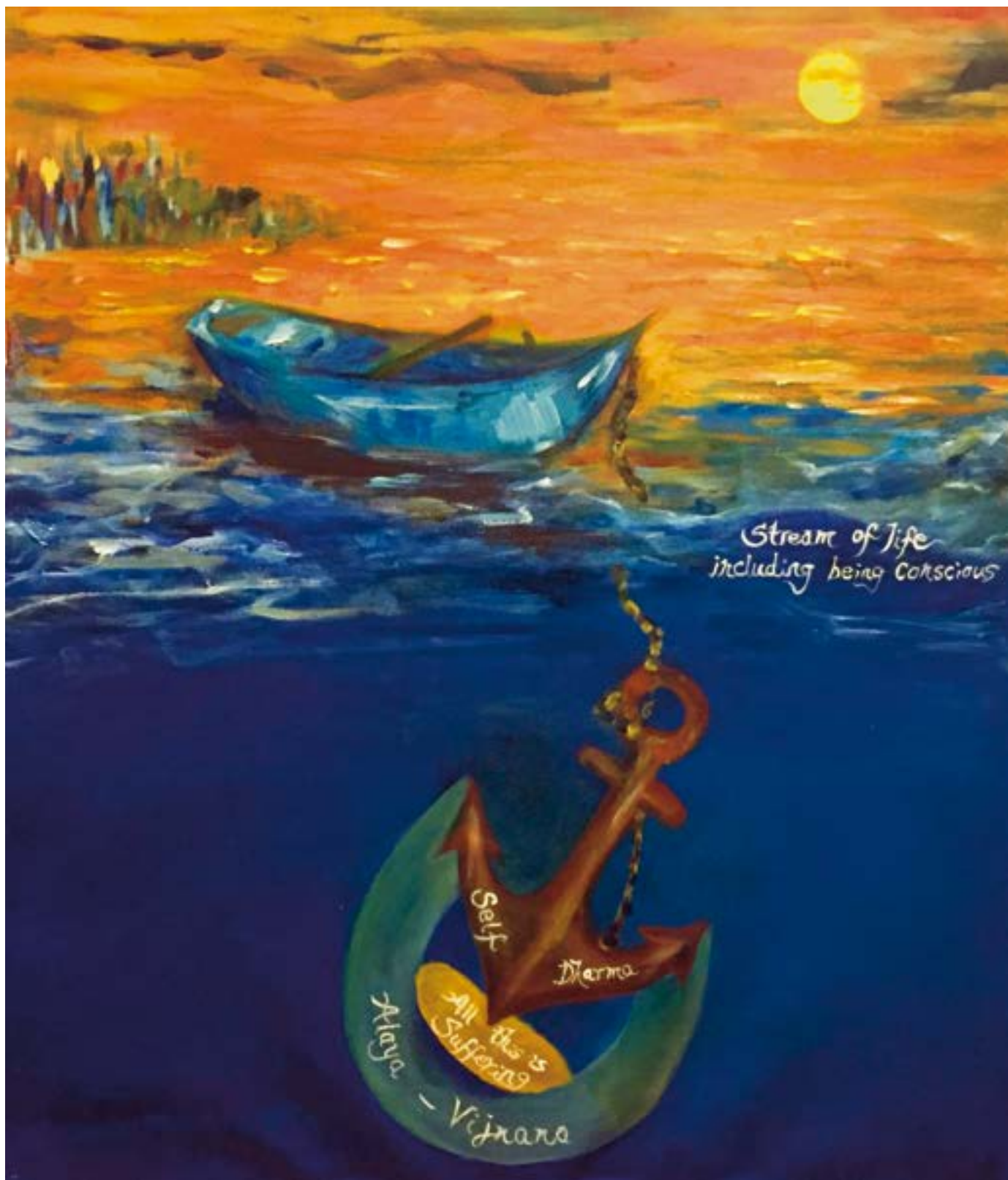
his solution by proclaiming: **"all this is suffering** (*sabbam idam dukkham*): birth, old age, sickness and death."⁵

Here, the Buddha chose his language very carefully. He used the demonstrative or relative article **"this"** together with the word **"all"** in order to signify a boundary, a limit to suffering. Suffering has an end, being a closure. It is local and particular. It is not unbounded and universal. Therefore it is possible to go beyond suffering and touch the domain of **peaceful happiness**. Human life is much more than suffering. There are so many blessings that enable us to enjoy our being and our life in every situation if we know how to contain our suffering within its own boundaries (see Figure on page 2).

It is a tendency of our mind, however, to treat each specific and local experience as general and universal. In the particular language of Buddhist thought, our mind has a tendency to construct self and dharma. **Self** is the subjective aspect of our experience and **dharma** is the objective aspect. Our mind tends to solidify these two aspects until they take on an existential reification which gives rise to our dualistic way of thinking and living. In this way, suffering is an experience which results from habitual embellishment by our mind. In other words, in our normal habitual way of living, we choose the practice of *"there is no way to suffering, suffering is the way"*.

In his *Trimsika*⁶ (*The Treatise of Thirty Verses*), one of the great Buddhist teachers and philosophers, Vasubandhu (4th to 5th century A.D.) developed a model for the process of our mind which can be called a model of philosophical psychology. The first two verses said:

1. Whatever, indeed, is the variety of ideas of *self* and *dharma* elements that prevails (*ātmadharmopacāro – biểu tượng ngã, pháp*), it occurs in the **transformation of consciousness** (*viññana-parinama*). Such



transformation is threefold, [namely,]

2. the **resultant** (*vipaka – di thực*), what is called mentation (*mmananas – tư lượng*), as well as **the concept of the object** (*visayasya vijnapti – biểu biệt cảnh*). Herein, the con-

sciousness called **alaya**, with all its seeds, is the resultant.

3. Living is a process of changing and acting and so is our consciousness. Consciousness is nothing more than the act of being conscious (*vijanatiti vinnanam*)⁷. As an act, it under-

goes a transformation every time we have a conscious experience. Most of the time, this transformation goes in the direction of being attached, anchored. This activity limits or solidifies our experience into a subjective *self* and an objective *dhar-*

ma element of that experience. The Buddha called this process *alaya*⁸. *Alaya* means mooring, anchoring, attaching. It is as if we are on a boat flowing along the river of life, then suddenly we decided to drop anchor at a particular place or moor to a dock. This dock is our *alaya-vijna-na*. The *self* and *dharma* elements are two arms of the anchor from our boat (see Figure on page 4).

4. The resultant is the potential response that we have learned from all our past experiences. All our actions – including those of our ancestors, our culture, etc – from the past are remembered and they become the potential resultant.

This resultant is directed by our mentation, which is our intentional and habitual way of responding to life situations in the direction of *self-view*, *self-pride*, *self-confusion* and *self-love*. This constitutes the first arm of the anchor, the subjective *self* aspect of our experience. We believe deeply that our life is separate from the lives of others; that there is no connection between us and that we do everything in order to protect ourselves, even at the cost of the life, security and happiness of others. We are always arrogant, believing that we are the center of the universe. We focus only on ourselves and are concerned only about our own business, without any

consideration for the well-being of others.

This resultant is also directed by our conception of, or perception about, the object of our experience. We believe with certainty that we know or perceive the absolute truth of what we experience. We grasp tightly onto our view and are ready to fight for what we believe is the truth. In fact, we have only a conception of what we experience and cannot know the thing-in-itself (*das Ding an sich*). The absolute reality of what we experience is always beyond our reach. This constitutes the second arm of the anchor, the objective *dharma* element of the experience.



In what is a vicious cycle, the mentation and the conception of the object are directed and shaped by the resultant. The interaction of these three activities of our consciousness constitutes the transformation of our consciousness into pain and sorrow. This is how we lose our peaceful happiness and become trapped in the whirlpool of *alaya-vijnana*, the attached consciousness. We are separated from the stream of the wonderful manifestation of life. As the Persian poet and mystic Rumi once said: “What strange beings we are! That sitting in hell at the bottom of the dark, we’re afraid of our own immortality.”

Understanding this process of our mind, the Buddha gave us a very simple but effective way of liberating ourselves from this tendency to anchor our life in painful experiences. His insight into the existential problem is expressed simply as: “All *this* is suffering.” This insight is also a solution to all our painful experiences. So when someone says something and we feel angry, instead of reacting or running away with our thinking and reasoning, reifying our experience into *self* and *dharma*, we learn to stop and recognize: *this* is anger; to embrace the anger with our love; and to come back and to relax our body. In this way we can calm down the three inter-activities of the resultant, mentation and conception of what we experience.

In the discourse on the Four Establishment of Mindfulness, the Buddha instructed his disciple that when going forward and returning he acts knowing clearly what he is doing; when looking ahead and looking away he acts clearly knowing; when flexing and extending his limbs he acts clearly knowing; when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl he acts clearly knowing; when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting he acts clearly knowing; when defecating and urinating he acts clearly knowing; when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent he acts clearly knowing⁹. In summary, whatever

we experience, we learn to respond in the way of: “This is the experience” and thus limit “**the experience in the experienced**”.

The Buddha called this path of practice to limit *the experience in the experienced: Ekāyano*. Ekayana means narrow, passable by only one person; being the only way. After a long, interesting and complicated discussion, Bhikkhu Sujato proposed to translate this term as: “*all things come together as one*”¹⁰. I understand the term *ekayana magga* as the path of learning to be with *the experience in the experienced itself and not adding any embellishment to the experienced*. This interpretation is in line with the teaching given in the sutra and consistent with Bhikkhu Sujato’s translation. Ekayana then is the key word to summarize the essence of practice. The Buddha said: “Monastics, this is the path where (*experiencing in the experienced [my interpretation]*) all things come together as one (*Ekāyano*), to purify sentient beings, to make an end of pain and sadness, to get past sorrow and lamentation, to reach the way, to witness Nibbāna; that is, the four kinds of mindfulness meditation.”¹¹

This is a practice for training the mind, for preparing ourselves so that when suffering comes, we understand “that suffering comes to be when conditions are favorable, and that it fades away when conditions are no longer favorable.”¹² Then with respect to the path of the middle way we no longer have any doubts. As humans, we believe that we are very logical. Yet most of the time we create an illogical and interesting narrative based on the three activities of the process by which our consciousness is transformed. When we are able to walk on the path of *ekayana*, our mind is well trained and we can enjoy deeply our peaceful happiness in every moment of our busy life. We can learn to let go of our experience by only experiencing the experienced. In that way we can liberate ourselves from the vicious cycle of our karmic action. Thus we can achieve a meaningful way of living our mortal life whilst allowing

ourselves also to be immersed in the immortality of living.

Remarks

1. Bhikkhu Nanamoli, ‘The life of the Buddha: according to the Pali canon’, p. 9, quote from Anguttara-nikaya 3:38
2. Bhikkhu Nanamoli, ‘The life of the Buddha: according to the Pali canon’, p. 10, quote from Majjhima-nikaya, Sutta Number 36, 100
3. Bhikkhu Nanamoli, ‘The life of the Buddha: according to the Pali canon’, p. 10, quote from Majjhima-nikaya, Sutta Number 26, 36, 85, 100
4. Thich Nhat Hanh, ‘Old Path White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha’, Chapter 18, The Morning Star Has Risen
5. David J. Kalupahana, ‘A History of Buddhist Philosophy – Continuities and Discontinuities’, p. 86
6. David J. Kalupahana, ‘A source-book on later Buddhist philosophy’, p. 489
7. David J. Kalupahana, ‘A History of Buddhist Philosophy – Continuities and Discontinuities’, p. 72, quote from Majjhima-nikaya, Sutta Number 43
8. David J. Kalupahana, ‘A source-book on later Buddhist philosophy’, p. 496
9. Analayo, ‘Satipatthana, The direct path to realization’, [Activities], p. 5
10. Bhikkhu Sujato, ‘A History of Mindfulness: How Insight Worsteds Tranquility in the Satipatthana Sutta’, p. 124, The Path of Convergence, for a discussion of the term Ekāyana
11. Bhikkhu Sujato, from Sutta Central, Majjhima-nikaya – Sutta Number 10
12. Thich Nhat Hanh, ‘Chanting from the heart : Buddhist ceremonies and daily practices’, p 279, Discourse on the Middle Way

I Take Refuge in the Sangha

This year is the third year that we shall be hosting the German and the Netherlands retreat without the presence of Thay.

Before Thay became ill many people would ask when Thay no longer man-

ifests with us what will happen; who will lead the sangha. Our answer always was the fourfold¹ sangha and the mindfulness trainings will continue Thay and as Thay continues in us we shall never feel bereft of a teacher. This is easy enough to say and in many

ways we can marvel at the way Thay had prepared his disciples for the time when he would no longer be evident as teacher. The tours and large retreats that Thay had led continue to happen with delegations of Plum Village Dharma teachers and monks and nuns trav-



elling throughout the world. In Plum Village, France numbers of retreatants have grown rather than depleted since Thay has not been present. The need for the Plum Village Dharma doors of practice is always growing and it is our determination to be able to continue to practice and to teach in order to be able to be faithful to all that Thay has taught us, handing it on to future generations.

In Germany we have the European Institute of Applied Buddhism and in Hong Kong we have the Asian Institute of Applied Buddhism. These Institutes are run by the monks and nuns who have been trained in the Plum Village monasteries with the help of lay friends who often voluntarily and selflessly offer their services.

The aim of the Institutes is to give people a chance to study Buddhism in such a way that they can apply it in their daily lives.

Friends who have been coming to the EIAB over the years on an annual basis often express their delight at the way

the Institute has developed. In fact the large part of our building more than half of it is still uninhabitable, but we have made progress and the progress that people remark on is the atmosphere. This atmosphere has been made by the practice of mindfulness, concentration and insight. Monks and nuns have been doing their best 24 hours a day and our lay friends who join us also do their best. Of course we are not perfect and we never shall be, but the energy of understanding and compassion has begun to transform the heaviness of the history of our building.

Clearly the Sangha, which Thay dedicated his life to building, is what continues Thay. Sangha is the third of the Three Precious Jewels of Buddhism along with the first Precious Jewel, the Buddha and the second Precious Jewel, the Dharma. Of course the Buddha is precious if we can see that we and all beings have the Buddha-nature and the potential to manifest awakening as the Buddha did. The Dharma is precious because it is the ways of practice that help us to manifest in our self the awakening

that the Buddha manifested. The Sangha, the community that practises and holds the Dharma is no less precious. The Sangha is essential for the survival of the Buddha and the Dharma because it produces a collective energy of mindfulness, concentration and insight. Collective energy is much greater than the sum of its individual components. If we want to transform our society, it is very difficult to do much as an individual but as a Sangha we can do something because we have the collective energy of mindfulness. The energy of mindfulness and concentration lead to the energy of insight. We know what steps we can take to change the world.

When we become a part of a Sangha we want to contribute something to the whole, we do not just want to benefit from the collective energy. Our contribution may lie in letting go. We let go of our individual ideas in order to come to a consensus. As a monk or a nun when we join the sangha we give up our money, our possessions; our car, telephone, our private e-mail, our wardrobe. We receive something very



precious and that is the collective energy of the sangha that supports our daily practice and is able to support the people who come to the Institute to practise with us.

Sometimes a member of the sangha falls sick. That person has to rest and the other members of the sangha perform her duties for her. The compassion and loving kindness of the sangha help her to grow well again. The sangha has a resource of loving kindness and compassion.

The Buddha devoted much of his life to building a sangha. In one of the sutras a king comes to the Buddha and prostrates at his feet, caressing the Buddha's feet with his hands. The Buddha asked: "Great king for what reason are you showing such great respect and friendship?"

The answer of the king was that the energy of the sangha was what made him feel such deep respect and gratitude for the Buddha. The Buddha had built a

sangha with qualities that were rare to find in the world.

The first reason for his respect was that the monks and nuns led the monastic life until their last breath, not just ordaining for a short time.

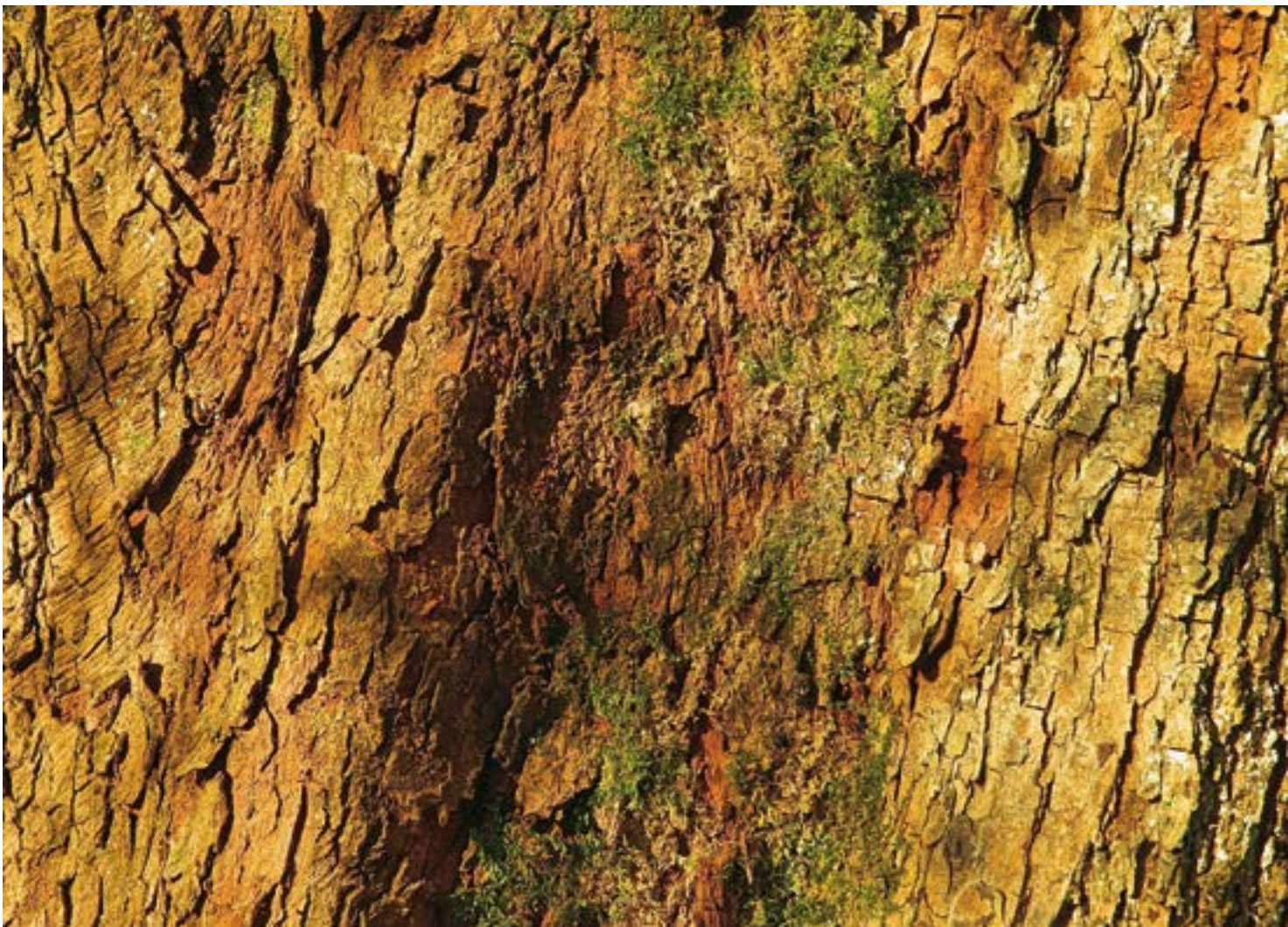
The second reason the monks and nuns live together with mutual appreciation, without quarrelling, viewing each other with kindly eyes.

The third reason the monks and nuns are smiling and cheerful, sincerely joyful, like deer roaming free in the forest.

The fourth reason was that the monks and nuns listened deeply to what the Buddha was saying. Even when a king was addressing people, they would start talking when he was talking. When the Buddha taught the Dharma to an audience of several hundred followers, there was not even the noise of a cough or someone clearing his throat. If someone did this his neighbour sitting next to him would remind him to be quiet.

If we look at our sangha now we see how in retreats people sit quietly and listen to a Dharma talk for more than an hour. In the retreat setting we see how people live in harmony and help each other. In Dharma sharing they listen deeply to each other and express their insights with loving speech. We see people eating in silence and walking in silence. All this is very impressive to an outsider. During a retreat we can give rise to a very powerful energy of peace and joy, that makes us feel that we are living in a better world, even a paradise or Pure Land.

Since we came to Waldbroel in 2008 many hundreds of people have knelt down to receive the practice of the Five Mindfulness Trainings during retreats. When they receive the trainings to make the commitment to live in accord with certain principles to bring greater happiness into the world they also commit themselves to the sangha. They are reminded: "In order to be able to continue on the path, you will always need a sangha. It is very important for you to



join or create a sangha where you live, so you can realize your aspiration.”

We build sangha because one Buddha is not enough to help our world. In this time when there are so many challenges facing us in all spheres of life, economic, ecological and social, “we are committed to learning to see ourselves and others as cells in one Sangha body. As a true cell in the Sangha body, generating mindfulness, concentration and insight to nourish ourselves and the whole community, each of us is at the same time a cell in the Buddha body.”²⁾

A sangha is like a flower arrangement. Each member is a different flower. We all come from different backgrounds

and have different ways of looking at the world. We do not consider that a rose is better than a dandelion. Each flower is beautiful in its own way and has something to offer. Let us look deeply at each member of our sangha and see what precious thing he or she has to offer. If we look deeply enough we are sure to find it. Sit down together often with each other to express your appreciation for the beneficial actions you observe arising from each other. When differences of opinion arise find ways to come to consensus and do not do anything until consensus is reached.

Thay has said that the most noble task anyone can perform is the task of building sangha. Just by taking refuge in

the sangha you are adding a brick to the Sangha building. Jesus Christ said it was enough for two or three to gather together in the spirit of Christ. Your practice helps the sangha to grow.

We want our sangha to be a true place of refuge for many people. In the beginning you may just be two or three people. It is your turn to lead the sangha that night. It is winter and it is raining heavily. You ask your yourself will the other two friends come? You do not know but still you prepare everything beautifully for them: the hot water for the tea, the cushions for sitting, the bell and the incense and you wait with peace and calm in your mind. You hear the telephone and it is one friend saying that she cannot come because her car has broken down and the other friend cannot come because her mother is sick. Still you continue to sit and you send your energy of loving kindness to your two friends who cannot be with you. The action of preparation that you have made is never lost. Your dedication to sangha building is never lost. Over the years the sangha grows and as twenty or more people gather you remember with a smile those days when you prepared and no one arrived.

A short guided meditation or total relaxation, a Dharma-sharing, a mindful walk outside, a reading from a book by Thay or listening to an extract from a recorded Dharma talk, a cup of tea in mindfulness, are all possibilities for a sangha that is just beginning. Building sangha need not be hard work it can be empowering and joyful. We build sangha not just to be a place of refuge for others but for also a refuge for our self.

Sister True Virtue, Waldbroel, 08-06-2017.

Remarks:

- 1) Fourfold means consisting of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.
- 2) 10th of the 14 Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing.



Healing Touch of the Heart

In 1996 I came into contact with Buddhism for the first time. Following a severe crisis I left my former life behind me and moved from Niederrhein to Bonn. During one of my first walks through the enchanting alleys of Bonn I saw a poster advertising a talk on Zen meditation in the tradition of Taisen Deshimaru. In the evening I attended the lecture, and something inside me felt deeply touched and understood. Once the lecture was over I became a

member of this meditation group and remained part of it for about three years. In this group I got to know my future partner, Peter. For some time we meditated together in this group before Peter stopped meditating altogether. I found a new group which, in comparison with the first, was far less concerned with form, although here too we also practiced Soto and Rinzai Zen. For me the strict forms of Japanese Soto Zen were fundamental, and I did

not consider what I now experienced as genuine, serious endeavour.

However, I remained and over the course of time my view changed. I still practice with this group today, and it was here that I got to know a very good friend about 7 years ago. We did not just share an interest in meditation, we had the same profession and, without knowing it, we were also neighbours. We developed a very close



bond, that continues to grow even today. The years that followed were full of wonderful experiences of nature, meditation, discussions, films, silence with her alone or together with her and Peter. It was a wonderful carefree time. As we both wanted to make fundamental changes in our professional life, we considered the idea of going freelance. During this time my friend went to the EIAB more and more often to find out what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. Whilst I was occupied with my future plans to go freelance, she was becoming increasingly attracted by the prospect of ordaining as a nun. Then

the day came when she told me that she could think of no greater happiness than becoming a nun. I was not just shocked that she had abandoned our idea of working freelance, worse – she was in the process of leaving my life altogether. I was stunned, it was something I hadn't anticipated. Up until then I hadn't heard much about Thay's tradition, and had only learned through Peter that this form of practice was very flowery and a complete contrast to Japanese Zen practice. Peter's opinions were always emphatic (*credo*), so I never gave the matter any further consideration. In the months that fol-

lowed I found practice rooms which I furnished, whilst my friend was occupied with giving up her flat.

The time to say farewell arrived, the flat was empty and renovated, finally we held each other in our arms and I knew it would be a long time before I would see her again, and perhaps never. With tears streaming down my face I approached the house in which Peter and I lived and felt empty, inconsolable.

Starting up on my own provided me with a distraction, now and then we wrote to one another, and occasional-



ly there was a phone call. Then I met her once again: she came with several monks and nuns from Plum Village to the EIAB for the summer retreat. I went there for a day and we had the opportunity for a long talk. Becoming a nun was the right decision for her she said. She was very happy and after a while I also felt more conciliatory and was happy that she had found her path.

Shortly before I was about to leave she said that I should not miss the chance to hear Thay's talk. So we went into the tent. I was astonished by the number of guests, many families with children; it was very lively and not at all the atmosphere that I was used to for Zen talks. To begin with I couldn't really make anything of it and subsequently left, very unimpressed, to return home.

Over the coming months my decision to go freelance paid off; I had so much to do that I barely found the time for it. Although Peter supported me where he could it often exceeded my, and also his, limits. It led to conflicts. Then came the day on which I had agreed to meet Peter for breakfast and he didn't turn up. We lived in two flats directly opposite each other, and the evening before we had, as we often did, argued about the excessive burden of work. Normally he always woke up very early, and I was surprised that he hadn't turned up. I called him, but he didn't answer. So I went over to his flat to see what was the matter. He sat, half lying, on his bed, the light was on, the computer was next to his bed, and I knew immediately he was no longer alive. I went closer and saw the empty look in his eyes. He just looked tired, and I didn't have the impression that he had suffered.

The body, an empty shell lying on the bed, whilst outside I could hear the birds singing, traffic, people talking, and here in this room was an unimaginable emptiness. Death!

Everything that had ever seemed important vanished. I tried to understand something; I went back to my flat and

fetches my meditation cushion, sat by his bed and attempted to breathe, to meditate. The many years of meditation practice and Buddhist teachings helped me to remain there, and not to run away. This was a form of reality that destroyed everything. I was deeply shocked. I don't know how often I went back and forth from one apartment to the next before I finally called someone.

After the doctor, the coroner and all the others who deal with a death after sudden heart failure had left, a mass of people, friends, relatives came. I was present, but as though under a bell jar, completely cut off from the rest of the world.

The weeks and months, even years afterwards, in which so many other terrible things happened, followed the same pattern: I broke down, pulled myself together, broke down again and pulled myself together again.

I don't know how many times I jumped over my own shadow during this time, and although everything was so terrible I had the feeling of coming closer to myself and the world. I really worked a lot, meditated, cried, breathed and regularly attended sesshins. During one of these sesshins in silence I began to read a book by Thay I had taken along.

What he said resonated deeply with me, so deeply that I wanted to read more and more.

As a result I registered for a summer retreat, although I also knew that my friend, the nun from Plum Village, would be there. Even though Thay had already suffered a stroke and could not participate, many people came to the EIAB and we were divided up into families. There was a programme within the families, but also walking meditation, deep relaxation and above all the very valuable Dharma talks together.

Although the Dharma talks did not necessarily touch on subjects that I had not already heard from Thay personally two

years beforehand, they now gave me, in contrast with previously, deep insights into his teachings.

Within the family we had daily Dharma sharings, which gave the opportunity for deep sharing. If we wanted we could share about ourselves whilst the rest listened attentively. For me this was a chance to speak about what I had experienced over the last few years in a setting of trust and respect. It was very healing simply to speak openly without anyone making comments or offering advice. But it was not just the role of speaker that was healing, no – and this astonished me – the role of listener was also very healing. To hear that everyone has a story, and that I could discover myself in so many stories and thereby connect with others, was a new experience for me.

Since then I have taken part in innumerable courses at the EIAB. Working on myself, which became so much more important after experiencing Peter's death, is the driving force. Courses such as 'Embracing the Inner Child', 'Healing Contact with our Ancestors', 'Reconciliation', 'Self-Compassion' and many others that I have attended have touched my heart, which I thought had turned to stone, with the result that understanding, compassion, joy, love and also equanimity have returned to my life. The easily understandable Dharma talks also nourish me on my spiritual path.

My relationships with my family and friends have changed and they are wonderful in a way I have never experienced before, and I have the feeling I am only at the beginning.

I feel immense gratitude for the work of the nuns and monks at the EIAB and for Thich Nhat Hanh.

Thank you!

Marita Roosen

The EIAB – a place of healing and transformation

A visit to Sangha Hong Kong

I had an extraordinary retreat at EIAB. I experienced human nature at its very best. People, including the monastics, our group members and the Sangha, were mostly calm, gentle, smiling, warm, generous, kind and helpful. I felt very much loved and cared for. The retreat was well organized, and yet it was flexible enough to accommodate our wishes and needs.

I was especially touched by Thay Phap An's greeting us at the airport early in the morning on our arrival, when he had just returned from his retreat in Hamburg the night before.

EIAB was a beautiful place in early Spring. I will always remember the tall majestic trees, the magnificent pine trees, the beautiful flowers – the tulips, daffodils, magnolia and apple blossoms, the vast stretches of green grass, the glorious sunset viewed from the top of the slope, the crystal clear lake, the singing birds and the nice hiking trails.

I was able to feel the land energy while we were practicing our walking meditation in the hills, and when we were so much in touch with Mother Earth. It was both calming and energizing at the same time, and the feeling was superb.

The title of our retreat was The Path of Transformation and Healing. Thay Phap An's teaching was clear, wise and compassionate. It was a special lesson for me to learn that there were two Paths for Transformation: the Path of Relaxation and the Path of Cultivation. When we tried to heal ourselves by taking the path of relaxation, we might finally become bored, and then we could turn to the Path of Cultivation/Action. Then again, when we became too tired, we could go back to the Path of Relaxation. These went in cycles, and we were like artists, trying to maintain a dynamic equilibrium and develop ourselves to our optimal energy. This helped me immensely to understand and accept my desire to retire

from my volunteer work of 15 years. I was tired, and needed time and space for self-nurturing.

Other teachings on the Path of Healing with Love and Deep Listening, and the Path of the Middleway in order to prevent polarization, were also very enlightening and inspiring.

At our Dharma sharing, I was amazed at the power of Collective Interconnectedness. Under the compassionate care of Thay Phap An, it was easy for people to build up trust in the group and to share deeply about their pains and sufferings, thus opening themselves up and embracing their pain so as to facilitate the transformation and healing. I felt honored and privileged to have shared the tears of many of our group members.

Our excursion to Rudesheim was unforgettable – the boat ride under the warm sun, the walking in the castle under the rain, the tasty packed lunch, the spec-



tacular view from the cable car ride, the yummy ice cream on the streets of this lovely town, and the incredibly hearty hospitality of the hosts at the grand and stately Chi Mai House.

Another touching moment was on Vesac Day. Tears rolled down my cheeks when I saw around 180 people, both Europeans and Asians, attended the Dharma talk, practiced mindful walking in the rain, chanted and gathered together to seek peace in themselves and the world. The collective energy was very powerful. Thay Phap An asked us to make a deep vow: To be the strong, happy and healthy Self. I promised myself that I would try.

I was greatly impressed by the stories of how Thay Phap An set up EIAB amidst numerous difficulties, and built the stupa using waste materials wisely to combat negative energy. I admired him for his courage, determination and conviction as a leader. I will always remember the words at the entrance of EIAB: Peace in Myself. Peace in the World. This also reminded me of Thay's wise message: When we change our daily lives – the way we think, speak and act – we change the world.

I am forever grateful to the organizers, Sister Luong Nghiem, Therese, Eva and Angela for giving us this memorable retreat, and Thay Phap An and Sister



Song Nghiem for showering us with love and wisdom and a brown EIAB T-shirt with words: Together we are one. At the last session of our retreat, I followed our group members to thank Thay Phap An individually, and I went on my knees and head. This was the first time ever I kowtowed to a living human being. The deep sense of gratitude and humbleness moved me to tears. My whole being was full of peace and joy.

I had kept my booklet full, with words of wisdom, postcards and pictures to

remind myself of this precious and wonderful time, and the lessons that I had learned. These memories will be kept close to my heart.

I wish Thay Phap An's dream of a new meditation hall at EIAB will soon materialize. As he always said: When the conditions are sufficient, it will manifest.

With Gratitude

Dr. Chan Wan Tung
Hong Kong

Golden Moments at EIAB for Hong Kong Sangha

The energy of healing and transformation – the theme of our Golden Moment™ retreat at EIAB in May – was everywhere during a week-long pilgrimage by older lay members of the Hong Kong sangha, led by monastics from the Asian Institute of Applied Buddhism (AIAB).

It bubbled over into the joyous welcome EIAB monastics gave our weary group at Dusseldorf Airport, after the long flight.

It flowed through Thay Phap An's deep, gentle and practical Dharma talks, and in heartfelt sharing by retreatants.

It manifested in the massive stone columns that were transformed from abandoned rubble into EIAB's remarkable bell tower. And it travelled with us on happy outings to EIAB's famous hinterland – to Koln, where we sat peacefully in the vaulted Gothic cathedral; to the heritage home of a Vietnamese German

family who showered us with generous hospitality, and to the Rhein, where we enjoyed a sunny river cruise, a rainy picnic in a riverside castle, then more sunshine to melt our ice creams.

The 20 or so Golden Moment practitioners from the AIAB sangha – all of us in, or approaching, retirement – first gathered in Hong Kong in April last year for a retreat led by Thay Phap An during one of his visits to Asia. Several lay members of the Hong Kong lay sangha have actively supported EIAB for years and some have spent time there. Now, the seed was planted for more of us to experience AIAB's "twin" for ourselves.

We felt so privileged to be in Germany listening to Thay Phap An's inspiring account of the story behind EIAB.

He spoke of many challenges that had to be overcome to realise Thay's (Thich Nhat Hanh's) vision, more than a decade ago, to establish the first Institute for Applied Buddhism right at the

centre of Europe. There were touching stories, too, about EIAB helping to heal and transform the unresolved suffering of patients who, long ago, resided in the Institute's vast main building when it was a facility for the mentally ill and, later, a maternity hospital.

We benefitted greatly from the exquisite care and thoughtfulness that went into planning our pilgrimage. Sister Luong Nghiem and monastics at AIAB, in close liaison with Thay Phap An, Sister Song Nghiem, EIAB monastics and core Hong Kong sangha members, did everything possible to make us feel comfortable, relaxed and happy. The conditions for healing and transformation could not have been more favourable.

We were nourished, too, by EIAB's plentiful tasty food after we worked up appetites by walking in the woods, joining Sister Song Nghiem's energetic Tai Chi exercises, or simply by sinking into her deep relaxation sessions, to the nursery sound of tinkling bells.

Even the weather cooperated. Frosty mornings gave way to warm days among the last spring blossoms in EIAB's orchards, and showers gave rise to rainbows. For Vesak, a heavy down-pour stopped just as outdoor ceremonies and festivities in front of the bell tower were about to begin. It was an answer, said Thay Phap An, to prayer.

On one particular afternoon of thunder and sunshine, Thay Phap An took us on a guided tour of the "Old Path White Clouds" and "Path of Joy" garden trails. We paused at the bottom of the hill in front of the stone archway etched with Thay's calligraphy, rendered in German. The message and symbolism were so fitting: "Peace in Myself; Peace in the World." For me, it was also the perfect moment to appreciate how peace and goodwill between East and West can make a powerful contribution to healing and transformation all over the world.

Sarah Monks, Sangha Hongkong

Eva Yuen, Hongkong



Memories of a wonderful visit and retreat

Living from the Wisdom of the Heart – Israel, Spring 2017

Israel, Spring 2017

Preparing this article about the visit of Sr. Bi Nghiem and Sr. Dao Nghiem brought back wonderfully vivid memories of our meaningful and beautiful time together. We enjoyed every precious moment and are full of gratitude.

Along with members of the Israeli Sangha, and with beginners eyes we enjoyed anew seeing with the sisters the uniqueness of Jerusalem – the Old and new City, the sites holy to the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths – the freshness of drinking mint tea outside one of the big gates from the Temple Mount – walking along the Via Dolorosa – eating humus and humus and humus – exchanging joyful energy with the merchants; standing in silence beside the two thousand year old trees in the Garden of Gethsemane; crawling down into the cave to the tomb where Jesus is said to have been buried and resurrected in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher; standing with Jews praying at the Western Wall; being with the horror of suffering at Yad VeShem Museum; walking the streets in Ein Kerem where John the Baptist was born and lived; gazing down in quietude on the calm waters of the lake of Galilee from Capernaum where Jesus delivered his sermon on the Beatitudes; watching the film *Disturbing the Peace*, together with Israeli and Palestinian combatants. Most of all we enjoyed just being in their presence.

Just being with the sisters and sharing their practice every day was a deep and unforgettable experience. They filled us with happiness and strengthened the realization that we all have a Buddha nature.

Memories of participants from the retreat at Bet Oren, March 30 – April 3

Over two months later we asked participants to share their memories and experiences from the retreat. Although we are all absorbed again back into our daily lives, their participation and willingness to share is a testament to the power of the retreat.

“This retreat was for me both a lovely, peaceful experience, and a deeply meaningful and important one. Its beneficial effects have stayed strongly with me till now, over 9 weeks later, and it feels like a transformation has been achieved.

Bet Oren’s lodge and the surrounding area were full of spring flowers, a brief and special growth we have here, in Israel. The weather was great, cool and crisp, rainy and shiny in equal measures.

This was a sort of an intimate retreat. Not only because of the smaller number of participants, or the warmth and the simplicity of the organization – thanks to some key members of the Israeli sangha – but very much due to the kind of presence our guest teachers, Sr. Bi Nghiem and Sr. Dao Nghiem, brought with them.

In my mind I remember things like the beauty of the place, the food (excellent, except for the first dinner which had some people very worried...), my room and roommates, sharing in our sharing group and anecdotes. I also remember Sr. Dao Nghiem’s Dharma talk about the five skandas, because it is the first time

I felt I understood what they were and the idea behind them. Whether it was just the right number of times for me to listen to that particular teaching, which finally clinched it for me, I don’t know. However, Sr. Dao Nghiem has a light and easy manner about her, combined with terse preciseness, and I am not the only one, I know, who felt her talk was





very beneficial. For the first time in my life I realized that watering the seeds of joy is available to me. Before this retreat I always believed I am fundamentally and forever, sad.

In my heart I remember this joy. Also the happy, thankful faces I saw around me all the time. And also, I experienced another level of walking meditation, in the meditation hall, in the mornings or evenings. I believe it had to do, again, with the presence of the nuns who are adept at it, and their swooshing robes. I personally have not been in Plum Village and am not used to seeing nuns and monks. I loved the way the robes moved when they walked, also outside. The Sutra about anger and forgiveness that was read one morning also had a profound effect on me. I had heard

it before but again, this time it made poignant sense.

The retreat was a wonderful time of meditation and insights and kindness, but if I have to pick out one powerful experience, it is something that happened to me as a result of Sr. Bi Nghiem's Dharma talk about shame; or was it about self-blame? I must say I don't remember much of the talk. It wasn't complicated but it was personal and quietly mesmerizing. In the end the sister said something along the lines of "when you are angry with yourself or ashamed, there is a child there that needs to be loved". Sr. Bi Nghiem suggested that we think about something that makes us feel ashamed, whether we did it or it was done to us, and give ourselves love. I did it, almost grudgingly,

and it worked. For years I have dealt with deep rooted shame and didn't let it go. This time, I was willing to see myself in a much rounder and more trusting way, and I have made a step towards freedom. I owe you this, dear Sister". (YA)

"I got to the retreat quite by chance. I had no previous acquaintance with the Community of Mindfulness. I was looking for a retreat for those dates and it seemed appropriate and nice (I liked the faces of the nuns in the retreat flyer and it caught my attention).

In my previous experience at retreats, people spend their time in meditation and silence, and although the shared presence gives power, there is also relative isolation where everyone works for himself, in a bubble. Relatively, this retreat put very much an emphasis on human touch. I did not know what it would be like – and now I think I'll never want another type of retreat.

I have heard in the past some talks by Thich Nhat Han on the Internet. And I was very impressed. But in the retreat I met people who lived with him and learned from him in reality – and I understood his true greatness. You can see that everyone who met him is touched – as if there is a light that passes, that he transmitted to the people he taught,



Jerusalem



who light up when they talk about him – or when they remember his teachings and deal with practicing and implementing it. A light of positivity, a recognition of what it really means to be a human being, why we are here, and of kindness – and a warm-heartedness to every person, that I have never encountered in a community. The ability to behave like this towards one another, beyond all theoretical ideas, in my mind is one of the main reasons we practice in the first place.

I think, maybe even more than from his talks and books, you can learn who he is through what he left in the people who met him and lived with him and learned from him. After the retreat, I felt a tiny bit as if I had met him myself". (TF)

"I think that the first time I was in PV, it was a mirror for the future – I could see hope and joy. At the retreat in Bet Oren with Sr. Bi Nghiem and Sister Dao Nghiem I felt this again – the strength to continue and to connect more with myself. The teachers were so true, not hidden behind veils, they were real – not acting a part. All my life, this is the place that I have wanted to be connected. At Plum Village and at the retreat I could taste the pure and the light – not a light that is a *wow* – but a light – that even if there is a tough time – a light so that I see not only the darkness but that I can say "*I am okay*", "*I am all right*". The teachers were so deep, so true, so

humble. I feel that the teachings with this depth and humility help me connect to my soul". (EW)

"The retreat was very good for me because the teachers spoke about cultivating the positive seeds which give strength. I am now committed to paying more attention to the positive, even if it is difficult, and not to be afraid. This is what I learned from them. Also how to be with the breath – how it brings me to the present. Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment. Breathing out, I know this is a wonderful moment". (AW)

"All I can say is that the retreat was absolutely wonderful in every way! The nuns were interesting and informative,

the food was delicious, the scenery outstanding, the accommodations comfortable, and the participants among the best people in the world". (RZ)

The teachings during the retreat and our happy experience during the entire visit remain with us.

We are grateful beyond words for the generosity of the sisters, to EIAB, to the Plum Village Community and to our beloved teacher Thich Nhat Hanh.

With gratitude and love from the sangha

Shelag Shalev (True Precious Peace)
Baruch Shalev /True Precious Heart)

Palestine



Reflections about the EIAB

International Retreats for Dharmateacher and Order Members

In the cold crispness of winter 2017, a small group of practitioners gathered at the European Institute of Applied Buddhism (EIAB) for the international Order of Interbeing and Dharma teacher retreats. It was my first visit to EIAB, and I met an American Dharma sister

in Dusseldorf for the trip. We were both unfamiliar with the route, and despite Germany's excellent mass transit plus good directions, we got on the wrong train. Luckily, that train traveled in the right direction, and we figured out the rest of the journey. In the end,

we reached EIAB on time, having enjoyed each other's company and lots of laughs on the way.

EIAB is a Plum Village Center unlike others I've visited. While Plum Village and the American practice centers are



in rural settings, EIAB stands a short walk from a main street, bordered by family homes, a child care center, and a park. The center is also unusual in that many classes are offered simultaneously. During my ten-day stay, I had three different roommates, each participating in a different class. The diverse community connected by practicing together at meals, during outdoor walking and working meditation, through noble silence each night, and even strolling to the local coffee shop together. We were also deeply supported by the practice, smiles, laughter, and singing of EIAB's resident monastics.

The Order of Interbeing and Dharma teacher retreats were four days each, back to back with a lazy day in between. Teachings for both retreats were offered by Sister Annabel and focused on the forty tenets of Plum Village. Of course, in eight days we could not study all forty tenets, but Sister Annabel's talks offered a taste of the history, meaning, and practice of some tenets. For me, the teaching helped me see ways to cultivate my own practice through the tenets, and supported my understanding of the foundations of Plum Village practice. Sister Annabel did remind us not to be attached to the tenets, which, like the Mindfulness Trainings, may change.

In the quiet space of the retreat, we also enjoyed small group sharing. Although most sharing was in English, sometimes one friend would translate for another when expression was easier that way. These sharing times helped us examine the teachings and our practice, and connect more closely as a community.

My time at EIAB was beautiful in so many ways. During outdoor walking meditation each morning, we strolled under evergreen trees with bark darkened by rain and morning mist. Patches of snow melted on the paths, and laughing children waved and called to us as we passed the nearby childcare center. One day, we walked a different direction and discovered sun on barren

fruit trees and buddha statutes in a field at the top of a hill.

One surprise at EIAB was the heavy weight of the doors, which required mindful, gentle closing or one risked a loud slam. I'm not sure I've ever enjoyed closing doors as much as I did at EIAB. Since I returned home, I've continued to enjoy a steadier door-closing

practice than in the past. And each time I close a door mindfully, I do not just enjoy closing the door. Mindfully closing a door, I also remember my time at EIAB and feel supported by the steady practice and beautiful community.

Leslie Rawls

Silent retreat with Sister Dieu Nghiem

Coming home

*when each breath is felt
when everything becomes clear
when the heart can be touched
when the tears come from deep within*

*When trees become majestic giants
roses fragrant essences
birdsong symphonies*

*when those around me,
who have made this possible
each day more precious
each day more connected
each day more beautiful
because not only the tears,
also the laughter comes from deep within*

*then I have divined, sensed, experienced
what it means to come home
a gift which I, which we,
carry within us forever.*

*Thank you Thay from all my heart
Thank you Sister Dieu Nghiem
Thank you to the whole group*

Christine Ulmer

The Netherlands Sangha-Jewel

When I asked Thay whether we could start up a monastery at a retreat in the Netherlands in 2009, he laughed. He said, we could come every year and offer a retreat, and since 2010 there has been a summer retreat at the EIAB for Dutch-speaking families. In addition, together with other Dutch-speaking brothers and sisters from Plum Village, I have also led three day spring retreats

in the Netherlands for the last couple of years.

This year, for the first time, we also visited universities in the cities of Eindhoven, Groningen, Nijmegen, Amsterdam and Rotterdam. It was a wonderful experience to share our practice with young people. The programme always took place from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m., and

comprised a guided meditation, an introduction to the practice of mindfulness, mindful eating, walking meditation and questions and answers.

This year our programme was so full, that I could only visit my family for a short while. It always takes me a little time to adjust to the different languages; care is needed precisely because of the similarities between German and Dutch. And apart from these couple of weeks in the Netherlands I don't get to speak a lot of Dutch in Waldbröl.

Apart from the sense of fulfilment, which we always get from sharing our practice, we also had a very good time together. It is a time to come closer, to share, to go walking together and to cook and eat together. I believe that it is only when we understand how to live joyfully and in harmony with one another that we are in a position to offer a very precious jewel at our retreats – the Sangha-Jewel, which includes all monastic and non-monastic members of the Sangha. This jewel is composed of love and understanding. It is a path which we can all follow together.

Those who have visited the Netherlands will certainly have noticed that it is very cyclist-friendly. I always enjoyed cycling. And the thought of a cycling retreat occurred to me a couple of years ago. Last year we finally put our idea into practice. Together with Verena Böttcher I organised this retreat in 'De Maanhoev' (a meditation centre in the North). This year too we will also mindfully 'fietsen' (cycle). In the picture you can see the Dutch Sister Sang Nghiem from Plum Village during the cycling retreat. Who knows where we will end up cycling to over the coming years? Feel like coming along?



Happy Teachers change the World

Happy teachers make it different

Let us remind ourselves: teachers are also human; teachers also have Buddha nature. They are not all know-alls and pedants nor are they all just interested in maximising their free-time. Neither are they super-human with supernatural powers and abilities. They are just people like you and I.

Mindfulness is just as beneficial for teachers as for everyone else, and can help us to be happy people. In a Dharma talk for teachers at the EIAB on 17.10.2017, Thay Phap Dung put it like this: 'If you train yourself in Mindfulness, you are able to see things differently. As teachers, let's learn to be loving and caring for ourselves. Then we can learn to give our love and care to others, our beloved ones, our students.' In the first instance this is what our mindfulness practice, and in particular the *Happy Teachers change the World* retreats, are all about: by practicing mindfulness and care for ourselves we learn to be present in every moment – and this allows us to be present for others with an open heart.

Under the heading *Wake Up Schools*, the Plum Village Community organizes retreats, conferences and get-togethers around the world for all those involved in education and teaching. Last year two international retreats were also held at the EIAB: in the autumn holiday 2016 and Easter 2017. They provided the opportunity for a very inspiring exchange about the many different aspects of our experience of mindfulness in school life.

These retreats provided us with inspiration and new ideas on our path towards becoming happy teachers. One

example: you go into your classroom and practice the gatha "I SEE YOU". If you are now in contact with your pupils they will feel the difference very clearly. They feel seen, recognised and perhaps even accepted in their own uniqueness. This can bring about a fundamental change in the dynamics of the classroom. There is no secret recipe: we need an inner attitude of mindfulness and love that allows us to accept and perceive the present moment and to be in good contact with ourselves and the many positive seeds within us. And then with those entrusted to us, as well as in situations that can sometimes also be fraught with conflict. This is the best way to deal with people and situations and to practice right thinking, right speech and right action. That is applied Buddhism.

At the end of the retreat we founded a Happy Teachers Sangha. Since January 2017 teachers from Cologne and surroundings have been meeting once

a month to meditate with one another and share their experiences. When we share deeply we can experience inter-being: rediscover our difficulties in the difficulties of others, and our resources in the resources of others. And in the Happy Teacher Sangha we learn from each other and with each other to treat the daily stress we encounter with a bit more distance or even with a smile. There are already more than enough conditions available for us to be happy.

Recommended Literature:

Thich Nhat Hanh: *Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children*

Thich Nhat Hanh, Katherine Weare: *Happy Teachers change the World*. Berkeley 2017

Ulrich Pfeifer-Schaupp (Hg.): *Leben mit dem Herzen eines Buddha*. (Living with the Heart of a Buddha) Freiburg 2016

(includes contributions on early schooling, and teaching in schools and universities)

www.wakeupschools.org

Anne von der Lüche, True Inclusiveness of the Ocean, practices in Cologne and Waldbröl
(a.lueche@gmx.de)



The short flight from Waldbröl or a lesson in the accomplished art of being a monk

Main characters: the musician Christian Bollmann and a Vietnamese monk in sandals and robe with the wonderful name Phap Tri, artistic name Pap Tree

Location: a meadow in Waldbröl

Props: a model aeroplane approx. 2 metres wide, a tree approx. 20 m high and a bamboo stick approx. 5 metres long

Everything began so simply, the plane sailed aloft on the spring wind..... and then.... the moment that changed everything:



'Uppsla, where's it gone?'



'Ojeminee what on earth am I going to do now???'



'20 m is way to high for me'



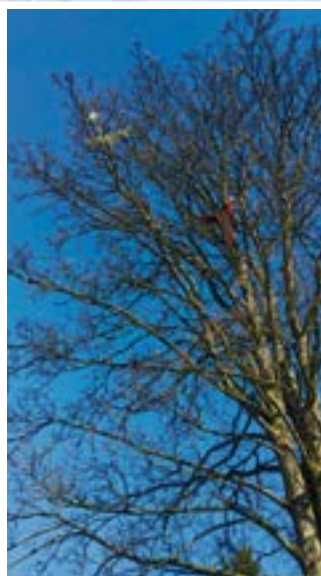
'Do I see help coming?...



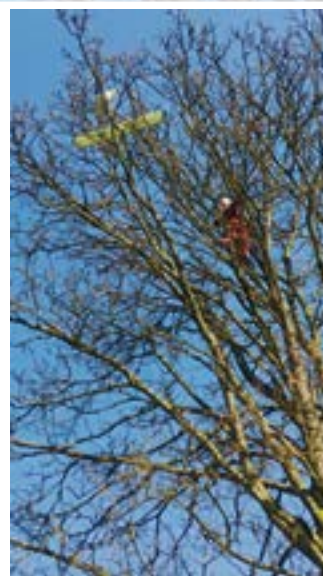
Monks are rumoured to have special powers', and before...



Mr. Bollmann could blink, the young man was climbing towards the heavens.



Eye to eye with the object of craving the battle for liberation began.





Practiced in concentration and focus Phap Tri, alias 'Phap Tree', jiggled and joggled the tree, whilst standing on its filigree branches at dizzying heights.



But all to no avail, the plane remained firmly stuck. A long pole is needed!!! Mr Bollmann ran off and huffing and puffing brought the rescue equipment, a long bamboo stick, to the scene of the action.



The tree artist Phap Tree came nimbly down and, suitably equipped with stick, returned again to the heights.

Surprise, surprise, a wonder occurred:



The 'Bird', freed from the clasp of the tree, plunged earthwards and landed at the feet of its owner, smack, bang on its nose!



There it lay, the injured bird, to be greeted and examined by mindful hands.



The lads got to work straight away with expertly implemented first aid measures.



Alongside, the beaming, modest **'hero'**.



The epitome of composure and joy, the robes were once again restored to their original condition.



One thing is certain, **the two are now friends for life.**



'And the moral of the story: Never fly between trees!'



Author and witness:
Christa Zehnder
www.yoga-wiesbaden.de
April 2017

„PLOENG CITY“ world-wide-Waldeck

A BDP (Association of German Scouts Rhineland-Palatinate) project during the Easter holiday 2017 at Burg Waldeck in Hunsrück for 13–16 year olds

The goal of the project is to boost the self-esteem of young people: to help them experience their own limits, develop the ability to manage conflict, and for self-reflection, and to feel sufficiently secure and confident to take a stance. The special feature of the this

project is that young people have the opportunity to experience things for themselves and thereby to develop self confidence.

There is space for direct experience, and a personal view. The young people are taken very seriously in their suchness. This meeting with refugees has been taking place for over 20 years. Every year young people from different countries with different reasons for fleeing their home countries take part. It is a framework within which to experiment and learn, to experience difference and to find joint solutions that are not just theoretical but work in practice. Ploengcity is not against something, but for it.

to be able to try out so many different forms of meditation and to have the chance to find the one best suited to them.

Everyone enjoyed the start to the morning with Tai Chi at a castle ruin close by.

The young people were particularly impressed by the openness and approachability of the nuns and monks. Their humorous manner and the games and singing were all received very positively. There was absolutely no fear of contact, which surprised the young people and turned the encounter into a very special occasion.

We learned breathing exercises and how to use them in normal everyday situations, something which was very much appreciated. The feedback was that the participants would be able to integrate these directly into their lives and were very happy that mindfulness is so easy to live.

The key to this is mindfulness.

This year we had the privilege of experiencing a very special day of mindfulness with the nuns and monks from the EIAB.

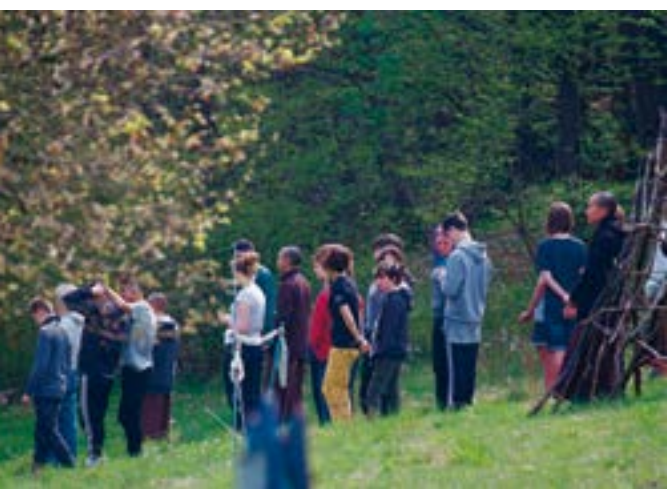
The young people and teamers learned and tried out different types of meditation: eating meditation, sitting meditation, walking meditation, meditation lying down, deep relaxation. The young people were very happy

These shared days had a very positive effect on the entire week: for example the bell was firmly integrated into the daily schedule, and the song ‘breathing in, breathing out’ could always be heard somewhere. And at the final presentation for friends and parents it was also sung by the Ploengcity choir.

MANY, MANY THANKS FOR THIS DAY!

This experience was a great gift for us all and lives on in our hearts.

Anita Wiersch



Deep relaxation

– The EIAB visits southern Italy

I am Caterina, I practice and teach yoga.

I participated to the retreat with the EIAB monks at Cisternino, in Italy.

When we did the deep relaxation, led by the EIAB Sister, I placed my meditation cushion under my head, a bit high.

Keeping the neck lengthened in the beginning, I thought that during the relaxation the muscles would release.

Three and a half years ago I had a bad motorbike accident which made me completely crumpled up... Nine fractures, all on the right side of my body, my entire body displaced, compressed... a car had hit my motorbike on the right side.

I was in bed for eight months.

After the impact, the ambulance arrived late, 45 minutes later.

While I was on the ground waiting for the ambulance I didn't lose conscious-

ness, but above all I didn't feel any pain. After so many years of yoga, the body had reacted all by itself releasing endorphines and dopamine, lowering the heart rate (42 per minutes), decreasing the metabolism.

After that, my first thought was that I needed to get back on my feet. Resume teaching.

I had fractured bones and I needed to wait for them to weld and work to get straight again.

I did it through physiotherapy, acupuncture, osteopathy, yoga practice, love and support from my family and from the loved people around me.

During the deep relaxation, that pain removed for such a long time came up again... It started from behind the neck, strong and intense, deep and internal. From there, the feeling of all the fractures came back again from the bottom of my body: the tibia, the knee, the side of my body which was hit, the ribs, the

shoulder blade, the part under the arm-pit, the collarbone...

I knew that this deep pain was a step in the process of releasing myself from such deep tensions of the past.

The pain had arrived, it was at home, here and now.

I was hoping that the deep relaxation would last long, as I was going back to the pain that I had repressed for a very long time, a pain that I did not have time to feel and listen to.

When I got up from the deep relaxation I had the awareness of being led on a path I would have not been able to walk on by myself.

Thank you Sister.
Caterina

Caterina – Cisternino, Mai 2017



Retreat for Families in the EIAB: Ikebana and Harry Potter

“The Art of Ikebana” was the theme of this year’s annual spring retreat for Dutch and Flemish speaking families. Ikebana is the traditional Japanese art of flower arrangement and is characterized by the space between the various objects in an arrangement which allows each object to be appreciated in its own right, as well as the arrangement forming a harmonious whole. This theme was chosen to focus the attention of the families present on the question of how to make space within family life for each individual, for every member’s preferences and favorite activities, and for the family as a whole.

Making space to truly arrive

The afternoon of the first day, the staff went to the park with the children: to run around and play, to have a game of “mindful football”, and to listen to stories, experiencing the freedom of space and time with (new) friends and without “shoulds”. The parents went off on their own or with each other, to take a walk or lie in the grass, finding the space to truly arrive in the present mo-

ment, doing whatever nourished them the most right then.

Room to play

The 28 children, big and small, who had come to Waldbroël with their parents, rediscovered what a large space there is for playing around the buildings of the EIAB. From early in the morning up until the doors are locked in the evening, you could hear the sound of groups of children playing table tennis, tag, hide and seek, and more. Some families went off into the woods together, where the children learned from one another how to climb trees.

Creative space

All of the families made a list of each family member’s favorite things to do: the things that make their life beautiful and worthwhile, such as hobbies, sports, music or being with a loved one. After this, each family went off together to look for natural objects that could be used for the “Family-Ikebana”. When finished, the beautiful and interesting creations were put in the meeting place

to be admired by all. The next day, each family was paired with another family to share together about their Ikebana and the process of making it.

One father described his experience in this way: “It was very special for me to make the Ikebana and to discuss it with another family. Doing this assignment made it very clear to me how important taking care of yourself is for the rest of the family, and also, how the choice of what other activities you take on affects the family as a whole.

Space in the new dining hall

This year the retreat consisted of 27 children aged 2 to 12 and a teenager of 16. Many present were familiar with the old dining hall in the basement of the Great Compassion Temple, the smaller of the two buildings at the EIAB. It was always very full there, and it wasn’t very easy for the children to respect the silent periods at mealtime. The new, large and beautifully light dining hall is roomy enough for the children to sit together with their



families and their friends' families at one large table. Each day, Sister An-nabel explained to the children how truly to eat in mindfulness, and how that benefits oneself, one's family and the other people in the dining hall. The children practiced with dedication, peacefully and quietly enjoying their food. When the bell was invited to indicate that the silent period was over, the children listened to the bell for the duration of three breaths. Then they all jumped up, walking quickly to the back of the room, in order to be the first in line to wash their dishes. The sound of their quick steps after the bell brought smiles of enjoyment and recognition to the faces of many of the adults, as they continued their meal.

Room for images from modern culture

Brother Pham Hanh, the young Dutch monk who has been active for years

with the children's program of the large Dutch summer retreat, also known as the "Cool Monk", truly lived up to his name during his dharma talk for children and adults on the last day. He used the example from the Harry Potter series of the Dementor, a character who sucks joy out of someone but can be driven away with the help of a Patronus. Harry's Patronus has the form of a stag. The children understood that the stag can be an image of mindful breathing and that we all can use our mindful breath when we are faced with a Dementor.

Room for participation

After the children left the room, the brother invited the parents to participate in shaping the rest of the dharma talk by naming the topics that were important to them right then. Brother Pham Hanh and Tineke then shared their experience and insight on

these subjects. Of course, there wasn't enough time to address all of the topics mentioned...the space for that will be found another time. Fortunately, the parents and children have truly formed a Sangha, one that with every contact builds and deepens bonds between new and returning members. The sharing and practicing together will continue throughout the year, for instance at other retreats at the EIAB with children's programs such as the Dutch Summer Retreat and the New Year's Retreat, Days of Mindfulness for families in the Netherlands and meetings of the online Parent Sangha.

Marion Moonlion and Tineke Spruytenburg



Second French-speaking Retreat at the EIAB

The retreat 'Healing Contact with our Ancestors' took place between 5th and 8th January 2017. Seventy people took part, mainly from the French-speaking part of Belgium, but also from Luxembourg, France, Switzerland and Germany. Another retreat for French-speakers is planned for the beginning of next year.

The retreat began with a welcome from Thay Phap An, who expressed his joy that French-speaking guests had found their way to the EIAB. In the days that followed we were treated to profound teachings on reconciliation by Sister Bi Nghiem. First of all reconciliation with ourselves as a basis for reconciliation with other people and our parents. In addition to this there were other activities, for example the rose ceremony and Dharma sharings in small and large groups.

The rose ceremony held on the 3rd day was the highpoint of the retreat. The

power and support provided by the silent presence of the Sangha created a lasting bond between me and my original family. I was able to express the hurt that I had suppressed and thought I had forgotten. The rose ceremony gave me an opportunity to understand myself better, and to deepen my meditation practice. I have gained a deeper understanding of life, and have learned that others are just like me, despite a different culture or language, or different experiences. Our family (group), comprising 25 people, breathed and felt like a single organism. This experience has given me strength to face the difficulties, as well as the joys, of life that await with mindfulness.

(Michèle Berger, Belgium)

This retreat was an important milestone on my path to transformation and healing. As a German-speaking Belgian I have felt uprooted for years: I often have the feeling that I am neither

Belgian nor German. However, I have Belgian citizenship. My ancestors were for the most part born in Germany, and today I belong to the German-speaking minority living close to the border. I often suffered from this in the past, and experienced feelings of loneliness. But practicing regularly and participating in retreats at both the EIAB and in Plum Village has allowed healing to take place. I can recognise that I do not feel at home anywhere. At the same time, as soon as I am able to take refuge in myself, in my breathing and in the present moment, I am at home everywhere. I recognise that 'being at home' is just a concept, and that what is important is to remain anchored in mindful breathing in every moment. Experiencing the truth of interbeing in my daily life helps me to understand that I am never alone, that the entire cosmos is in interaction in every moment. So I can be at home wherever I am as soon as I try to let go of the labels I attach to people when I come into contact with them and instead see what we have in common: the humanity that creates a bond between us. Perhaps it is precisely what I experienced earlier as alienation, that drives me on to build bridges and to act as a mediator between cultures today. No mud, no lotus.

To end we would like to express our gratitude to Thay Phap An, Sister Bi Nghiem, Sister Song Nghiem and the entire EIAB Sangha for their heartfelt welcome, support, and your presence. We are grateful to our ancestors for all the seeds they have passed on to us. We can see ever more clearly that thanks to them we are today on this wonderful path of practice. We bow in gratitude to life.

(Michael Vassen, Belgium)



Be the **change** you want to see in **society**

Wake up Retreat, April 2017, European Institute for Applied Buddhism, Waldbröl, Germany

At the beginning of april a group of young people from all over the world met at the EIAB in Waldbröl, close to Cologne to spend one week meditating, sharing experiences and exchanging thoughts and ideas on the way of living in today's society. The title: "Deep Ecology, Deep Insights". I was one of them. Most of the retreat's participants already been to Plum Village in France or to the EIAB, for me it was the first time I encountered applied buddhism. I knew about the mindful practice from my sister, but never before experienced it's full impact. And to be honest: It just blew me. The daily routine at the EIAB was repetitive which helped me a lot to get into the rhythm. The day started with a meditation, afterwards Qigong

or Yoga, breakfast at 7.30, followed by Dharma lectures on different aspects of the mindfulness practice. Afterwards we went outside for a walking meditation. After lunch there were mostly workshops outside and in the evenings we met for a sharing in smaller groups.

At that time I was knee-deep in a life-changing phase, by now I quit my job, emptied my apartment, sold half my stuff and in a couple of days I'm off to walk the Camino del Norte in northern Spain. So in hindsight I think I might have put a little bit too much on my plate. This is actually literally speaking, because during the meal-times (vegan, no talking), I noticed that whenever I am under a lot of pressure

or simply overwhelmed by life and its challenges I tend to eat way too much, using food as a means to fill emotional gaps. On a subconscious level I was aware of this phenomenon, but I think it was the first time in my entire life that I consciously observed myself falling into this pattern. If it wouldn't have been for the silence and the constant reminder to cherish the food on our plates, to eat slowly and mindfully, I wouldn't have realized that there is a strong need in me to take good care of myself in other ways than eating, namely be kind to myself, especially in times of trouble.

Due to the fact that we were a very big group, unfortunately I didn't have the





chance to get to know everyone which I find very regretful. Nevertheless, there were many times when I had the chance to BE with people, listen to them, hear their stories and without talking to them, I felt truly connected just by being in the same room and feeling that some of their suffering, disappointment, joy or excitement has been felt by myself in the past or will be felt in the future. This week was a couple of firsts for me and it was also the first time I met a monk. I was a bit intimidated at the beginning, but that disappeared soon and intimidation turned into admiration and maybe even a little bit envy. There were many times when I swore to myself to become a master practitioner of mindfulness, because if you look at

the monks and nuns of the EIAB this surely and simply must be the one and only way to true and deep happiness. Whenever brother Stream held one of his Dharma lectures I felt as if the pure truth was streaming out of his mouth and my mind was too slow to take it all in. The good thing is that the things that resonate with you, also stick with you, so I am quite sure when the time is ripe for me to process and reflect on the things that are mine, I will remember his words.

There are many more things I could write about, for example the intense energy of three layers of history that resides within the halls of the EIAB or the beautiful landscape that sur-

rounds the center, the lovely time I had with my sister, the little conversations sometimes held between meditation and workshops. What I will write about though is how thankful I am for having had this experience. I started to BE more and to think less of where I will be. The present became more important than the past or the future and I am quite sure I'll continue on this track, because never before I saw happiness and freedom impersonated in so many people at a time and it had nothing to do with having things, doing things or planning things. So here's one last thought: Breathe you're alive.

Johanna

Sister Tang Nghiem – Great Ease und Joy

‘Tang’ in my name means store consciousness. ‘Nghiem’ means ‘adornment’.

I was born in Hoi An, a coastal city in the central region of Vietnam. The city has a large pedestrian precinct full of old houses, mostly built 4-5 centuries ago by the Chinese and Japanese, that have been preserved and for the most part very beautifully restored. Every night the street lights are turned off and lamps are lit in front of the individual houses giving the city a romantic, fairy tale flair.

I was my parents’ only child. My father died when I was nine and I lived with

my mother and grandparents on my father’s side. My father had started a hotel and the entire family helped to run it.

My father was very friendly and very popular throughout the entire city. He also spoke very good English. He was full of love for everyone and helped the poor and beggars. When he died a very large number of people came to pay their respects.

My mother did not marry again; she wanted to live a truly spiritual life.

Throughout my education she placed great value on becoming a good person. She is a very beautiful woman, very tender, but her gentleness is combined with strength, as she also had to take the place of my father, and not just in my education. She loves meditating. My mother was the only one in my family who supported me when I said I wanted to become a nun.

My grandparents on my father’s side also had a very important influence on my life. Originally they were teachers,



but later they gave up teaching to help my father in the hotel. They loved me a lot and I played with them like friends. Unfortunately, they were initially very much against the idea of me becoming a nun: for a whole month they could not eat or sleep because of the thought of losing me.

My childhood was wonderful. I had many dolls. Together with other children I used to like, for example, cooking

in tiny pots and then ‘selling’ the food to friendly neighbours so that we could give the money to the poor. But although I had many friends my own age, when I look back I remember the times with my family with most affection.

School was also a great experience: I liked each subject equally. I was good at school without being outstanding, and in no subject was I a bad pupil. I liked the teachers and felt accepted by them.

Because I was so happy as a child, I felt a lot of love and trust. This nourished the desire in me to practice as a nun for my family, my city, my country.

When I subsequently went to the Bat Nha monastery and expressed my wish to become a nun, my grandparents, my aunt, my uncle and even my mother came with me: they all wanted to take me back home with them. They had the idea that only those who were not good at school or who were poor entered the monastery.

But when they arrived at Bat Nha monastery, they saw how beautiful it was, how peaceful the life of a nun was and how happy I was there. My grandmother said: ‘It is like paradise here’ and my grandfather finally accepted the idea of leaving me there. He understood: ‘That is your path’.

After one year my whole family was practicing in the tradition of Thay. During his last visit to Vietnam, Thay was also in Hoi An and visited my home. This was a great joy and support for my family. Later one of my cousins also decided to ordain.

In 2006 I went to the Neuroscientist-Retreat in Plum Village, New Hamlet, and there it finally became clear to me that I really wanted to ordain. I spent a lot of time with the young nuns there and they encouraged me further.

When I travelled to Plum Village I took my finest clothes with me. Then a young nun asked me if I would like to wear the brown working clothes of the nuns. I was very proud to wear them, and sat peacefully and still in meditation. Everything I did I now did in mindfulness. In the evening I had to wash the brown clothes, and at the beginning it made me happy to once again put on my beautiful clothes until the others were dry. But after a while the pleasure faded, and I would have preferred to wear the brown clothes the whole time.



Once I went to a hill close by with the nuns of New Hamlet. There the young sisters who I had befriended asked me to kneel down and join the palms of my hand. Then they blessed me with a flower and water, while they chanted – just like Thay does at an ordination.

Then I wrote a letter to Thay and he supported me in my wish to become a nun. But as I did not have a visa, I had to return to Vietnam. At the age of 18, I then went definitively to Bat Nha monastery and in 2007 I was ordained at age 19 together with 77 brothers and sisters. I really loved having so many ‘siblings’. As I had been an only child at home, this was a completely new experience.

After several months in Bat Nha the Sangha sent me to Plum Village, where I stayed for a good five years.

It was easy for me to accustom myself to life in Plum Village and to feel comfortable in Western culture as a whole: as a child I had had a lot of contact with Western guests in the hotel.

But there were many other challenges. There were many things that I had never done at home and first had to learn in the monastery: to sweep and mop the floor, to work in the vegetable garden, to chop vegetables in the kitchen without cutting my fingers, to cook for several hundred people. However, I wanted to do all these things because they were part of the spiritual path that I love so much. The patience of the sisters supported me and my beginner’s mind helped me through all the difficult situations. Later, when I went home, I could take care of my family by cooking and cleaning.

As a novice, as well as as a nun, I received a great deal of love and support from Thay. He is a wonderful teacher. As a novice I waited patiently for my turn to be his ‘attendant’. After every day of mindfulness with Thay I always went to his ‘attendants’ and asked how Thay was and how the day with him had been. I usually helped them with

cooking and washing dishes. But as I had to wait so long, I thought it would be better to practice in such a way that I could see Thay in every one of his students, that perhaps this would be my only chance to be together with Thay.

But then one day Thay asked me unexpectedly: ‘Sister Tang Nghiem, when will you be my ‘attendant’?’ I answered: ‘I have been waiting so long, that I finally decided to see Thay in all my brothers and sisters, just to be with Thay.’ Thay answered: ‘My child, tomorrow I will make vegetarian ‘scrambled eggs’ (out of Tofu) for you.’ And from this point on, every now and then Thay cooked vegetarian ‘scrambled eggs’, bamboo shoots, soup and salad for me. When I was his ‘attendant’ or went to the Hermitage he would often cook for me.

As thanks I would recite a poem that came spontaneously to mind. For example, when I ate the ‘scrambled eggs’ with the bamboo shoots, I said :

*Bamboo shoots and
Tofu cooked in Soya sauce,
are more than enough,
to nourish the bond between
teacher and student,
so that it never abates.*

Thay replied to my poem in the following words:

*The respect and
devotion of the past
are more than enough,
to nourish the bond between
teacher and student,
so that it never abates.*

On my first day as ‘attendant’ I recited the following poem:

*It is truly wonderful
and peaceful
As though I had entered
the Pure Land.*

After five years in Plum Village I went to Thailand for a year, from where I came to the EIAB last autumn.

What I most like about Germany are the people. They are very correct, clear and clean. The language, the flowers, the trees, the air, the way the people speak – I can sense German culture in everything. I really like the fact that they are so respectful in the way they view most things in life, in particular nature, and the way they deal with things so respectfully. The only problem is that winter is a little bit too cold for me, but apart from that I really enjoy being in Germany.

Here at the EIAB there are only around 45 monks and nuns, in Plum Village there are approximately 200 and in Thailand even more. Because it is such a small community I can be close to all of the brothers and sisters, and get to know them better. I can learn a lot from each of them, and recognise that every one of them is wonderful. They are all devoting their lives to the spiritual path.

Sister Tang Nghiem



The new Kitchen building

Cooking with the Community, Eating in Nature

We have moved in!

After the turbulence of planning and building, on 12.4.2017 the Gummersbach Planning Department finally granted permission to begin use of the new kitchen and dining area.

Today the dining hall extends an open and expansive invitation to enjoy the lotus garden specially designed by the EIAB: the lotus garden interacts with the dining hall by creating the impression that the seasons and the course of nature are tangibly present within the building. The view of nature becomes an integral part of mindful eating.

The transfer of catering operations into the new building was a joyous occasion that took place within a very short time.



The cooking team is growing accustomed to working procedures in the new kitchen – also to using the newly acquired machines for cooking – and they will soon be able to use everything with ease.

Since the start of dismantling work on 16.10.2014, the start of structural work on 06.03.2015, the concluding site inspection by the Oberbergischen Kreis on 14.12.2016 and the granting of permission to use the building by the authorities, a total of 2 1/2 years passed before operations could finally be commenced.

The completion of the building was delayed by approximately 6 months

due to the installation of the fire alarm system in connection with the main building. The reasons for this were the need for the routine replacement of the existing fire alarms in the main building after a period of 8 years. This enabled agreement to be reached with the fire service to significantly reduce the number of fire alarms in the unused parts of the building.

For commercial reasons, the EIAB subsequently chose an integrated solution with regard to the fire alarm system for the main building which also included the kitchen, in order not to have to operate parallel system components. The installation of the new system with

subsequent long delivery times for the control components resulted in the delay mentioned above.

But these last problems were also resolved by the EIAB through patience, and this has been rewarded by the start of operations in the new building.

We would like to wish the EIAB many happy years of healthy food in the new kitchen building!

Dieter Comes, Architect





Note on some of our courses in EIAB 2017

(For the full program, see our website www.eiab.eu)

13.-17.09.	HIKING-RETREAT We will hike ca. 15 km daily in the wonderful nature near Waldbröl <i>Course with Johannes Thomm and Brother Phap Xa</i>
28.09.-01.10.	BEING IN TOUCH WITH THE PRECIOUSNESS OF OUR LIFE <i>Course with Annabelle Zinser</i>
29.09.-03.10.	TOUCHING THE EARTH - RETREAT <i>Course with Michael Schwammberger (formerly Brother Phap Son) and Brother Phap Tri.</i>
12.-15.10.	THE HEART OF COMPASSION <i>With Wali and Arienne van der Zwan</i>
20.-22.10.	AT HOME IN ONE'S BODY <i>Course with Sybille Reiche-Wetzel, Helmuth Wetzel</i>
26.-29.10.	AUTUMN-RETREAT <i>with the Nuns and Monks of EIAB</i>
27.-29.10.	FOCUSING - AWARENESS IN OUR BODIES Following Transformations in Being - a circuitous Introduction <i>Course with Astrid Schillings, Maria Schüller and Gudrun Abrecht</i>
01.-05.11.	EMBRACING OUR INNER CHILD - Healing the wounds of the inner child <i>Course 4D with Thay Phap An and Sister Song Nghiem</i>
09.-12.11.	BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY AND SYSTEMIC WORK WITH THE INNER FAMILY <i>Course with Uli Pfeifer-Schaupp</i>
16.-19.11.	AWAKENING JOY How does Joy Feel? How do we Experience Joy in Body and Spirit? <i>Sabine Jaenicke and Robert Krupp</i>
17.-19.11.	SHIATSU - EXPERIENCE OF YOURSELF Touch that moves <i>Course with Maria Kathrein and Brother Phap Tri</i>
07.-10.12.	BODY PRAYER, DANCE AND CONTEMPLATION DURING ADVENT - A silent course <i>Course with Beatrice Grimm and Sister Bi Nghiem</i>
27.12.2017- 02.01.2018	CELEBRATING LIFE - A holiday - retreat for all <i>Retreat with the nuns and monks of EIAB</i>

Please, save these dates for our August Retreats 2018

06.-11. 08. 2018	<i>Retreat with the nuns and monks from the EIAB and Plum Village</i> Retreat language: English with translation into German A programme for children and young people will be offered in German For registration see our website: www.eiab.eu .
13.-18. 08. 2018	<i>Retreat with nuns and monks from the EIAB and Plum Village</i> Retreat language: English with translation into Dutch A programme for children and for teenagers will be offered in Dutch For registration see our website: www.eiab.eu .

The EIAB course programme for 2017 is available on request from the EIAB and can also be found at our website www.eiab.eu.

The programme for 2018 will be available in December.
If you visit our website in autumn you will find more information about courses for 2018.

Registration for all Retreats: EIAB – Europäisches Institut für
Angewandten Buddhismus
Schaumburgweg 3
D-51545 Waldbröl
www.eiab.eu
Tel.: +49 (0)2291 907 13 73

Mail-Adress for Registration: registrar@eiab.eu

Other Questions: info@eiab.eu



www.eiab.eu



The EIAB continues to be grateful for your donations. We will send you a receipt for your tax deductible donations every year.

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