



# EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF APPLIED BUDDHISM

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2014

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of applied buddhism

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## Dear readers,

in time for Thay's visit in August 2014 here our 6th newsletter.

What is new, what has changed since his last retreat in the EIAB?

The most obvious change: this year the Great Compassion Monastery (small building) will have to be renovated according to the requirements of the authorities to comply with fire-safety regulations.

At the time this newsletter went to press end of June, construction works were just about to begin: modern fire detectors in the corridors and an outside fire escape at the North side of the building have to be installed. Due to the costs of these renovation works we had to postpone the planned renovation of the kitchen of the Ashoka building (big building), but this will be our next project. (s. the report inside of this newsletter).

In this edition of the newsletter you will find an article each of Thay Phap An and Sr Annabel to the topic of "Applied Buddhism". Please, also read the comments of some of the participants of the course for European Dharma Teachers.

By now some of the Vietnamese brothers and sisters speak German quite well already and this enables them to help more and more with caring for our retreatants. In May some brothers and sisters have received full ordination while others have received the Dharma teacher lamp by Thay. Please read what Thay Phap Tri, one of the new Dharma teachers, shares about his life.

Sometimes journalists for newspapers, radio and TV come to our Institute. One of them shares in this newsletter about his time in the EIAB.

Continue to read the report of two friends who helped us with Thay's retreats; the reflections of a teacher of the Gesamtschule (Comprehensive School) Waldbröl about the nun's teaching his class; the report of our Dutch friends about their very special family retreat; and many other interesting contributions ... Last not least about Thich Nhat Hanh at Harvard and Stanford Universities.

Allow us to express our gratitude for your practice, your friendship and your support on our path together.

The Brothers and Sisters of the EIAB

Suggested donation to cover printing costs: 1,50 Euro



Plan of the new kitchen:  
South-West view/Entry of dining hall

## The EIAB is growing

### Foundation

Once the ideal location for a Buddhist institute had been found in Waldbröl in 2007 in the form of an ex-hospital (and army academy) with surrounding gardens, the next step was to find the most suitable legal structure for the purpose of acquiring the property and conducting business operations.

A precondition for the purchase of the property from the Federal Republic of Germany was that the purchaser be a charity, as defined by the Federal Ordinance, and the premises be used exclusively for charitable purposes. After extensive deliberations and discussions, the EIAB was founded at the end of 2007/beginning of 2008 as a charitable company (gGmbH).

### Purchase of the Property

The purchase of the Institute's property, of a total of 51,000 m<sup>2</sup> including the main building, which is also a listed building and offers accommodation for around 200 people, received notarial

approval in September 2008. Planning of construction measures to comply with the extensive fire safety measures began immediately. It was possible to begin the first phase of construction in 2009.

As the main building was unusable prior to completion of the first phase of construction, the adjacent building (Great Compassion Monastery, GCM), which had initially only been rented, was subsequently purchased in August 2009, and since then it and its 50 beds have also been used for the Institute's purposes.

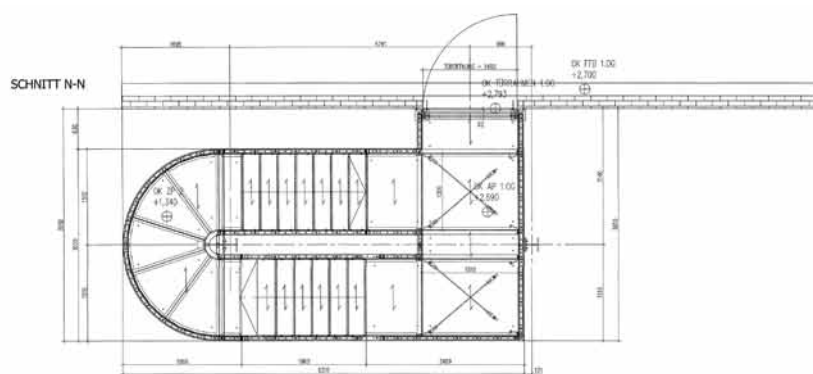
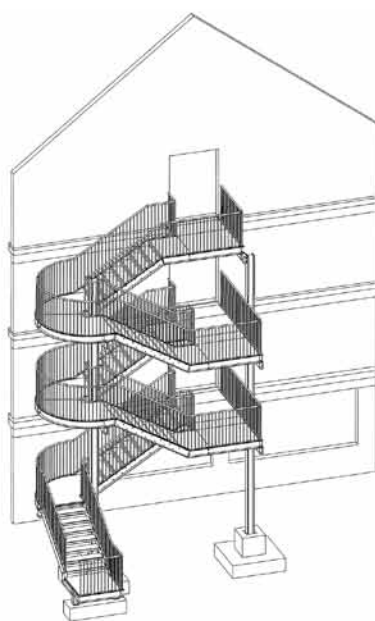
### Construction measures

The first phase of construction of the main building was completed in June 2010, and since then the first 1/5 of the building in the West Wing has been in use. The costs incurred with regard to these measures were not for 'improvements', but exclusively to comply with building regulations. Since the commencement of the second phase of construction in August 2012, the outside

steps and the entrance hall of the EIAB can now be used once again. As previously, the costs related to this were almost entirely to comply with the relevant fire safety regulations: all wooden and marble casing had to be removed and then restored in its original condition once fire resistant material had been put in place underneath.

Guests of the Institute are received at the stupa (belltower) constructed in 2012/2013 and in the garden area in the vicinity of the entrance and the garden surrounding the stupa. These create the desired effect of peace, harmony and inner peace.

In 2014 great efforts will also have to be made to raise money to comply with fire regulations for the GCM and to renovate the kitchen in the main building in line with government regulations as well as for the construction of a dining room. Alongside the urgently needed renovation of the kitchen, the coming years should also see the construction of a large meditation hall.



Drawings of new fire escape in front of dining room (small building)

### Current operations of the Institute

In 2009 the requirements needed to obtain residence permits for the monks and nuns, primarily those from Vietnam and the USA, were fulfilled enabling the EIAB to start operating. Whilst in 2009 an average of 19 sisters and brothers practiced and taught at the EIAB, this figure had risen to 41 by the end of 2013.

Since then the number of visitors has risen continuously: in 2009 retreatants spent approximately 3,000 days visiting the EIAB., however by the end of 2013 this figure had risen to well over 13,000.

Nonetheless, the fees for retreats merely cover costs, on the one hand to attract as many people as possible to the retreats and on the other to fulfil the legal requirements pertaining to charities. Consequently, the EIAB cannot generate any significant earnings from leading retreats.

### Financing

As a result the high costs of construction must be covered by donations and loans. With regard to this the monks

and nuns place great emphasis on ensuring the financial security and solidity of the overall concept. In order to remain free of external third-party financing, it was planned from the very beginning to finance this very large project exclusively through donations and with the help of Plum Village and its communities and from the earnings generated from retreats and courses. Each phase of construction has been, and will only be begun when it is sure that the financing is secure.

The monks and nuns of the EIAB are grateful for the tremendous support they have received since the Institute was founded. The breadth of this support is demonstrated by the fact that a large number of the donations which have contributed to the success achieved so far have been for less than 100 euros. Nonetheless, the overall total also contains large amounts donated by individuals, Buddhist communities associated with Plum Village as well as loans from the French and American organisations Eglise Bouddhique Unifiée, Zen Community of Plum Village and the Unified Buddhist Church.

The donations have been almost completely, where required in accordance

with specified conditions attached to the donations, used for the purchase of the property and the construction measures described previously. The loans received from the French Plum Village organizations also served in part to finance the current operations of the EIAB in its core areas.

In 2014, the loans from communities and private individuals friendly with Plum Village are available to begin with the construction measures needed to comply with the regulations imposed by the authorities in relation to the GCM (approx. 700,000) and the kitchen (approx. 2 million euros) with the greatest possible certainty that these will be able to be completed. With the call for donations on the next page, the brothers and sisters of the EIAB, are hoping to be able to make as large a contribution to this as possible.

**Dr. Thu Pham** (Thay Phap An), Managing Director of the European Institute of Applied Buddhism gGmbH.

**Dr. Olaf Clemens**, Auditor, Tax Advisor



# Dear Friends of the EIAB,

we would like to thank you all from our heart for the generous donations you have made and without which our work here would not have been possible, and hope that we can continue to rely on your help and commitment. We would also like to thank you for participating in our courses and retreats as well as for your practice and spiritual support.

This year we need to take care of the following two construction projects: compliance with fire-safety measures for the small building and renovation of the kitchen in the big building according to building ordinances. We are asking for your help for these two projects.

## Brief overview of the work required

**Fire-safety measures for the Great Compassion Monastery (GCM, ancillary building)**

The old community-service building used by the Buddhist community and lovingly termed the Great Compassion Monastery urgently requires renovation work demanded by the authorities to comply with fire-safety regulations so that the building can continue to be used for courses offered by the Sangha and for accommodation.

**Renovation of the large kitchen in the main building**

Significant renovations and extensions urgently need to be made to the large kitchen in the main building of the EIAB, in order to be able to use it. This

involves extending the existing kitchen structure to create a common dining room for the monks, nuns and guests of the EIAB.

## Current situation at the EIAB regarding the kitchen and premises

**Mindful cooking for 100 to 1,000 people in 12 m<sup>2</sup>**

Since six years we are living at the EIAB and only have a 12 m<sup>2</sup> kitchen which does not meet the fire regulations and is located in the small building.

Currently around 50 monks and nuns are living at the EIAB. On top of this we have many guests and visitors, so that during the week, three times a day, we cook for around 70 people, and at weekends sometimes for up to 150 people.

In addition to this are the large retreats (new year, summer, autumn etc.) with over 100 participants and once a year we hold two very large retreats with our teacher Thich Nhat Hanh at the EIAB. At these retreats we have to cook for up to 1,000 people every day for a whole week. Even at these large events we prefer it that the monks and nuns cook for the guests themselves, rather than buying in food from external providers.

We also need a sufficiently large dining room for all guests and monastics. Currently, it is necessary to eat in a number of different rooms, which means we are unable to benefit from the collective, mindful energy of the larger Sangha.

Plan of Kitchen and Lotus garden seen from outside



There is no longer sufficient space in the small dining area which also no longer complies with fire-safety regulations.

As a result of the current situation and the need to comply with the demands of the authorities, we have an urgent need to enlarge the 'big' kitchen in the main building. In addition, it should also be a meeting place in which cooking courses can be offered for guests and those interested. This will enable us to help many people prevent illness or even cure it through mindful preparation of vegan food.

Please, help us with your donation to realize these urgently needed construction projects.

We wish you much happiness in your daily mindfulness practice.

In friendship

*Thay Phap An and  
the brothers and sisters of the EIAB*

## ACCOUNT FOR DONATION

Account holder: EIAB

IBAN: DE27 3705 0299 0341 5529 32, BIC: COKSDE33XXX



## Detailed overview of the necessary construction measures

### Great Compassion Monastery: Fire-safety regulations

The old community service school urgently requires renovation work demanded by the authorities to comply with fire-safety regulations so that the building can continue to be used for courses offered by the Sangha and for accommodation.

After close collaboration between the relevant government office for fire safety, the fire service and the EIAB, a firm of architects has drafted a programme of measures.

This involves replacing or installing door systems to minimise the danger to monks, nuns and guests in the case of fire. An outside emergency exit must also be added to the north wing of the Great Compassion Monastery (GCM), as there is currently only one escape route meaning that only the first floor can be used for accommodation.

The electrical installations must be partially replaced, a smoke/heat extraction device installed and additional fire-safety equipment installed. In addition, an acoustic fire alarm system must be installed.

One of the emergency exits needed for the dining room will also be used as a door from the dining room to the garden and therefore also to the stupa (belltower).

A building application for these measures has been approved by the authorities. So that we can accommodate a larger number of guests in the building, some of the space will be converted into 21 rooms.

### Main building: renovation of the large kitchen and dining room

Significant renovations and extensions urgently need to be made to the large kitchen in the main building of the

EIAB, in order to be able to use it. This involves extending the existing kitchen structure to create a common dining room for the monks, nuns and guests of the EIAB.

The kitchen is a remnant of the old army building and is in urgent need of renovation. The large kitchen does not comply with the necessary directives and requirements for a kitchen either with regard to hygiene standards or fire-safety regulations. In addition the entire water supply system is outdated and in need of renewal.

On top of the need to comply with the legal requirements for a large kitchen, it is also important to take account of the many aspects that are important for the Sangha itself: being able to prepare food together, vegan cooking (fewer separate refrigeration areas than is normal) space to rinse dishes etc.

Dieter Comes, Architect

# Coincidences, Histories and the Monastic life in the EIAB Waldbröl

Through mere coincidence I came across the history of Waldbröl and the former KdF-Hotel which is now the EIAB (European Institute of Applied Buddhism). In search for material about the period of National Socialism in the university library I came across a book about the “Stadt der Volkstraktorenwerke” (City of the people’s tractor factories).

This unique scientific publication documents the work of Robert Ley, who – as an organisational manager of the NSDAP and leader of the German WorkFront DAF – wanted to change Waldbröl into an industrial city with a gigantic tractor factory, an Adolf-Hitler-School and the aforementioned KdF-Hotel.

In contrast to other big projects, like the Ordensburg Vogelsang in the Eifel Region, only a small number of these National Socialist plans became reality in Waldbröl. Curious to see the few remaining traces of Robert Ley’s policies, I travelled to the small town of Waldbröl for the first time nearly two years ago. I found myself in front of the imposing entrance gate and looked in vain for any clues about the history of the house. Here, I encountered for the first time the initials of the EIAB. It seemed

to me like an irony of history that a Buddhist practise centre would find a home in, of all places, this old Nazi building with its bombastic interior of marble and mosaics and its forbidding facade.

Later, I studied the webpage of the EIAB and was surprised at the variety of activities and events displayed there, so very contrary to the historical spirit of this house. And I asked myself how it could be possible to practice Buddhist mindfulness in such a building.

Many more months passed before I got my answer. I finally received a contract from Deutschland Radio to make a documentary about Waldbröl, its Nazi history and the EIAB. In spring 2014 I immersed myself in this topic, curious about who actually lives in the EIAB, what life is like there and who the guests are. How would the personal experiences of nuns, monks and guests mix with the aura of this history? So, for a few days in April I moved into one of the rooms of the former KdF-hotel. Furnished in the style of the 30s, it had just a sink, a wardrobe and a view onto the park.

I entered two worlds at the same time. On one hand the ordinary, bustling life

of Waldbröl: where youngsters would meet to chill out in the evenings on the so-called “Hitler-wall” – the foundation of the planned and never finished Adolf-Hitler-school; the colourful market, where everybody goes to buy groceries; the traffic that slowly winds through the city. On the other hand the EIAB with its beautiful Stupa, the garden around the former KdF-hotel, the meditation halls, dining hall, orchards and a quiet, monastic life.

The fundamental difference was of course the people, in particular the Sisters and Brothers, which I met there. Especially Sister Song Nghiem – who was at my side every day especially helping with the interviews. She explained the history of the house with great animation and I realised what an act of strength it must have been to counteract the spirit of the house. Especially the halls of the main building still seem to be so cool and forbidding. “Inner beauty is more important than outer beauty”, sister Song said to that.

I was particularly impressed by the ceremony for the victims of the house: 700 patients of the former hospital had to leave to make space for the KdF-Hotel and were relocated or killed. Everyday a special altar in the entrance hall





is decorated with offerings and songs are chanted. Where in Germany is there another place where the victims of National Socialism are remembered every day?

This particular form of remembrance by the monastics is somewhat alien and exotic to the Western spirit. The inclusion of the perpetrators in the ceremony for the victims also seemed strange to me, not fully comprehensible in a land where absolution for the Nazi perpetrator is still a topic today.

However, it is most important to me that the history of this building finally is being looked at. Countless sites of National Socialism in Germany are surrounded with an aura of helplessness as these memorials continue to remind us of our painful past. The establishment of the EIAB in the old KdF-hotel in Waldbröl has opened a new page.

And strangely the darkness of history does not dominate the character of the



EIAB. Whoever experiences the joy of the brothers and sisters and sees their delightful manner of conducting daily tasks in kitchen and garden, realises that even in such a place history does not hold all the power. Though silence is an important part of life in the EIAB – which needs some getting used to for everyone who comes out of “normal life” –, for me it was a wonderful experience to watch the sisters and brothers, who would meet during the warm spring evenings for volleyball or table tennis and hearing their laughter and shouts filling the air.

From what I learned during my visit, the history of the EIAB is only of secondary importance for its visitors. They come to Waldbröl to practise mindfulness and meditation. And yet

they always encounter the history of the house, a past filled with violence.

Here in Waldbröl the violence of the past meets with the peace of present monastic life and these are perfect conditions to meditate on how violence arises and how it can be overcome, how non-discrimination can be born from discrimination..

The students of the Gesamtschule (comprehensive school) Waldbröl, whom the sisters visit regularly, have understood this principle. When I asked whether the EIAB and the nuns and monks fit in well in Waldbröl, one of the girls said: “Of course, because somehow every person can belong to every place, right?!”

**Axel Denecke**, free lance journalist for Deutschland Radio



# Thay in Harvard and Stanford



## Harvard Medical School & Harvard School of Public Health

Thich Nhat Hanh was invited to offer the keynote lectures on the Harvard Medical School course "Meditation and

"Compassion is first of all compassion for ourselves. If you don't know how to be compassionate to yourself first, it is very difficult to be compassionate towards someone else. ....With the energy of mindfulness you can listen to your suffering and embrace your suffering, in order to understand. And when you understand your suffering, compassion is born in you and you suffer much less right away. Once you have understood suffering, it is much easier to understand someone else's suffering."

Psychotherapy: Deepening Mindfulness with Thich Nhat Hanh" on September 11th and 12th, 2013, hosted by the Harvard Medical School's Department of Psychiatry and the Harvard School of Public Health in downtown Boston. Thich Nhat Hanh's address, entitled "Healing the Heart with Mindfulness" was followed by a discussion with Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, America's mindfulness pioneer and one-time student of Thich Nhat Hanh. Attendees also had an opportunity to experience guided meditation, total relaxation and mindful eating.

It was on a retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh that Jon Kabat-Zinn first realized the appropriateness of mindfulness in the treatment of chronic medical conditions, which he later adapted into

the structured eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course, which has since spread throughout the western World, and is recognised by and taught at Harvard Medical School. The School has awarded Thich Nhat Hanh their "The Institute of Mind Body Medicine Award" - the first time the Buddhist teaching of mindfulness has been recognised by the medical profession.

## Stanford University

On October 24th 2013, Thich Nhat Hanh was invited by Stanford University to engage in a "Dialogue on Compassion" with renowned neurosurgeon and pioneer of the science of compassion, Dr James Doty. The event was hosted by Stanford's new Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) and attended by over 700 University professors and students. A further fifty thousand people have since watched the discussion online.

It was a joyful exchange between scientist and yogi: Dr Doty as a pioneer in the research and study of compassion; and Thay as a spiritual leader offering concrete practices and insights into how we can actually generate the energy of compassion in our lives.

## Hong Kong comes to France

Due to Thay's teaching schedule he was unable to travel to Hong Kong to receive the award. Undeterred, the Vice Chancellor and President of University of Hong Kong, Prof. Lap-Chee Tsui, along with two other professors came

to award the Degree to Thay, in person, at Plum Village on March 13. The ceremony was formally completed at HKU's 190th Congregation in Hong Kong on March 18.

"This is the first thing I would like to propose to the young people of our time: If you have a dream, please build a Sangha, build a community in order to realise your dream.

And secondly, I would like to propose that our love should be directed to the whole planet, not only to our nation and people. I have learned that my home, my country is the whole planet earth. I do not limit my love to that tiny piece of land in Asia, Vietnam. I have a lot of transformation and healing just because I got that vision.

Your love may be still too small. You have to enlarge your heart. Your love has to embrace the whole planet earth and that is the love of Buddha, the love of great human beings like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa and many others."

In Thay's acceptance speech he expressed his deep gratitude for the award, and offered a special message of encouragement to the students of Hong Kong University and beyond.

There then followed a fascinating dialogue between Thay, the Vice-Chancellor and Professor Lee about how best to train the young generations to prepare for an uncertain future (see <http://plumvillage.org>)

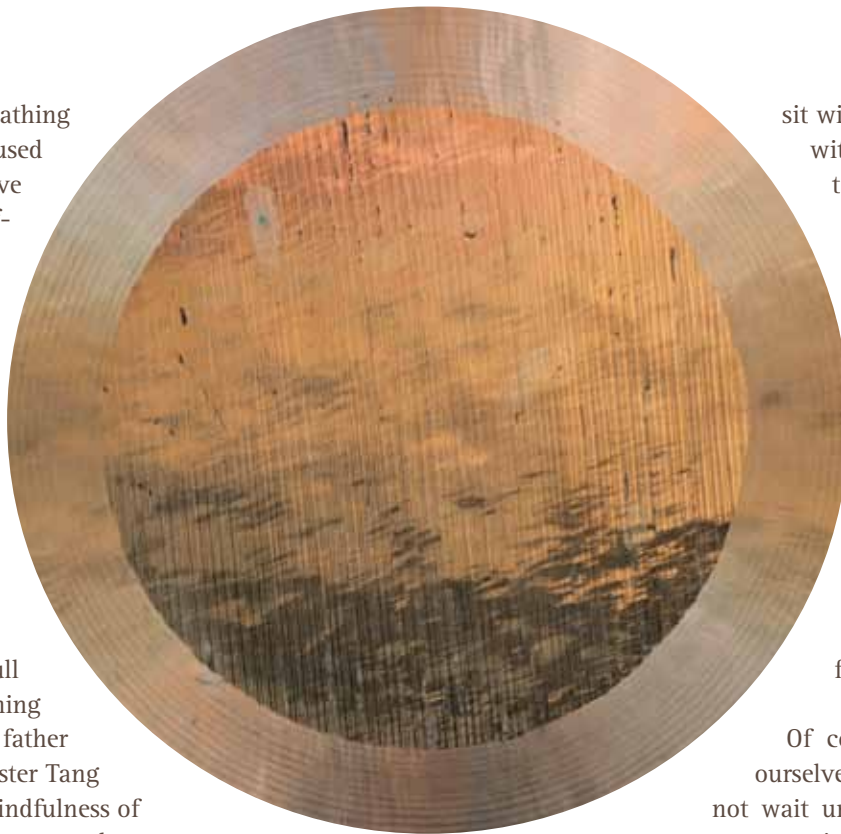


## Applied Buddhism

# Master Tang Hoi for our time

“Mindfulness of breathing is the great vehicle used by the Buddhas to save beings who are drifting and sinking in the ocean of suffering.” This is the opening sentence of a text that was studied in a course for Dharma teachers in training at the EIAB last April. The text is very ancient belonging to the 3rd century CE. It is the Preface to the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing and was written by the father of Vietnamese Zen, Master Tang Hoi. In our own time mindfulness of breathing is becoming more and more universal. It is not a Buddhist practice alone. It can be taught to anyone and practised by anyone of any spiritual or no spiritual path.

Have you ever been in a crisis when you do not know what to do? Your heart may be beating too fast. Your mind may be confused. You may be very afraid of what is going to happen. There is only one thing you can do and that is breathe and bring all your attention to your breathing. At first you see that your breath is uneven, short and not so pleasant but you keep being aware of it and it becomes deeper and more peaceful and at the same time your mind becomes more peaceful. When the mindful breathing continues like that for twenty minutes or so it will bring you to the shore and you do not need to drown in the ocean of fear, confusion or despair. We call it the great vehicle because it can car-



ry anyone of any walk of life to the shore of safety. It has carried business people, policemen, prisoners, teenagers and politicians, to name but a few, to the shore of security and calm. In the EIAB there is no course where we do not train ourselves in the practice of mindful breathing.

You do not have to wait for a crisis in order to practice mindfulness of breathing. In your daily life it can nourish and heal you at any time that you want. You can learn to enjoy your breathing. When you lie in bed unable to sleep you can take refuge in your mindful breathing in order to calm and relax body and mind. You can enjoy your breathing so much that it no longer matters whether you are able to sleep or not.

Say your teenage son or daughter is suffering or angry with you. Can you

sit with him or her and listen without judging or reacting? If you follow your breathing it will not be so difficult. You stick to your breathing for the whole time your daughter shares her suffering. You look at her with compassion and the knowledge that she is suffering and if you are able to sit solidly and look with kind eyes she will suffer less.

Of course we need to train ourselves to breathe. We should not wait until we are caught in a strong emotion, or our son is angry with us in order to practise mindful breathing. Today, right now we need to learn to recognise an in breath or out breath as we breathe in and out. We can train ourselves to enjoy the feeling of our breath in our body. Now as you sit in front of your computer screen, look up for a moment away from the screen and take an in breath, feel your abdomen rising, breathe out and feel your abdomen falling. You have come home to your body. You are in touch with your body. Every morning when you wake up be aware of your in breath and out breath before you step out of bed. Before you sleep be aware of your breathing. Every time you have to drive somewhere, before you turn the key in the ignition, remember to breathe in and out three times and every time you hear the telephone, take a deep in and out breath. These are all moments of renewal for your body and mind.

**“Wrong perception enters the mind of living beings as rivers enter the ocean. The mind is like a person who is very hungry and however much he eats he is not satisfied. The mind contains everything.”**

Master Tang Hoi

“Wrong perception enters the mind of living beings as rivers enter the ocean. The mind is like a person who is very hungry and however much he eats he is not satisfied. The mind contains everything.”

This quotation comes from the second paragraph of the Preface to the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing. In our own time with the development of neuroscience people are becoming more aware of and more interested in how their minds work. When we begin to be aware of our breathing we also become aware of our mind. Before, whenever something unpleasant was beginning to happen in our mind, we would turn on the television or eat a piece of chocolate, pick up a book or go shopping. Now we do not try to run away anymore. We recognise that unpleasant feeling, which is happening in our mind and allow our breathing to help take care of it. We know that the feeling comes from a perception and that perception is only partly correct. In other words it is a wrong perception. Our mind consumes and we suffer the results of what our mind has consumed. This is clear in the teaching on the Four Foods. The Fourth Food is called “Consciousness Food”. What does this mean? How can we eat consciousness? Consciousness is the contents of the store consciousness; all the memories and experiences that have been stored up in our own and our ancestors’ lifetimes. Especially when that has been a bad experience our consciousness will

keep bringing that experience up and every time it comes up we consume it and suffer. It is as if you had a film of some unpleasant event in your life and you keep going into a dark room to look at that film. So you now tell yourself that this is a film you do not want to watch anymore. You want to give your attention to something different. If by chance that film is brought up by something someone says or does or some event that you experience, you tell yourself that this is only a film. You are an adult now. You are not in danger. You can go up to the screen and see for yourself that it is only a film. It is your mindful breathing that enables you to see clearly like this.

Recognise that your mind is always wanting to consume. It cannot face the emptiness of doing nothing. One day when you allow your mind to do nothing, just to sit and enjoy, like at the first moments of a new day as the dawn comes, you will see that your mind can also stop and be satisfied with a state of complete rest. This is a transformation not only for you but for your whole ancestral line, that has not known how to sit still and do nothing.

“The mind is very deep and wonderful. If we are able to find an undisturbed place to practice, so that our mind can settle down and our thoughts are not carried away by wrong desires, then we shall be able to hear clearly ten thousand words and we shall not lose a single one.” This quotation from the

third paragraph of the text mentioned above shows what the meditator experiences of his own mind. We do not need MRI’s to let us know how wonderful our mind is. It is enough to calm our mind by mindful breathing and to sit quietly, walk peacefully or even eat a meal in mindfulness, in order to be able to see what a flexible and wonderful instrument the mind is. In the Anguttara Nikaya the Buddha is recorded as saying: “There is one thing, O monks, other than which nothing can bring as much suffering and that is an untamed mind. There is one thing other than which nothing can bring as much happiness and that is a tamed mind.” If we know how to master our mind we can bring much happiness to ourselves and others. We tame our mind by giving our attention to what can nourish and heal us and withdrawing our attention from what waters the seeds of craving, hatred and anger in us. We have to recognise which seeds are being watered and purposefully water what can nourish and heal us. So we do not put ourselves in an environment where the negative seeds are easily watered until we have tamed our mind and it is flexible enough for us not to water those seeds even if the environment is not a positive one. The best environment is the environment of the sangha and even if we cannot live in a sangha 24 hours a day, we can found or join a local sangha and meet spiritual friends every week for a couple of hours to breathe and walk mindfully together and share our experience of the practice.



“The mind is very deep and wonderful. If we are able to find an undisturbed place to practice, so that our mind can settle down and our thoughts are not carried away by wrong desires, then we shall be able to hear clearly ten thousand words and we shall not lose a single one.”

Master Tang Hoi

Applied Buddhism, which is taught at the European Institute in Waldbroël is about keeping the ancient teachings of the Buddha and his successors, the ancestral teachers, up to date so that they can be applied in every walk of life in the society in which we live. The mindfulness of breathing, the taming of our mind is something we all need in this present time so that we can

protect ourselves and others from the harm that is done by fear and anger. Mindfulness of breathing opens up a new world for the practitioner where any moment can be a deep moment of joy and happiness. So please find something that can help you come back to your breathing often in the day, like a beeping of your watch, a bell on your computer, an aeroplane overhead or

the sound of a telephone ringing and whenever you are able stay in a centre where mindfulness is practised so you can train.

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



# A European Course

**In April 2013 Sr Annabel offered a course for Dharma teachers in training. Among the participants from different European countries there were future Dharma teachers as well as those who had already received the Dharma lamp some time ago.**

Our journey to the EIAB was punctuated with serendipitous meetings, like way-marks confirming that we were on the right path. At our final station the lone taxi driver told us how he had sought refuge at the EIAB at a time of crisis and kindly called a colleague to take us there. On arrival at the Institute we were greeted by joyful monastics and cherry blossom in the grounds, opening our hearts to receive Sister Annabel's deep and beautiful teachings.

*(Barbara Hickling, England)*



.... The fact that my understanding at times was limited didn't really matter, just to sit and let the Dharma rain fall was enough. A very moving experience, to be part of this European get-together of new, old and aspirant dharma teachers, all working together in harmony.

*(Angie Searle)*



With each step I took under the cherry blossom trees in the exquisite gardens, the deep peace, kindness, joy, ease which the Sangha has planted here was tangible. I thought of my Dad a lot, he'd been in the RAF and had flown in Lancaster bombers over Germany through the war. I simply know how overjoyed he'd be, to the point of tears, by this place. The Sangha is honouring, healing and transforming the sorrow of it all. By some mysterious happening, when I got home an award had arrived in the post for Dad. A posthumous medal awarded for his part in Bomber Command, 70 years on. Both passionate gardeners, Dad and I, his conti-



uation, happily tend seeds of peace, transformation and cherry blossom in our hearts.

*(Lesley Collington, England)*



Many years ago I worked for Her Majesties Forces in Germany. I lived in a similar physical environment to the EIAB, but that is where the resemblance ends. My barracks offered an environment of fear: EIAB opens peaceful, joyous doors to the community and beyond; it is at the heart of the community offering true love. At the EIAB I learnt how the Buddha used skilful communication to offer Dharma to people of other beliefs and cultures of the time; this strengthens the aspiration to continue to make our tradition's teachings even more inclusive.

*(Dene Donalds, England)*



Our course took place in the very special context of the EIAB, which unites the spirit of Plum Village with a dense

program of socially oriented courses for people from all over Europe – also for young people. The EIAB has given us a taste of “applied Buddhism in action”.

In April both of us still have been dharma teacher aspirants and were very grateful for this course which has been offered as help and encouragement for all of us. We were happy that among the participants there were some experienced Dharma teachers.

Sr. Annabel combined the deepest knowledge of our spiritual tradition with the ability to share and transmit it with humility and loving kindness.

She had asked us in advance to reflect on two texts: the preface to the Sutra on Mindfulness of Breath by Master Tang Hoi of the 3rd century and the recent teaching of Thay on the twelve “nidana”, i.e. the twelve links of co-arising.

These two texts point to two main pillars of the practice: on one side, mindful breathing, which calms the mind, leading to concentration; and on the other side, wisdom and interbeing, which allow us to transcend the dualistic vision and to connect the historic truth to the ultimate truth.

These two foundations of Buddhist practice inter-are, since mindful breathing is the main way to come back to the place inside of us where we find peace and insight, but also the deepest connection with other beings.

Throughout the course we have received valuable help with respect to “teaching



the Dharma". The Dharma can be transmitted through the traditional texts, as long as we do not disregard the historical context. "Truth is found in life" and accordingly we realized that "the way we live is our best dharma talk". (*Gius-  
eppe and Letizia, Italien*)



The beauty of practicing in an international group was very inspiring and nourishing.

On my Dharma path, which started 21 years ago, I did not have a chance to have a tutor or mentor living nearby and I felt grateful when I learned about this course, which I considered to be an opportunity to catch up with everything I missed.

What I found at the EIAB was more than I expected: we had very interesting and deep teachings on many aspects of our practice. For us it was very special to learn about the history of Vietnamese Buddhism: these important teachings are difficult to find even at university libraries. - I really felt the need for knowing more about our ancient ancestors, who had the courage to start a spiritual tradition in a place where the conditions were not easy.

And it was important for me to connect with our female ancestors who also could transmit their way of practice. I feel the importance of acknowledging the presence of female Dharma teachers in our spiritual tradition.\* (*Silvia Lombardi, Italien*)



Before arrival we were given 'homework' to read the preface by Tang Hoi which is from the 3rd century asking ourself "What can you use from it in your daily life?"

"A handful of seeds are scattered and thousands of plants will sprout. Similarly in the time it takes to click your fingers, the mind can have 960 recollections. In just one day and night 13,000 recollections can take place in our mind, without being aware of them, just like the one who sows seeds in the dark. This is why we must practice to calm our mind, bind our mind to our breathing ..."

Personally, at this time in my life (66 years), I am having some serious health issues primarily with my heart, and with my brain, as a result of my heart problems.

I am so grateful for having been reminded again about the practice of brea-

thing, looking deeply and relaxing. It gives me a lot of stability and my breath is my Anker, in each moment there is a coming and going, being born and dying, without being attached to the outcome.

When I was having frequent cardiac arrests, I could remain calm, relaxed and feel my breathing until my consciousness left for some time, and then returned again.

The staff in the Cardiac Intensive Care was very surprised because they were most often confronted with a great deal of fear, anger and grief by the person with similar heart problems and with the family around him/her. They asked me how was I able to remain so calm?

I explained that I had 30+ years of meditation experience and that helped me a great deal. The staff has asked me to teach them mindfulness.

(*Rochelle Griffith, Dharmateacher, Netherlands*)

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\* Sr Annabel will offer a course on "Women in Buddhism" next year.



## Working as staff – a joyful challenge

Looking back I can say that the work itself was the least important thing for me. I was far more interested in the very different, very personal experiences in connection with work, in opportunities to understand myself better, to tackle new topics and try out new things.

The meditations, the daily staff meeting that the sisters learned to lead more skilfully year by year, and which during this time developed into a small sangha within the larger retreat-sangha, as well as the feeling of being held and supported by the monks and nuns, created the basis that enabled me to shift my focus from the work itself to the experience of working. After two stints as 'staff' this is the way I currently understand what happened.

### My expectations

Contrary to my usual way of working – I knew this from the working meditation in Plum Village – working as staff had to be holiday in its purest form: concentrated activity, focused mindfully on the work at hand, together with others, in silence, for a limited

time, and continually accompanied by breaks, announced by the sound of the bell from wherever it might come. And with the focus on the action itself not just on the goal ... super! So far, so good. These expectations were fulfilled – in both years.

### Joy – for me – with and for each other – cheerfulness

In my life I have seldom felt so welcome as at the EIAB. Over and again, in a variety of different ways including through my staff group, the nuns and monks conveyed the message to me: 'Wonderful, that you are here!' And they certainly didn't mean my work 'performance'.

### Confrontation with my life themes

The retreat situation sometimes functions like a magnifying glass: such as working together with someone who serves as a high intensity mirror to confront me with the difficulties with which I myself struggle day in, day out.

This was a real challenge. Luckily there was also the possibility, in the form of the nun who led our group, of taking real, practical refuge ...

What is to be done though, when in an attempt to help me a retreat-ant overshoots the target so far that even a monk has to intervene? And then, without asking, this person takes over the duties assigned to me as staff. Judgments and feelings of inferiority were very powerfully in play here.

In later Dharma-Sharings I had plenty of opportunity to atone as this Sangha brother recounted the wartime experiences which he had had to endure as a five year old child. Similar experiences can be found in my family, have watered my consciousness, and make up my life themes. As I began to comprehend that I was sitting in the Dutch group with the descendants of those whom my father had been sent to fight in the war, my eyes filled with tears of gratitude.

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Urte Sager, Berlin





## Being part of the **staff family**

In June 2013 Thay came again to Waldbröl for the Dutch and German retreats. The huge number of people who come and join the retreats requires a lot of planning and organisation every year. The monks and nuns therefore always ask lay friends for help. I decided to be part of the staff for the second time and to help during both retreats. It was a wonderful time.

### **A small group in the big one**

All staff members arrived in the EIAB a few days before the retreat started, and had a first meeting very soon after arriving to get to know each other and also to learn about our tasks. We built our own little group within the bigger community. During both retreats we met every morning for breakfast in order to be together and to share our difficulties and our joys, so we could support each other and benefit from everybody's experiences.

Those meetings were always lead by a monk and a nun: Sister Tri Nghiem was very inventive and talented when it came to answering our questions, while Brother Phap Dung, an experienced

Dharma Teacher from Plum Village, enriched our morning meetings with his wisdom and his easy going nature.

### **Joy in doing things together**

Last year both my Dutch and German families had the task of preparing the fruit and setting the tables for breakfast. Both families were very committed and we had a lot of fun- while being mindful of course.

Since we were preparing breakfast we were unable to attend morning meditation. To make this as painless as possible I divided my families into three smaller groups, which then rotated through working meditation. So, two groups could go to morning meditation while the third prepared breakfast. Nobody ever missed out on working meditation and working together brought lots of joy.

The work of the families not only helps the sisters and brothers greatly, it is also a wonderful opportunity to practise mindfulness together. Once we learn how to fulfil simple tasks like cutting vegetables, washing dishes, cleaning

toilets, etc. with mindfulness and joy during the retreat and once we experience these tasks as “doing without getting done”, without resistance or attachment, it becomes much easier to continue the practise at home.

### **Self-awareness**

Working in the staff family can also be very challenging. In 2009 for example I was not very mindful towards my family members and still caught in my own expectations. In examining my feelings and resistances I could slowly recognise that the problems were to be found in my self righteousness, my spiritual pride and other blocks on my own path. Through working in the staff family I learned to accept other people more and to love them just the way they are. I learnt to adapt better to various situations and let go of trying to change the world to suit my own preferences.

This work is a great teaching for me and I want to continue it as often as I possibly can.

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Lily Neu, Sangha Munich

# My experiences as a school teacher working alongside the Buddhist nuns of the EIAB

A few weeks ago, I invited the Sisters from the EIAB into our school, to train the 10 year old students of class 6a in mindfulness. I decided to do this because I realised that quite a few of the students had developed some unwholesome behaviour patterns. They are unfocused, disruptive, have only short attention spans and are easily aggravated emotionally. In addition to that a lot of the children are very self-centred which results in many conflicts and wastes a lot of energy.

fulness, listened to the sound of the bell and the chants of the sisters, sang songs and meditated in many different ways. We painted rocks and reflected about the symbolism of water, flowers and mountains; sewed a bag for our mindfulness pebbles, said beautiful and kind words to each other. We wrote letters and listened to stories about the wonder of creation.

In essence, all these practises were about becoming more sensitive toward

More than ever I am convinced that these mindfulness practises strengthen the students' maturity and helps their whole being in a wholesome way; they are fundamental for their health and well-being. It would be of great benefit to integrate these practises into day-to-day life at school so that the students can use their energy for positive and constructive things.

For me, as a teacher, it is important to develop students' attention and con-



Of course we have classroom rules, which we formulated and agreed to mutually and which are discussed regularly. The students test these rules, fight, lose their energy and get agitated. They barely seem to understand how their individual behaviour is part of the collective picture. In the normal classroom situations these energies tend to end in chaotic and disruptive behavior, but I wanted to use them efficiently for conflict resolution.

The students were very open towards the Sisters. The monastics shared a lot of mindfulness practices with the students. We ate tangerines in mind-

the wonder of creation and about developing loving, kind and respectful behaviour towards oneself, as well as towards parents, other people and nature.

It is very gratifying to guide students to listen to their own bodies, to teach them how to embrace different situations, or how to step back a bit and humbly give oneself to the wonders of life in the here and now. For this to be possible discipline and respect towards oneself and others are essential. Meditation and mindful breathing exercises allow the students to collect their energies and they begin to realise how much it helps them.

centration by awakening in every single student the need for an inner silence and concentration rather than through restrictions or by focussing merely on the external conditions of the classroom environment.

If everybody realises the importance of the core of their own being, then teachers and students will have a chance to treat each other with mutual respect and create a pleasant atmosphere truly conducive to learning.

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**Holger Kuske**, teacher at the Gesamtschule Walddröhl

# Learning to eat, learning to walk

**Last year, my husband and I practiced for one year in Plum Village. At the end of the Winter Retreat we went to the EIAB for 6 weeks before going back to Plum Village for the June Retreat.**

It was beautiful spring time when we arrived at the EIAB. Fresh green leaves were just sprouting, cherry blossoms and flowers were blooming in the garden. The monks and nuns had just finished the monastic retreat and now had a more relaxed schedule. Sometimes we played volleyball. Whenever we had a few hours free time, brothers and sisters would invite us to go hiking in the forest around Waldbröl. I remember particularly one occasion during a hike, whilst we took a rest after a long walk, brothers and sisters suggested a group game. To my surprise Sister Annabel also participated in the game. It turned out that we had a very joyful time, nourishing brotherhood and sisterhood.

As we lived closely with the brothers and sisters in the EIAB, we had many opportunities to practice mindfulness by working together, sitting together, walking together, and eating together. There were many times when I rushed to the toilet before the morning sitting meditation and walked unmindfully and closed the door brusquely. Often at this moment, I would meet Sister Annabel walking down the stairs slowly and mindfully. I stopped and felt embarrassed, but she always gave me a tender smile. Her presence was like the warm and soft light from the rising sun, and my rushing energy just disappeared. After some days I wrote a gatha to help myself in this situation:

“Opening the door,  
I open a new door  
of my life,  
I vow to live truthfully  
and mindfully.”



Truly, living in the EIAB opened a new door for me, and I started to deepen my practice more and more in daily life.

During my stay, I had a chance to join the course “Building relationship” taught by Thay Phap An. On the first day of the course, he taught how to take care of our physical health. If we always feel ill or tired, it is impossible for us to offer joy to our beloved ones. He shared the following gatha with us, which he practices when serving himself food.

“All beings struggle to survive,  
may all living beings have  
enough food to eat today,  
I send my love to all beings.”  
(originally in Vietnamese)

I was very touched by Thay Phap An’s love and compassion for all beings and for the world. Thay Phap An has great compassion for those who suffer. I thought that by practicing the gatha at every meal, I could nourish my seed of compassion. But the English translation is not easy to remember for me. So I made my own Chinese gatha to practice with:

“In gratitude for the food  
in front of me  
which cultivates my love  
and good heart,  
I wish all beings in the world  
Have shelter and enough food  
to eat in this moment.”

This gatha helps me to enjoy every meal and to be thankful for the food I have.

Our six weeks stay in the EIAB was finally only a short visit. I felt very reluctant to leave. Mid-July we will come back for another four weeks.

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Celia Tsui, OI, Hong Kong Sangha







## Applied Buddhism

# The practice of ‘non-Self’ – Being in touch with the Other Possibilities of living

**Friends visiting EIAB sometimes ask me what exactly ‘Applied Buddhism’ is and how it is different from other forms of Buddhism. I enjoy this inquiry very much and would like to share briefly with you some of my thoughts on this topic.**

There are many different aspects of Buddhism. We can look at Buddhism through many lenses, such as through the lens of a religious historian, of a philosopher, of an anthropologist, of a believer or of a simple spiritual practitioner who uses Buddhism as guidance for a happy and healthy life, and so on.

Let us look briefly into some of these aspects and begin by asking ourselves

the following questions: What constitutes a spiritual life? What are the core aspects of a spiritual life, and do we really need a religion in order to have a spiritual life? What is the relationship between religion and spiritual life? Do we need some sort of a belief system in order to live peacefully together on this planet earth? If so, how much belief, how much faith, should we have in order to have a spiritual life? Or how

much spiritual life do we need for our belief system?

If we look deeply at our past as well as the course of our humanity, our life has been constructed from different paths of belief and faith. So, in some way, we are all religious practitioners in some particular ways. We have constructed our life based on these beliefs. Our life is a result of our own belief system.

To have a spiritual life is to walk on the path of discovery.  
We learn to discover ourselves, to discover others, as well as to discover  
the totality of life, of our environment, and of our whole cosmos.

Some beliefs have led us to joy and happiness, and some have led us astray into confusion, suffering and destruction. If we have a chance to stop and look at our life deeply, with honesty and sincerity, looking at the nature of the beliefs and the faiths that we have chosen, we begin to have a spiritual life. To have a spiritual life is to walk on the path of discovery. We learn to discover ourselves, to discover others, as well as to discover the totality of life, of our environment, and of our whole cosmos.

### A spiritual journey of awakening

In the 5th century B.C, when Prince Siddhartha left home and did that important act of stopping and looking deeply into his own life experiences, he began his spiritual journey. According to the legend, he was searching for six years. Then he found a particular spiritual path. He became a Buddha. “Buddha” means the one who has awakened, that is, has reached or attained Enlightenment.

What makes somebody a Buddha? What qualities, or states of mind, or ways of living, make someone a Buddha? There have been many discussions. But everyone has agreed that the Buddha taught a doctrine of **No-self**\* or a practice of **non-Self**\*\*. No-self is

the foundation for understanding and developing Theoretical or Theological Buddhism, and **non-Self** is the foundation for acting, practicing and living Applied Buddhism.

Theoretically, the Buddha taught us that we do not have a permanent, non-changing, eternal identity called a self underneath our unique personality as a human being. If we observe ourselves carefully, we will see that deep within us, there is no single isolated reality that could be called our true self. In our daily life we say: this is my body; he is my son; that is my house. These are convenient ways to communicate. So they are valid as far as the conventional way to designate is concerned. Unfortunately, these ways of living and communication gradually lead us to assume unconsciously that there is a fixed entity called ‘me’. We don’t know exactly what it is, but there seems to be a ‘me’ deep within each one of us, and that ‘me’ seems to be permanent. We believe that there is a fixed entity in every one of us which makes us who we are. “Do you know John?” “Yes, I know him very well.” Right away you recall how John talks, how John thinks, how John behaves. And what John says, what John thinks, what John does, that constitutes a man called John. Unconsciously John becomes a fixed, permanent entity within our perception. But life is a process of change. This tenden-

cy of fixation, of reification, prevents us from being deeply in touch with life, which is available only in the present moment. If we believe deeply in this notion of a permanent self, we cause ourselves deep suffering when things do not follow our wishes.

### The “Self” as linguistic construction

Believing in a permanent reality inside and outside of us and searching for its existence has long been a quest of humanity, since the very dawn of our consciousness. This quest was also present in the historical context of the Buddha’s time. The discussion has been going on inside and outside of the Buddhist tradition for thousands of years. Buddhist philosophers observe that as humans, we are blessed with linguistic capabilities. By logical deduction, they discovered that the notion of a permanent ‘Self’ is only a linguistic construction deeply embedded in our sub-consciousness due to our usage of language. Even though this process of ‘**Self-reification**’, of regarding and treating this construction as if it has a material existence, is a necessary means for our mental functioning as a human, the nature of life is emptiness. There is nothing permanent and unchangeable underneath any, either within us or outside of us.

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Remarks:

\* No-self is a noun, which denotes an ontological existence.

\*\* Non-Self is a verb, which denotes the epistemological action of overcoming the tendency of fixation of our mind.

**Spiritual life is a life of watching out  
for the movement of our mind –  
and transforming his craftwork.**

**This is because that is**

The Buddha declared the principle of “This is because that is” as a governing principle of life and nature. Nothing can ever be found that can exist independently by itself. This principle holds true from the level of the subatomic particles, all the way to the level of the whole cosmos. All of the phenomena at the subatomic particle level can be qualitatively described by this principle, and so can the movement of the other planets, the Milky Way, the galaxies..., and all animate and inanimate forms of life. Everything is interrelated. Eve-

rything depends on one another for its existence.

We can say that throughout the six years of his spiritual journey, the Buddha-to-be had made many important discoveries about himself and about the nature of life. These discoveries constitute moments of spiritual awakening. Each awakening gave him the momentum to live out according to the insights he had found.

Thanks to his sensitivity, the Buddha was awakened to the vanity of life. Life ceased to have its meaning all

together. This spiritual wake-up gave him the impulse for a **first spiritual jump**, that of leaving home for a spiritual journey. This disillusionment and dissatisfaction with life is a necessary condition for anyone who is serious about seeking the meaning of life. Naturally, facing this condition, we all want to look for something that will be forever satisfactory, forever lasting and permanent. Throughout six years of patiently searching within himself and contemplating the nature of our world, he had a breakthrough into the illusory nature of our phenomenal world.

**The mind is at the root  
of our suffering**

It is not the nature of life itself that causes us difficulty. But the root of our afflictions lies in the way we understand the transitory aspect of life and our failure to recognize and truly accept its true nature. It is our mind and the model through which we perceive our observed world that causes us difficulty. The Buddha discovered that our mind is the creator of the illusory world, which we believe to be solid, everlasting and permanent. The mind is the mischievous master, the architect of all of our suffering and difficulty. It is the process of ‘Self-reification’ that makes our mind rigid and inflexible and prevents us from flowing along with the changing world.

With this spiritual awakening, the Buddha discovered the way to live happily. Looking for an absolute eternal ground of existence, an ontological search for something everlasting and permanent







is also a scheme of our mind. The way out of all confusions woven by our mind is to perform a **final spiritual jump** to transform the habitual energy of our builder, the workings of our mind. Spiritual life is a life of watching out for the movement of our mind -- and transforming his craftwork.

Thus, through direct observation and deep contemplation, the Buddha discovered the movement of the mind and the world of happiness or pain it creates. He was not deeply interested in the ontological ground of the mind as a theoretical abstraction. Rather, he applied this understanding in order to have a happy and peaceful life. He had discovered the epistemological way to liberate himself from his own suffering, his pains and his sorrows. He had discovered a particular truth, the truth of the unsatisfactory nature of life, the root of its unsatisfactory nature and the possibility for some joy and happiness by adapting our life accordingly to the principle of ever-changing life.

### Trust in experience and change

Based on this theoretical understanding or awakening himself to the fact of **No-self**, at the applied level, the Buddha taught us the practice of **non-**

**Self**. The Buddha declared that, our dissatisfaction with life is caused by the habit energy of fixing our life lives to the abstraction of a '**Self**'. There is an unconscious illusion that there is a 'me', and we try to do everything to satisfy this 'me', so that we can be happy. We consider this 'me' to be permanent, solid and unchangeable. Sometimes in our daily relationships, we feel so much frustration and pronounce desperately: "Do not bother; he/she will never change!", "Don't waste your time talking to him/her". But if you ask for advice from the Buddha, he might tell you: "Please wait a moment. There is a possibility that he/she will change. He/she will change when the right conditions for him/her to wake up are there, so he/she can see things differently, and determine to change and aspire to live in an awakened way. So please live your life in such a way that you can help to provide enough conditions for changes to happen in the other person. This possibility is there within each and every one of us."

The Buddha certainly had faith and belief. He was a religious believer, believing in his own discoveries and experiences. But he only accepted his faith as a mean to support his spiritual life as far as it concretely helped him to free himself and others from different dissatisfactions of life. The Bud-

dha applied the practice of **non-Self** to all aspects of his life and experiences, including his internal bodily, energetic, emotional and perceptual experiences and his external interactions with others in his surroundings. He learned to be consciously present with these experiences as much as possible and to embrace them with his understanding of their roots and loving compassion. He recognized them as they were while neither interpreting them based on his past experiences nor grasping and rejecting them. He did not allow his consciousness to get him confused between the experienced and its abstraction and reification. So he could avoid the resulting entanglement in his experiences due to this process of '**Self-reification**'. So to a great extent, he was able to maintain freedom of mind in the midst of his living experiences.

In the domain of living spiritual practice, the Buddha helped us to see that enlightenment is not a permanent everlasting experience or an attainable state, because living experiences are continuously changing. Rather, enlightenment is an epistemological **Act of Being Enlightened**, that is, an act of being fully conscious of what is experienced in the moment. With daily training, we will have enough strength to be free from the entanglement in that



stream of experienced. This **Act of Being Enlightened** is the core practice of **non-Self**, a training of not fixing oneself to a particular process and having enough freedom to be in touch with the **'Other Possibilities'** offered to us in the present moment. We live deeply in the present moment, fully recognizing the present consequences due to the past conditions, and anticipating the future outcome, but we are not caught either in the past or in the future. This is the core aspect of a spiritual life and this is what I call **'personal Applied Buddhism'**.

Learning from these experiences, we can find out for ourselves our own spiritual path and form our own religious belief system. These beliefs will not be based on ideas about life but instead based on our true experiences of living a life of freedom and joy, being free of our own pains and sorrows. This is the

foundation for our contribution to a peaceful world.

### **The capacity to be free**

We all have this capacity to be free, to reach the pure mind, the Buddha mind, when we free ourselves from the tendency to create such mental loops of abstraction, a process of **'Self-formation'**. When we practice **non-Self**, we learn to act as a mirror, fully reflecting. We learn to restrain ourselves from reacting quickly and aggressively or behaving negatively.

The practice is very simple, but we need to train ourselves diligently. For example, when something happens that causes us painful emotions, instead of reacting immediately, we can practice as follows: "Feeling the pain within me, I breathe in. Embracing the pain

within me, I breathe out. Feeling the pain within me, I breathe in. Feeling so much love for myself, I breathe out." We allow ourselves to experience and give ourselves enough space to embrace our experienced. We learn to come back and take good care of our pain and sorrow. The more we can do this, the more we can go to our fundamental ground and touch the Buddha within us. Creating loops of thinking and abstraction adds only more pain and supplies more energy and momentum to the wound within us.

The Buddha did not remain in the forest for long but instead went back, and re-integrating himself into his society and environment in order to help others. To have a spiritual life is learning to take care not only our own life but also of others' lives. This is the other important aspect of practicing **non-Self**; stepping out of ourselves in order to be in touch

Life becomes meaningful again  
 when we can relate more deeply to people and everything around us,  
 whether that is a tree, an animal, a bird, a friend  
 or even a casual acquaintance.

with and be a part of the **'Other Possibilities' of living**. To have a spiritual life is to have a life together with someone else, with the totality of life and not just the fragmented, broken pieces of life. That is the true meaning of a spiritual life. We have to learn to give ourselves completely to life as a service and to learn to receive whatever life offers to us as a blessing.

### Encountering life as part of our spiritual practice

In this process of being together, learning to understand one another's needs, one another's joy and happiness as well as one another's pain and suffering, so that we can accept, love and take care of each other, is a part of spiritual practice. What is the point of living if we go to the mountain and stay there for many years escaping human contact? Many people consider that a spiritual life. But that is not really a spiritual life. That is an escape. It could be called a spiritual escape, because you cannot face life. You have to go and to be quiet somewhere; you hide yourselves somewhere because life is not meaningful anymore. To bring meaning back to your life is a part of the spiritual training.

Life becomes meaningful again when we can relate more deeply to people and everything around us, whether that is a tree, an animal, a bird, a friend or even a casual acquaintance. We have to be in touch with everything whole-

heartedly. Working together, living together, is a very difficult process. Some people think that spiritual life is only for the monks and the nuns. In fact, lay friends need spiritual life more than the monastics do, because they have a family and long-term commitments to their family members.

### Caleidoscope of Buddhisms

The Buddha continued to practice, to teach and to share his life with others until he passed away, at 80 years old. Inspired by the way the Buddha lived his spiritual life for himself and for the others, later Buddhist generations developed a form of Buddhism known as Mahayana Buddhism. Its ideal is to cultivate the heart of compassion for the benefit of all living beings. We may regard this as a religious ideal of cultivating a **Compassionate-self**, which forms the basis for the social orientation of Engaged Buddhism. I call this aspect of practicing **'non-Self'** for the benefit of others, **'social Applied Buddhism'** or **'communal Applied Buddhism'**.

Indian Mahayana Buddhism entered into China and transformed itself into **Inspirational Buddhism**, which embodied the natural, simplistic and spontaneous Zen way of living. It entered into Tibet to become **Mystical Buddhism** and Vietnam to become **Engaged Buddhism**. Thanks to its flexible framework of **No-self** and adaptation to different living styles, in our mo-

dern time of globalization, Buddhism has entered many different parts of the world and provides rich and multiple colorful forms of spiritual life. We may have the atheistic form of Buddhism (a-Buddhism), the technological form of Buddhism (@-Buddhism), the individual form of Buddhism (i-Buddhism), the family form of Buddhism (f-Buddhism), the mindful community form of Buddhism (mc-Buddhism), the religious form of Buddhism (r-Buddhism), the monastic sangha form of Buddhism (ms-Buddhism), the scholastic and academic form of Buddhism (sa-Buddhism), the wake-up form of Buddhism (w-Buddhism) and so on.

Regardless of the multiple beautiful forms of Buddhism of our time, in order for it to be called a way of Buddhism, it should carry within it some elements of understanding the **No-self**, practicing the non-Self and cultivating the **Compassionate-self**. We may not be perfect or succeed all the times of in performing the **non-Self** act of liberation, but we certainly can enjoy some spiritual freedom, joy and stability for ourselves and for others when we learn to practice either personal or communal aspect of Applied Buddhism.

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**Thay Phap An** is the director and Dean of Studies of the EIAB. He was ordained in 1992 and still continues to learn and grow, offering new dharma doors combining Chi Kung (Qigong), Tai Chi and meditation, among many others. (Because of limited space in this newsletter I refer the interested reader to the full version of this article on our website [www.eiab.eu](http://www.eiab.eu).)



## A gentle monk: Brother Phap Tri

I was born in 1988 in a tiny village near Hanoi, as the second of three brothers. My mother is a farmer and we planted rice on our land. My father was a mason. As a child I used to tend water buffalo. Later when I came to read Thay's book 'Old Path, White Clouds' I was deeply touched by the story of Swasti, the young buffalo shepherd.

As a child I liked to play football, but without shoes. And most of the time we didn't have a proper football, instead we used a grapefruit.

After initial difficulties in elementary school I enjoyed learning up until I was 15. Later I was not allowed to play anymore or take care of the buffalo; I had to learn all the time. I know that my mother wanted to help me, but it was too much pressure and I stopped wanting to learn.

Up until the end of secondary school I didn't know anything about the Buddha; my family were not Buddhists and in the north of Vietnam there are not many temples either.

When I was 19 I went to Hanoi to study medicine. At university I had to learn a lot, and often suffered from headaches. At that time I read in a book in the library that meditation was good for keeping a clear head.

This was my reason for looking for a monastery, and a master, to help me learn meditation. One of my student friends was a Buddhist. He gave me a book from Thay. In our summer holiday we went together to Hue, to the Tu Hieu Temple (Thay's root temple),

to learn meditation. There for the first time I saw many monks and novices, including children as young as 10.

My friend and I stayed in the temple for 21 days. At night we slept in the meditation hall and when the monks came for morning sitting meditation at 3.30 a.m. we joined them. At the end of our stay it was clear: my vocation is to become a monk! But at that time I still thought that I should first complete my medicine studies and earn some money to support my family.

A little later however my father took early retirement and his company gave him a generous pay-off. I thought that that was enough money for him and my family. And so, after seven semesters, I felt free to leave my studies to realize my dream of becoming a monk.

I travelled from the university directly to Thay's root temple, and from there I phoned my family to tell them of my decision. I thought I had found a good way to help both myself and others. But my parents were so sad that I returned home to explain to them why I wanted to follow this path. Finally my parents agreed that I could at least try it out for a year.

They have long since reconciled themselves to my life as a monk, and are at peace with it. And as my younger brother followed in my footsteps a few years later they no longer had any problems at all.

In September 2005 I asked to be accepted as a novice at the temple in Hue. I wanted to be ordained by Thay, so

together with a group of 30 aspirants I travelled to Bat Nha monastery in South Vietnam in late autumn, where I was ordained as a novice by Thay in January 2006. At that time around 100 novices and aspirants led a very simple life there.

As part of the policy of rotation I returned to the Tu Hieu Temple in Hue with 10 other novices after a year. There we worked in the fields and planted rice.

Following the summer retreat of 2007 I was sent by the Order to Plum Village in France. I felt at home there from the very beginning and didn't miss Vietnam at all. My English was very bad, but I still always made an effort to come into contact with others. I learnt English with one of my English brothers, and in return I taught him some Vietnamese. On this brother's birthday 20 people from 15 different countries came together; this was the first time I had experienced such an international atmosphere and I enjoyed it immensely.

In winter I became Thay's attendant. This was a wonderful gift. I was able to have breakfast and dinner with Thay in his hut; Thay only ate lunch together with all the monks and lay friends in the dining hall. At dinner, Thay also invited other brothers to eat with him. Thay would say a few words to each brother to help him. I learned a great deal from this time.

Then in September 2008 the Sangha sent me to Germany, to the newly created EIAB. At first things here were difficult. The large, empty building weighed on our lives. Nonetheless, I soon



knew that I wanted to stay here. The building required a great amount of work, energy and practice to make it more positive and friendly.

At first I could not speak to our German friends who came to visit us. It wasn't until the third year here that we were prompted to take a German course. Even as a child languages were my weak point and that has remained the case. In particular I found German pronunciation difficult. So I concentrated completely on learning German, and only later did I once again work on my English. After a little while I began to be able to understand our guests better and better. This is very important for me. The German course brought me much joy.

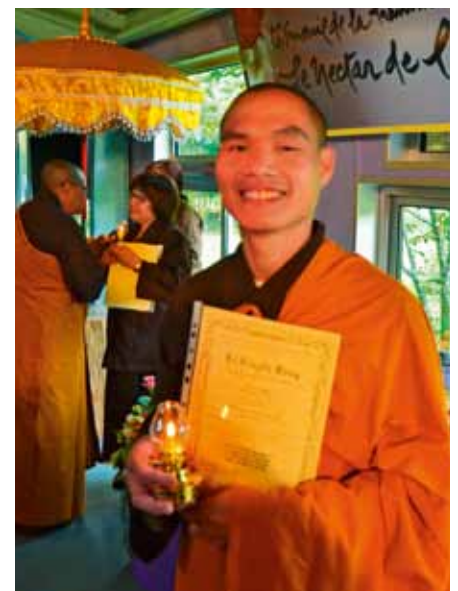
A few years ago I was in Italy with some brothers and sisters to lead a

retreat. While we were there we also visited Assisi. I felt very close to the Christian monks, for I understood, that their practice is very similar to ours.

I often help with the children's programme, as I really enjoy playing with the children.

I have no other wish for the future than to live in my monastic community and continue to practice. To receive the lamp from Thay and become a Dharma teacher means responsibility: I want to pass on the Dharma in order to help as many people as possible.

About my monastic name: the Vietnamese word Tri means knowledge.





# Beautiful family retreat in EIAB

**It is May 2014 and we are in the first Dutch speaking family retreat in the EIAB! We are with 15 children, 20 adults and 7 staff members.**

## What is compost?

During the introduction we talk about compost and flower watering. What is 'compost'? Kai, one of our youngest friends knows: "It means that old flowers die and become black, and than you put them near new flowers, and than it goes on, and on, and on!" That simple. -- The elder children practice one-minute sitting meditations.

## Being attentive

Adults and children filled in a form, before coming to the EIAB. We asked:

breaths, a bit of counting and there she (Jael) goes.

## Experience at home

To be able to join the retreat families were asked to have some experience in the practise. In our form we asked what experience the families have at home. They mentioned things like: "We eat in silence for 5 minutes." or "We invite the bell when we have a quarrel". Children can explain very well why they do such things. "It makes me calm down and that feels nice."

ty to play 'change trees' or to go on a treasure hunt with his child? Or do things like 'Big Steps' walking meditations, or simply hop to the next area? When Marjolijn ends a short dharma talk for children with "Okay, now I'll take a moment to switch to the adults", one of the mothers said "Please, don't".

## Activities for everyone

Most activities are for the whole group; children and adults stay together for most of the day. But there are also some separate activities, and there is time for the different families together and for children in different age groups. There are single parents, two mothers, grandparents with grandchildren and classic father-mother-children-families. The adults join a talk, question & answers and dharma sharings. Some men expressed the need to share with each other, as they feel that among themselves they share deeper or simply in another way than with women. This request is being met by an extra dharma sharing for men-only, which is appreciated a lot. Claude, who facilitates the dharma sharing, starts with "We men did not carry a baby in us for nine months. ... "



"What do you hope to take home, after the retreat?" Some children answered: "I hope that my stuffed animals will come home with me afterwards." So, all of us are very attentive that no stuffed animal will be left behind, in some corner of the building. – A nun wants to explain how to eat in mindfulness, but that is not necessary, a few deep

## Young again

We practise as a real community, and Tineke, whose joy in life is to 'spread the Dharma amongst children', offers us her love, inspiration and her skills. Adults join the children's' games and look younger and younger. How many times would a father, being a professor at the university have the opportuni-

Our staff is excellent: Ludo, Maria and Maria, Tineke, Ann, Claude. Marjolijn and Ellen. All with special qualities, working together in harmony, most of us also working together in the Netherlands, on days of mindfulness for families in Tricht (Vriendenhuis Nooitgedacht).





### Support from monastics

The nuns and monks support us as much as they can. They arrange tea and cookies, cook for us, offer sitting meditations early in the morning, but most important, they offer us a mindful setting. The children love to talk to them. Some have been looking forward to meet them, having good memories from other retreats. During introduction we ask the children: "Who has already seen nuns and monks?" All of them had. "And what strikes you when you see them?" They shout: "They are all bald, they all look the same, they have brown clothes, they have a brown skin, they all wear trousers!" But most of all: "They all smile! They all love children!"

One boy invites himself to eat with a group of monks, several times, with only a bowl of white rice before him. The monastics share little bites of other dishes with him and the boy eats everything. To his wondering mother he explains: "I eat it, because it makes them smile." Sometimes children

choose to join the walking meditation with the monastics, only to be so surprised when some monks quit the group for a moment to climb a tree, so quick and so high!

### First Noble Truth

During the adults activity we talk about the first Noble Truth, the existence of suffering in family life. Much of it has to do with worrying about children, about comparing real situations with ideal images, and about needs to find some rest in the middle of hectic life.

Some children feel at ease in the big group, others need more time, or more space for themselves. This is all welcome. Adults as well as children are given the opportunity to have a consultation with someone from the staff. But for the children it seems to work best to simply talk to other children.

### Bonfire

It is the last evening and families work together in teams. Some organize the



wood, others the bread, others make skewers, to put the bread in the fire. And of course there is an entertainment and a music team. It is a very beautiful evening.

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Marjolijn van Leeuwen, Nederlande, und  
Tineke Spruytenburg, Nederlande



# Wake Up Music Retreat

at EIAB in April 2014

Dear Thay,

Yesterday at the Dharma talk you said that you would like us to share with you how we generate joy and handle suffering.

We would like to share with you and the whole Sangha about the Wake Up Music Retreat we had at the EIAB in April. It was an amazing retreat where we generated so much joy, happiness and love.

After a very short period it felt like we'd known each others for years. There was a deep feeling of familiarity and to-

getherness. It seems these connections don't require time. A smile, a warm look or a gentle touch was enough to feel safe and accepted. During our last sharing one retreatant said: "You are all beautiful flowers and day by day I could see you blooming more beautifully."

Music has a unique power and this served as a catalyst. Held in the rich soil of the EIAB our hearts opened leading to inner and collective transformation. We invoked the name of Avalokiteshvara in a circle. With the growing energy of mindfulness we could learn to sense what was needed in each mo-

ment: silence, a soft song to hold our pain in tenderness, or – and we noticed that this is very important – a joyful, uplifting and energetic song, to "change the CD" and raise our spirits.

It is fascinating how quickly a fresh tune, rhythm or harmony can change our mood. Music's vibrations and synchronicity help us feel instant joy and connection, getting us in touch with our true nature. We also touch our heritage and ancestors with the music that has continued across space and time. While consuming music can be distraction, tuning mindfully into the kind of music that is full of wholesome ener-

## Clap along if you know



# Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth

gies has helped us to generate joy and transform parts of our suffering.

We had some tensions while organising the retreat. On lazy day we facilitators had a long Dharma sharing, staying silent for some time or perhaps playing music. We found this enabled healing and happiness: being there for ourselves and each other with our true presence, love, joy and compassion.

It is so wonderful to feel connected and to both be loved and give our love and presence to others.

We are deeply grateful for all you give, do and teach and for the great support and trust of the brothers and sisters – thank you so much, dear Thay and beloved community!

Dear Thay, what you shared yesterday about the vow you made after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King “to continue Sangha building” really touched us deeply.

We are very committed and motivated to building and nourishing Sanghas and we are sure that the Wake Up movement will grow beautifully with the support of you, your continuation body in us and the whole Sangha.

Many smiles and lots of love,

*Charlie, Jona, Julia und Nadine  
Plum Village, 7.6.2014*

# happiness is to you

what







## The gardens of the EIAB: How it all began ...

There was once a small Japanese Zen garden in the Oberbergischen municipality of Nümbrecht, which opened its doors once or twice a year for those interested in gardens. One Sunday in 2012 Mr Hamburger, Thay Phap An's German teacher, visited this garden and recounted details of his visit at the EIAB. How nice it would be if they also could have such a garden, but who is going to create it....?

I'm now already in the third year of creating an attractive garden from a site that was originally little more than building rubble. I began to lay out the first small garden under the fire escape in 2012. To cover the building rubble a gardening landscape company delivered plenty of topsoil. Once this was done I could begin with the planting and landscaping.

Only a short time afterwards the next Japanese garden was laid out to the left and right of the main building within only two days. Another thick layer of topsoil was needed to be able to plant in this large area and here we also placed decorative rocks. The first bu-

ses with guests for the coming retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh were already on their way as I began to put the plants in the earth. I could only create emphasis with large rocks and selected plants, but they still created a beautiful picture.

In 2013 the next challenge arrived, namely the landscaping around the stupa. We completely redirected the path to the stupa. Here too plenty of top soil was needed, if any plants were to be put into the earth. Together with Dagmar, Winfried and Ralf I began to build a stone wall and to plant flower beds. A fountain that now burbles away on

sunny days was put in place and the area around the stupa covered with a layer of gravel. Several benches now invite visitors to sit and meditate and as they walk around there are larger-than-life Buddhas for them to discover. We have also created a decorative design for the area beneath the entrance gate.

This year things will continue to the left and right of the large steps in front of the main building. Where we could only put in solitary plants in 2012, I will now create a new landscape over the level ground and add small plants



# How Spirituality helped me to find **back to life**

Often only a terrible event wakes us up from our shallow life. Until two years ago I never thought of death at all, until the doctor informed me about the diagnosis: cancer, a rather aggressive form of prostate cancer. I was not yet 68 years old and I always had felt fit, had never been sick and I should die now? I felt terror: how long would I be able to live? How is it to die? But I cannot leave behind my sweetheart with whom I have spent the last 50 years of my life! And are there still things I have to sort out? Question upon question.

On a camping place we then met Marion, our guardian angel. She took care of our fears, we had a long discussion with her and we meditated together. I never cried as much as I did that afternoon.

She succeeded in planting a seed of hope in us. During the following days we visited her again several times. One day she invited us to come with her to the Buddhist monastery in Waldbröl. We were looking for any kind of help and gratefully agreed to come along.

Already during our first visit in the EIAB we were touched by the great strength of the Waldbröl Sangha. Walking meditation and guided sitting



meditation allowed us to come to a rest. Evening meditations and other events at the EIAB brought us step by step further on our way.

I learned to accept my illness. Life started to organize itself in a new way. The „big“ things lost their importance, became insignificant. Awareness of the „small“ things enriches our lives every day and gives us joy and happiness again and again.

I could understand the Buddha saying that all suffering has its origine in ourselves.

My cancer was no longer a terrible accident, it was the result of my life prior to my illness.

Then I understood that we had to let go. Everything is impermanent and subject to continuous change. I learned to look at all life as a beautiful gift. And it was a very important insight, that life takes place only in the present moment.

This time has left its traces: it has enabled my sweetheart and myself to transform our suffering. We never have lived as intensively and so happily as in the last months. Every day is a precious gift for us.

My heart is full  
of gratitude to All!

*Theo, Waldbröl Sangha*

and ground cover. There are, for example, just a few azalea to add a bit of colour.

Often people cannot understand why I do it, work voluntarily in the wind and all weathers at the EIAB without being a Buddhist myself! I can only say that it brings me a lot of joy to be able to create a garden for such loving and

sincere nuns and monks at the EIAB. Working in the garden I feel totally relaxed, and am completely present with myself. I feel good doing what I do.

Professionally I am a freelance artist (painter) and lecture at the VHS Oberberg. I also offer workshops at the EIAB on the subject of 'meditative painting'.

I would like to thank Thay Phap An and Sister Song Nghiem, to the nuns and monks, Dagmar, Winfried, Ralf and the many helpers who have given me such energetic support.

*Barbara Niessen*

## New EIAB Courses that are offered (in addition to the courses listed in our printed program 2014)

- | **26.09.-03.10. WAKE UP** Retreat for Young People
- | **10.-12.10. REIKI II** Ernestine Hakea Graf, Frank Klüner and Sister Song Nghiem
- | **04.-07.12. TAI CHI CHUAN – HEALTH AND JOY OF LIFE THROUGH INNER CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS – PART 2** Course which Brother Phap Cu and Sister Song Nghiem
- | **05.-07.12. MEDITATIVES MALEN** Course which Barbara Niesen and Sister Bi Nghiem
- | **11.-14.12. STRESS REDUCTION AND BUILDING INNER ENERGY – THROUGH MEDITATION, DEEP RELAXATION, QI-GONG AND TAI CHI** Course with Brother Phap An, Sister Song Nghiem and other brothers and sisters of the EIAB
- | **18.-21.12. MINDFULLY PLANNING A MEANINGFUL FUTURE – USING PRINCIPLES FROM BUDDHISM AND FROM PSYCHOLOGY IN A CREATIVE WAY**  
Course with Jörg Dierkes and Sister Song Nghiem

## Here following once more the dates for our popular family retreats 2014

- | **16.-19. October 2014 AUTUMN RETREAT** With the nuns and monks of the EIAB
- | **26. December 2014 – 02. January 2015 CELEBRATING LIFE – NEW YEAR'S RETREAT**  
With the nuns and monks of the EIAB

The EIAB Course Program for 2015 is available upon request and can also be found on our website: [www.eiab.eu](http://www.eiab.eu).

In December the 2015 Program will be available. Please check our website this autumn for information about 2014 courses.

Registration for all retreats:

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Registration by email:

[registrar@eiab.eu](mailto:registrar@eiab.eu)

Other questions:

[info@eiab.eu](mailto:info@eiab.eu)



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

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