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Editorial: EIAB. Layout and Graphic:
Dieter Spitzer. Thanks to all who supported
us in editing, translation and photos.

Cover: Thây's calligraphy,
inscribed in German on
EIAB's bell, means
"for a better world".

10th Anniversary

From war, to peace, to the cosmos

As the European Institute of Applied Buddhism (EIAB) prepares to mark our first decade, Director and Dean of Studies Thầy Pháp Ấn looks deeply at how the suffering of the Vietnam War formed the backdrop to EIAB's establishment by our beloved teacher Thầy (Thích Nhất Hạnh). He also describes how healing and transformation have been the Institute's primary building blocks – both spiritual and physical – during these formative years.



Thầy's powerful teaching "Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World" is engraved in his elegant calligraphy across the Gate of Interbeing at EIAB's main entrance. Above, Thầy Pháp Ấn explains the meaning behind the gate's construction and name as he takes visiting members of Hong Kong's Golden Moment Sangha on a tour of EIAB in May 2017. Photo courtesy of Sarah Monks.

Acknowledgement: The author would like to express his deep gratitude to Ms. Sarah Monks for her research into the writings and speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Vietnam War and her detailed, creative and careful editing work; and to Sr. Song Nghiêm for her spiritual intuition in encouraging him to represent Thầy at a major event in Montreal (please see page 19) just days after the unexpected and sudden passing away of the author's father. Sr. Song Nghiêm is also to be thanked for first suggesting that a talk by the author in Norway last October should be shared with a wider audience through incorporation into this special feature article marking EIAB's 10th Anniversary.

A TIME TO REMEMBER – AND REFLECT

Since visiting Norway, home of the Nobel Peace Prize, to lead an EIAB outreach program last October, I have been moved to reflect upon how, 50 years earlier, the Nobel Peace Laureate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., nominated our teacher, Thầy, for the 1967 Peace Prize. Though none was awarded that year, Dr. King recognized in Thầy “an apostle of peace and non-violence”, like himself.

At the time, I was a small boy in central Vietnam, crawling away and hiding in terror as soldiers camped in front of our house at sunset, preparing for a military strike. I thought to myself “there is no future”. I began to see no point in growing up as it would mean becoming a soldier and killing or being killed. I became ill and suffered for years from deep sadness and depression, especially at sunset.

How joyful I feel, now, to know that all the while I was sinking into despair as a child, Thầy and Dr. King were working tirelessly together to end the war and create hope for a future of peace in Vietnam and beyond. How grateful I am that my own suffering from war led me eventually to Plum Village in France, the first monastic community Thầy established in exile and where I first experienced personal healing and transformation.

The inspiring story of the partnership between Thầy and Dr. King is, I believe, worth sharing anew as we remember Dr. King 50 years after his assassination¹ and, in EIAB’s 10th anniversary year, contemplate how deep roots in the suffering of war and discrimination prepared us for our primary mission: to help people recognize, embrace and transform their painful feelings and emotions, and to resolve conflicts in their relationships at home, in their workplaces and within their communities.



To call the world’s attention to the repression and suffering of Vietnamese Buddhists, Ven. Thích Quảng Đức self-immolated on 11 June 1963. This photograph is displayed on the ancestral altar of EIAB, in loving remembrance of Ven. Thích Quảng Đức, his courage and compassion. It nourishes and strengthens our Bodhisattva ideal of cultivating love and peace. World Press Photo by Malcolm Browne of The Associated Press.

“PLEASE KILL THE REAL ENEMIES OF MAN”

Thầy and Dr. King met at a pivotal time in each other’s lives. Both were towering intellects, spiritual leaders and social activists at the forefront of non-violent movements for radical change amid escalating violence in their respective countries. Both had experienced threats, oppression and danger. Through humanity, compassion, leadership and respect for each other, they brought the Vietnam peace movement and the US civil rights movement together. This meeting of two enlightened minds helped to change the course of history.

The relationship began on 1 June 1965, when Thầy directly addressed Dr. King in an open letter entitled “In Search of the Enemy of Man”.² This was shortly before US President Lyndon B. Johnson took a further step towards committing

America to full-scale war in Vietnam by announcing he would raise “our fighting strength” almost immediately from 75,000 to 125,000 men, with more to be sent later.³

Already, Dr. King, the Nobel Peace Laureate of 1964, was wrestling with his conscience over Vietnam. But “I did not march, I did not demonstrate, I did not rally.”⁴ He believed that the bloodshed would end sooner if Americans moved from the battlefield to the peace table, without prolonging debate over the war. The strategy of the veteran civil rights leader was, at this time, to be “a quiet actor” pushing behind the scenes for peace through negotiation.

In his letter, Thầy sought to explain to Western Christians that the widely-publicized self-burning of four Vietnamese Buddhist monks and a nun in the summer of 1963, beginning

with that of Ven. Thích Quảng Đức – whom Thầy had known personally – was not suicide. It was not despair or even protest; but an act of courage, love, and compassion of the highest order; an act of hope, an aspiration for something good in the future. The monastics were willing to suffer and die for the sake of their people at a time when Buddhist leaders and followers were being discriminated against and brutally suppressed by South Vietnam's Ngô Đình Diệm regime.⁵

Thầy said that he believed with all his heart that those who had sacrificed their lives in this agonizing way did not seek the deaths of their oppressors but only a change in their policy. Their “enemies” were not people, Thầy said, but intolerance, fanaticism, dictatorship, greed, hatred, and discrimination within the heart of man.

“I also believe with all of my being that the struggle for equality and freedom you lead in Birmingham, Alabama, is not really aimed at the whites but only at intolerance, hatred, and discrimination. These are real enemies of man – not man himself,” he wrote to Dr. King. “In our unfortunate fatherland we are

trying to plead desperately: do not kill man, even in man's name. Please kill the real enemies of man which are present everywhere, in our very hearts and minds.”⁶

“YOU CANNOT BE SILENT”

Thầy went on to describe how countless Vietnamese peasants and children were being killed every day in a tragic war that had already gone on for 20 years. “I am sure that since you have been engaged in one of the hardest struggles for equality and human rights, you are among those who understand fully, and who share with all their heart, the indescribable suffering of the Vietnamese people.”

Thầy put it to Dr. King that “the world's greatest humanists” would not remain silent. He continued: “You yourself cannot remain silent. America is said to have a strong religious foundation and spiritual leaders would not allow American political and economic doctrines to be deprived of the spiritual element. You cannot be silent since you have already been in action and you are in action because, in you, God is in action, too...”

“I WAS IN THE PRESENCE OF A HOLY PERSON”

Thầy left Vietnam in May 1966 for a US speaking tour to bring Americans first-hand information about “the real situation in Vietnam”⁷ which, for the most part, they were not getting from their media, and to plead for an end to the suffering. It was in Chicago, on 1 June 1966, that he and Dr. King met in person for the first time. Thầy later wrote of that meeting: “From the first moment, I knew I was in the presence of a holy person. Not just his good work but his very being was a source of great inspiration for me.”⁸

At a joint press conference, Thầy called for non-violent ways to remove “the real enemy”: anger, hatred and discrimination. He said that Dr. King's activities for civil rights and human rights were perfectly in accord with efforts in Vietnam to stop the conflict.

For his part, Dr. King came out very strongly against the war. “That was the day we combined our efforts to work for peace in Vietnam and to fight for civil rights in the US,” Thầy later wrote.⁹ It was also around this time that Thầy was banned from returning to Vietnam, forcing him into what would become nearly four decades of exile.



“THIS GENTLE BUDDHIST MONK FROM VIETNAM”

Encountering Thầy had a profound effect on Dr. King and his deeper awakening to the humanitarian and moral challenges the Vietnam War posed for the world. On 25 January 1967, Dr. King sent the following letter to the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo:

Thầy and Dr. King held a press conference in Chicago on 1 June 1966.

Gentlemen:

As the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate of 1964, I now have the pleasure of proposing to you the name of Thich Nhat Hanh for that award in 1967.

I do not personally know of anyone more worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize than this gentle Buddhist monk from Vietnam.

This would be a notably auspicious year for you to bestow your Prize on the Venerable Nhat Hanh. Here is an apostle of peace and non-violence, cruelly separated from his own people while they are oppressed by a vicious war which has grown to threaten the sanity and security of the entire world.

Because no honor is more respected than the Nobel Peace Prize, conferring that Prize on Nhat Hanh would itself be a most generous act of peace. It would remind all nations that men of good will stand ready to lead warring elements out of an abyss of hatred and destruction. It would re-awaken men to the teaching of beauty and love found in peace. It would help to revive hopes for a new order of justice and harmony.

I know Thich Nhat Hanh, and am privileged to call him my friend. Let me share with you some things I know about him. You will find in this single human being an awesome range of abilities and interests.

He is a holy man, for he is humble and devout. He is a scholar of immense intellectual capacity. The author of ten published volumes, he is also a poet of superb clarity and human compassion. His academic discipline is the Philosophy of Religion, of which he is Professor at Van Hanh, the Buddhist University he helped found in Saigon. He directs the Institute for Social Studies at this University. This amazing man also is editor of Thien My, an influential Buddhist weekly publication. And he is Director of Youth for Social Service, a Vietnamese institution which trains young people for the peaceable rehabilitation of their country.

Thich Nhat Hanh today is virtually homeless and stateless. If he were to return to Vietnam, which he passionately wishes to do, his life would be in great peril. He is the victim of a particularly brutal exile because he proposes to carry his advocacy of peace to his own people. What a tragic commentary this is on the existing situation in Vietnam and those who perpetuate it.

The history of Vietnam is filled with chapters of exploitation by outside powers and corrupted men of wealth, until even now the Vietnamese are harshly ruled, ill-fed, poorly housed, and burdened by all the hardships and terrors of modern warfare.

Thich Nhat Hanh offers a way out of this nightmare, a solution acceptable to rational leaders. He has traveled the world, counseling statesmen, religious leaders, scholars and writers, and enlisting their support. His ideas for peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity.

I respectfully recommend to you that you invest his cause with the acknowledged grandeur of the Nobel Peace Prize of 1967. Thich Nhat Hanh would bear this honor with grace and humility.

Sincerely,

Martin Luther King, Jr.¹⁰

“NEVER AGAIN WILL I BE SILENT....”

In his autobiography, Dr. King pinpoints the “existential moment” when he knew he finally had to speak out against America’s involvement in the war. It was after reading an article entitled “The children of Vietnam”. He said to himself: “Never again will I be silent on an issue that is destroying the soul of our nation and destroying thousands and thousands of little children in Vietnam.”¹¹

In February 1967, at a symposium in Beverly Hills, California, Dr. King presented a searing analysis of what he called “The Casualties of the War in Vietnam” which, he said, included America’s principles and values – and some one million Vietnamese children.¹² He insisted that the US was in an untenable position morally and politically. “We must combine the fervor of the civil rights movement with the peace movement,” he urged. “We must demonstrate, teach and preach, until the very foundations of

our nation are shaken. We must work unceasingly to lift this nation we love to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humane-ness.”

The speech provoked criticism of Dr. King across the political spectrum, including from his own supporters. But he was not to be deterred. In an impassioned speech entitled “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence”, delivered at the Riverside Church in New York City on 4 April 1967, Dr.

King took his strongest personal stand against America's "disgraceful" commitment to "this tragic war".¹³

"Over the past two years, as I have moved to break the betrayal of my own silences and to speak from the burnings of my own heart, as I have called for radical departures from the destruction of Vietnam, many persons have questioned me about the wisdom of my path," he told the overflowing congregation. "At the heart of their concerns this query has often loomed large and loud: Why are you speaking about war, Dr. King? Why are you joining the voices of dissent? Peace and civil rights don't mix, they say."

Risking his future as the leader of the civil rights movement, as well as his relationship with the Johnson White House, Dr. King argued that the issues of the war in Vietnam and civil rights in America were inseparable. He noted the cruel irony that young black men crippled by American society were being sent "to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem". Dr. King did not stop there. He knew that the issue of the war in Vietnam had gone beyond civil rights to the very soul of America. "If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read Vietnam. It can never be saved so long as it destroys the deepest hopes of men the world over."

FINGERPRINTS ON HISTORY

Dr. King painted a devastating picture for the Riverside congregation of the war's impact on the Vietnamese people and society, echoing much of what Thầy had revealed through his scholarly writings and speaking tours. "We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village," said Dr. King. "We have destroyed their land and their crops. We have cooperated in the crushing of the nation's only non-Communist revolutionary political force - the unified Buddhist church. We have

supported the enemies of the peasants of Saigon. We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men."

He called for the madness to cease immediately, saying that the initiative of the war was America's and the initiative to stop it must also be America's. "This is the message of the great Buddhist leaders of Vietnam. Recently one of them wrote these words:

'Each day the war goes on the hatred increases in the heart of the Vietnamese and in the hearts of those of humanitarian instinct. The Americans are forcing even their friends into becoming their enemies. It is curious that the Americans, who calculate so carefully on the possibilities of military victory, do not realize that in the process they are incurring deep psychological and political defeat. The image of America will never again be the image of revolution, freedom and democracy, but the image of violence and militarism.'

The unnamed Buddhist leader whose words Dr. King quoted was Thầy.¹⁴

"MARTIN, THEY CALL YOU A BODHISATTVA"

In May 1967, soon after the Riverside address, Thầy and Dr. King met again at a conference entitled "Peace on Earth", organized in Geneva by the World Council of Churches. It was there, over a convivial private breakfast in Dr. King's hotel room, that they continued their brotherly discussion on peace, freedom, the building of community and what steps America should take to end the war.

Thầy said to him: "Martin, do you know something? In Vietnam they call you a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being trying to awaken other living beings and help them move towards more compassion and understanding." Thầy later wrote that he was glad he had the

chance to say that because, in less than a year, on the exact anniversary of his historic Riverside address, Dr. King was dead.¹⁵

"I was in New York when I heard the news of his assassination; I was devastated. I could not eat; I could not sleep," Thầy later recalled. "I made a deep vow to continue building what he called 'the beloved community' not only for myself but for him also. I have done what I promised Martin Luther King Jr. And I think that I have always felt his support."¹⁶

KEEPING THẦY'S PROMISE

Those who keep Dr. King's legacy alive describe his Beloved Community as a global vision in which all forms of racism and discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood, in which love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred and in which peace with justice shall prevail over war and military conflict.¹⁷

I look upon EIAB's beloved community both as a manifestation of Thầy's promise to Dr. King and as a continuation - far into the future - of Thầy's Bodhisattva Vow of Great Compassion. EIAB is a modern Buddhist peace project embodying Thầy's positive response to suffering and difficulties in the world of today. His deep wish in establishing EIAB is that future generations may benefit from "studying the Dharma and putting into practice the teachings of the Buddha in ways that are relevant and effective in our time."¹⁸

Thầy has tasked us to build EIAB into an enduring institution that is formal, intellectually rigorous and systematic in carrying out this work. We are, over time, to serve as a repository of learning for other Plum Village centers and to be the main campus, or "hub" - within Plum Village's global network of practice centers - for administering the training and certification of Dharma Teachers.

On 4 July 2007, Thầy outlined his vision for EIAB and its future role, in a handwritten note (reproduced below).

the European Institute of Applied Buddhism
 The EIAB provides courses, workshops, sessions of training to helping students and others to

- release the tension in ^{the} bodies,
- reduce stress and pain ⁱⁿ bodies,
- recognize, embrace and transform painful feelings and emotions
- look deeply to understand their suffering and the suffering of the people around
- to use compassionate listening and to bring speech to help release suffering and to remove wrong perception on self and on others,
- to restore communion and to reconcile etc...

by learning studying the Dharma and by putting into practice the teachings of the Buddha ~~that~~ in ways that are relevant and effective in our time.

The EIAB trains Dharma teachers, both monastic and lay, that have the capacity to provide ~~them~~ the teaching and the practice in the context of individual, family, community, workplace, etc...

All courses, retreats, workshops and sessions of training given by the EIAB, ~~for~~ offer at its main campus or other campuses are creditable. It is the Council of Dharma teachers of the EIAB to decide when a trainee can be made into a Dharma teacher, ~~as a person~~

that is capable of offering the right teaching and the way of practice, the person himself or herself is recognized as having obtained transformation and healing thanks to the practice -

Longtime practitioners, after having enjoyed transformation and healing, may be motivated to become Dharma teachers to help others. They may gather all the credits they have of their studies + practice, and come ~~to~~ ask the Dharma Council Teachers Council what ~~other conditions~~ whether they are qualified as a Dharma Teacher. In the case they need some more ^{studies} training and practice, the DTC will recommend these to them, before they are bestowed with the title of DT.

In Thầy's words: "It is (for) the council of Dharma Teachers of the EIAB to decide when a trainee can be made into a Dharma Teacher, a person that is capable of offering the right teaching and the way of practice... (and) is recognized as having obtained transformation and healing thanks to the practice."¹⁹ Thầy goes on to say that long-term practitioners who - having enjoyed transformation and healing - "may be motivated to become Dharma Teachers to help others", may consolidate all the credits they have received from their studies and practices and ask the Dharma Teachers Council (DTC) at EIAB whether they are qualified as Dharma Teachers (DT). "In the case they need some more studies and practice, the DTC will recommend these to them, before they are bestowed with the title of DT".

My personal connection to EIAB goes back to a spring day at Plum Village in 2006 when Thầy asked me to come to his hermitage. I thought it must be to discuss plans for his next visit to Vietnam. Instead, when I entered, Thầy was busy writing pieces of calligraphy, repeating the words "European Institute of Applied Buddhism". He carried on doing that for some time. Then he stopped, put down his brush, poured me a cup of tea and said: "This is your next project after you finish your work in Vietnam."

Thầy's intuitive choice for the Institute's location was Germany, a country whose leaders were among those who made war in the first half of the 20th Century but whose people now stand as exemplars of peace. Thầy's idea was to create an Institute not just for Germany

but for the whole of Europe, taking advantage of the fact that Germany is in relatively easy reach of many countries in Northern and Central Europe.²⁰

Thầy had German Sangha friends out looking at dozens of properties over many months before deciding upon a large wooded estate at Waldröhl, 64 km east of Cologne (please also see article beginning on page 30). He saw that it included a splendid old building, large and impressive enough for his pan-European vision.

At our local press conference to announce EIAB's establishment, Thầy raised a laugh when he told one journalist that it was Waldröhl that chose Plum Village, not the other way round. We soon began to understand, though, that Thầy had not been joking.



Thầy practicing his mindful art of calligraphy (above right), next to his rendering of “The European Institute of Applied Buddhism”. We adopted his artwork for our official nameplate (above left), which is displayed in front of the Asoka Institute.

WALDBRÖL CHOSE US

EIAB’s 150 meter-long main building, now our Asoka Institute, was constructed from 1895 to 1897 as a hospital for the mentally and physically handicapped, under the management of the Protestant Congregation. During the Nazi era, the building was commandeered. Between November

1938 and January 1939 all the patients – close to 700 in number – were forced out of the hospital and moved to a small town nearby.²¹

No one knows their exact fate but there can be little doubt that they suffered greatly. Under the Nazi’s “pure race” ideology, mentally and physically handicapped people were considered

a threat to “Aryan genetic purity” and a “liability for the society”. They were subject to sterilization, forced abortion and “elimination” through euthanasia. After World War 2, the building served as a general and maternity hospital and then a Germany military facility, after which it stood empty from April 2006 – until it came to Thầy’s attention in late January 2008.



Thầy seated with Mr. Peter Koester, the Mayor of Waldbröl, at the press conference on 12 September 2008 announcing EIAB’s formal establishment.

Less than two months later, Thầy visited Waldbröl to inspect the property. Satisfied that it was the right place for establishing the future Institute, he gave instructions for the acquisition process to begin.



After a search lasting many months, Thầy and Sr. Chân Không visit Waldbröl on Friday 7 March 2008 to view a property shortlisted as a site for the future Institute. (Above left) Thầy, accompanied by his attendant Br. Pháp Hiện, is introduced to the site by EIAB's first Director, Dr. Thuc-Quyen Nguyen-Ryzek (Chân Diệu), who has arranged the viewing. A few paces behind, Sr. Chân Không, begins her own inspection, while Thầy seems well pleased, already, with what he sees. He proceeds up to the stately main building and steps mindfully over its threshold. Photos courtesy of Bui Huu Tuong & Trang.

In September at Plum Village, Thầy requested me to meet with the Sangha so we could identify which brothers and sisters would come with me to the new center in Germany. Over the next two days, Plum Village's three hamlets met to make their nominations.

On Sunday 7 September 2008, after formal lunch at New Hamlet, we presented ourselves in front of the

Buddha altar and touched the earth to the Buddha, Thầy and the Sangha to ask permission to leave Plum Village and move to Waldbröl. That afternoon, three vans of monastics left New Hamlet for Germany. The entire Sangha gathered to bid us farewell. It was very moving and we were all happy.

Three days later, on 10 September 2008, we arrived at the entrance to the main

building – our future Asoka Institute. We waited for our lawyer, Dr. Alexander Puplick, to invite us inside to proceed with the acquisition formalities, helped by EIAB's first Director, Dr. Thuc-Quyen Nguyen-Ryzek (Chân Diệu).

Perhaps because of his Bodhisattva vow to help all sentient beings, I believe that Thầy knew along why we had been called to Waldbröl. He knew it was a



Fresh from Plum Village, on 10 September 2008 members of Thầy's new monastic Sangha in Germany take our first steps on the 5.7 hectare Waldbröl estate he has selected for EIAB. This is also our first glimpse of the imposing building that will become the Asoka Institute.



We feel joyful as we approach EIAB's lawyer, Dr. Alexander Puplick. Together, we are to meet with representatives from the Institute for Federal Real Estate, the public agency managing the sale of the property on behalf of the federal government of Germany.



With a welcoming smile, Dr. Puplick (left) invites the Sangha to ascend the grand staircase leading to our future Asoka Institute.



We wait in happy anticipation to be called in so that the formalities may begin.



Thầy Pháp Ân discussing the purchase process with Dr. Puplick, left, and EIAB's first Director, Dr. Thuc-Quyen Nguyen-Ryzek (Chân Diệu).



Sangha members already look to EIAB's future, while waiting for the day's formalities to conclude.



Dr. Puplick carefully reviews documents prepared for signature.



Done!



EIAB has arrived! On 10 September 2008, we begin our new life at Waldbröl.

request from the Nazi's invisible victims for him to help them, just as he had helped victims of discrimination and war in Vietnam.

As a scientist, I usually have a hard time believing in the invisible world, even though as a monk I have studied Buddhist teachings on the subject. But after coming to EIAB, vivid dreams persuaded me that the invisible world was, indeed, trying to communicate. I also experienced strange phenomena, such as a small bell or a plate of food inexplicably flying out of my hand and onto the floor. While there remains a degree of mystery about all this, the energy of past suffering was palpable and clearly needed to be transformed.

At the same time, multiple issues of a more worldly nature were also crying out for attention as we set about developing the Institute. The challenge was how to respond to so many needs, both spiritual and physical, in tandem!

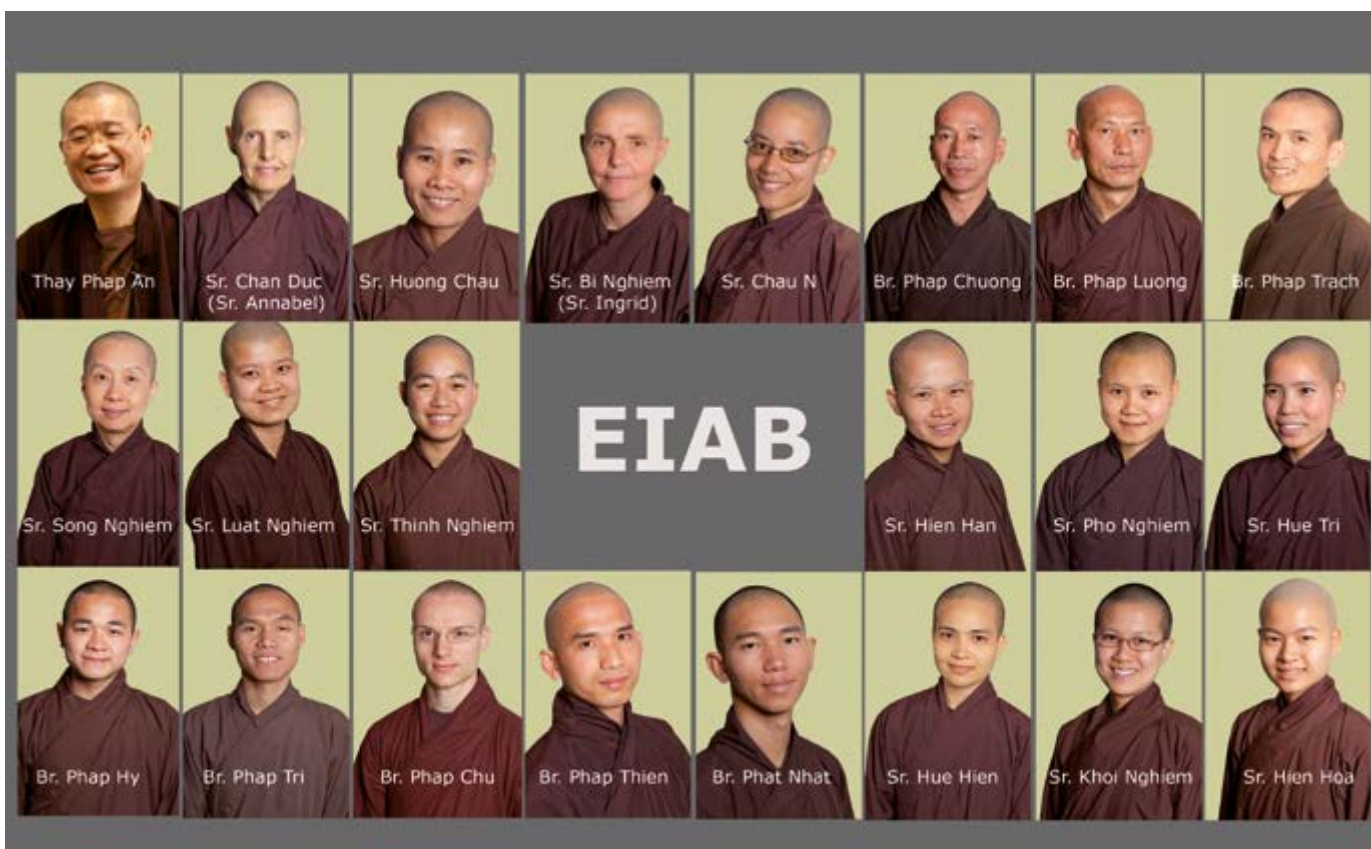
GETTING ON OUR FEET

EIAB's new monastic community spent our first icy winter huddled in just a few rooms of the vast, echoey Asoka Institute, with neither heating nor drinking water. It certainly brought home our status as pioneers of another of Thầy's pioneering projects! The huge structure required a new heating system, new water pipes and electrical rewiring to make it habitable and compliant with local fire safety and other building regulations. When renovation turned the Asoka Institute into a construction site, we were thankful, in September 2009, to have the nearby Great Compassion Monastery to move into. Its acquisition by EIAB meant that we now had a facility that could accommodate students taking our courses.

Those early years were, in effect, EIAB's "soft opening". It was essential to spend time developing faculty, curricula and a solid program of courses for

the Institute, and to start building the administrative infrastructure that would enable EIAB one day to fulfil the global "hub" role outlined by Thầy. It was equally necessary to consider the overall implications for human and other resources, not least the need for new funding for the next phase of the Asoka Institute's renovation and to build a meditation hall.

EIAB's existence was still new and relatively unknown. It was important to promote the Institute more widely if we were to succeed in attracting more students and in raising additional funds that would help place EIAB's operations on a stronger, more sustainable footing. In the spring of 2010, while in Hong Kong for a retreat, I discussed these challenges with supportive lay friends, including Professor Eva Yuen an artist, curator and professor of art and design, and Mrs Therese Khan.



The first 22 monastics (pictured²²) to reside at EIAB needed to summon up a pioneering spirit when we moved into the Asoka Institute. During our first winter (2008–09), we had neither heating nor drinking water. Photo courtesy of Rolf Franke – Film- und Theaterfotografie www.actorsphotography.de.



A poster for EIAB's exhibition of original calligraphy by Thầy. First mounted in Hong Kong in 2010, the exhibition is now permanently housed at the Asoka Institute.

We came up with an idea for EIAB to create a fund-raising exhibition of Thầy's mindful calligraphy, with a magnificent accompanying art book whose sale would also raise funds. We knew, too, from Qi Gong masters that Thầy's calligraphy radiates the peaceful, positive energy of his compassion. The proposed exhibition, therefore, would also provide a means for EIAB to transform the block of pain and suffering lingering from the past. Moreover, mounting an exhibition of Thầy's work would be a wonderful way to leverage the Asoka Institute's abundant space once the ground floor renovation was complete.

Professor Yuen and Mrs Khan flew to Germany to present the exhibition proposal to Thầy at EIAB, where he was leading the Summer Retreat. He graciously agreed. Over the summer of 2010 Thầy produced many new pieces of calligraphy. Plans moved swiftly

ahead for a travelling exhibition to be mounted first in Hong Kong at the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011,²³ before moving to Taiwan and Canada, then eventually taking up permanent residence at EIAB.

SHOWING OUR LOVE TO SUFFERING SPIRITS

Two weeks after we moved into EIAB, I reported to Thầy the strange phenomena we had experienced and mentioned my dreams. He requested us to offer our energy of compassion every day to the wandering spirits. That November, Thầy returned to EIAB after a teaching tour of India and offered a public talk at the nearby hospital. He also investigated further the Asoka Institute's past. During walking meditation one morning, he came across a memorial steel plate dedicated to those who had suffered there at the hands of the Nazis. He was most moved and wrote a letter

of reconciliation which we still read aloud every day during the ceremony for wandering spirits.

In early 2012, EIAB Sangha members proposed that we invite local residents, communities, school children and members of other Buddhist centers around the world to sew hearts in memory of each of the 700 handicapped patients the Nazis had removed from the former hospital. It was a great idea and the response was overwhelming. We ended up with more than 1,400 beautiful hearts, enough for a significant exhibition.

As we prepared for the exhibition of Thầy's mindful calligraphy a unique opportunity presented itself to bring the two initiatives together – the hearts project and Thầy's sacred art – in one all-embracing, holistic exhibition on

the theme of suffering, healing and transformation.

We conceptualized the exhibition, to be mounted in the newly-renovated ground floor of the Asoka Institute, as the branch of a lotus plant whose roots begin in the mud of suffering and whose blooms, rising out of the mud, are the transformation of suffering.

We located the symbolic "roots" in the space to the left of the Asoka's Institute's foyer, where large mosaics left over from the Nazi era depict "idealized Aryan people". These images represent the historical conflict and "mud" of suffering caused by the Nazi's racial ideology and discrimination. That is where we placed the display of hand-sewn hearts. We also placed there, in the middle of this "conflict", a calligraphy Thầy wrote to help with the

process of reconciliation and healing: "With the mud of discrimination and fanaticism we grow the lotus of tolerance and inclusiveness." Thầy's words helped many visitors to accept, with compassion, the suffering caused by the painful past.

Thầy's part of the exhibition began with his calligraphy: "Are You Sure?" It is a question for all who hold rigidly to dogmas and ideologies that are the roots of all conflict and deep suffering. From there, the symbolic branch of the lotus plant traveled along the Institute's long marble corridor, where each of Thầy's calligraphies bloomed like a lotus flower.

The integrated exhibition brought so much love and life into the Asoka Institute. Thousands of visitors paused in quiet reflection at the hearts. They

Hand-sewn hearts featured in the Asoka Institute's inaugural exhibition in 2012, in remembrance of 700 handicapped patients forced out by the Nazis when the building was a hospital, were given a new display format (pictured below) two years later. It was inspired by Thầy's calligraphy (right). In English, it reads: "The tears I shed yesterday have become rain." The hearts represent drops of rain falling from clouds above – represented by pieces of cloth hung from the ceiling – into a river. The prostrate figure on the left is releasing his/her pain and sorrow into the river of tears, which flows to the ocean to be transformed back into drops of rain. Photo courtesy of Joachim Gies Fotografie www.joachim-gies.de.

die tränen die ich
gestern vergossen
heute sind zu
regen geworden





Stone columns from the Nazi era lay in storage for more than 70 years beneath EIAB's main building, the Asoka Institute.

also benefited from Thầy's teaching and the healing energy of his calligraphy

by strolling along the lengthy corridor. Thầy himself walked in happiness

through the exhibition in August 2012 when he came to EIAB for major events marking our official opening and to preside over the Institute's formal inauguration.

TAKING CARE OF THE WOUNDED LAND

Besides tending to unresolved suffering in the invisible world, we also needed to bring about healing and transformation on the physical plane. The land, too, had been wounded by what had occurred there long before EIAB arrived. We felt a strong need to heal, reconstruct and redirect its energy. This took the form of two major projects: the building of a physical structure – a bell stupa – tall enough to “balance” EIAB's other structures, and construction of a stately gate, marking a new entrance, through which fresh, living energy could flow into EIAB and compassion could flow out to the world.

Fortunately, the Nazis had left a valuable parting “gift”. Lying abandoned for



The Stupa of Inclusiveness



The Diamond Stupa



The Many-Treasured Stupa

The stupa has three names depending on where you stand and on the perspective from which you view it. When you are in the center of the garden next to the stupa, it is called the Diamond Stupa. When you approach from the Asoka Building, it is called the Many-Treasured Stupa (Prabhūtaratna Stupa), and when you enter the main gate of the Institute from the town, it is called the Stupa of Inclusiveness.

more than 70 years in the basement of our main building was a pile of massive stone masonry. It had been intended for a huge structure to be built in front of what is now our Asoka Institute, and supposedly from which Nazi leaders would address a major rally. That never came to pass.

What could be more healing than turning stone columns from the Nazi past into pillars supporting a Buddhist stupa dedicated to inclusiveness; and into a gate dedicated to peace? On that basis, I briefed architects on the design for a 21 meter-tall stupa and for a massive stone gate marking a new entrance for EIAB, positioned away from the road and angled to the northeast to receive the revitalizing energy of the rising sun.

For the stupa's location, we chose a bushy dip in EIAB's lower grounds, a place where you could feel the energy darken. As workers began to dig for the foundations, we discovered that the site had been the estate's garbage dump for more than 100 years. The more our workers dug the more garbage they uncovered. Sr. Song Nghiêm wondered how we could possibly build a stupa on top of this seemingly bottomless pit of garbage.

The answer came, in part, from a vivid dream in which I saw an EIAB friend holding a baby. When I asked whom he was holding, he answered that the baby was dead and that he was moving its body to a new home. I immediately saw the connection to an earlier dream, in which I heard the voices of children crying and calling for help. In that dream, I walked along the hallway to look for the children and elbowed open closed doors. Inside, I found children drowning in toilets and tried to save them. With that disturbing image still fresh in my mind, I was amazed when workers at the stupa construction site reported that they had found many discarded toilets buried in the pit.

With such signs to guide us, we persevered and completed our stupa in 2013. The Nazi's stone columns teeter

at different ascending angles; Buddhist symbols are embedded on every level and mantras of liberation are carved in Sanskrit for the "land ancestors" who suffered as a result of Nazi policies.

The stupa has already brought much transformation and healing to our host land. All through EIAB's extensive grounds the energy is lighter, more joyful. People tell me that the paintwork looks brighter on parts of the Asoka Institute we have not yet started to renovate. One German friend has even suggested that the establishment of EIAB in what was once a Nazi facility and the building of a Buddhist stupa from Nazi pillars is, itself, worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize!²⁴

ENGAGED BUDDHISM – THẦY'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

To return to Norway, EIAB's outreach there last October involved several

events, including a meeting with members of the local Sangha in the city of Kristiansand. As some of the friends at that gathering were new to EIAB, my talk was entitled "What is Applied Buddhism?"

Before attempting to address the topic, however, I had first to introduce Engaged Buddhism for – like the historical issues of the Vietnam War and American civil rights – the two are inseparable.

We can trace Engaged Buddhism's origins to 1954 when, as a young Dharma Teacher, Thầy wrote a series of ten articles for a Vietnamese newspaper, on the overall theme "A Fresh Look at Buddhism".²⁵

In those days, the practice of Buddhism in Vietnam had become more or less confined to monasteries, where it mainly served monastics in pursuing their goal of personal liberation. The lay



An essential stop for EIAB monastics when visiting Sangha members in Norway last October was Oslo's famous Nobel Peace Center, a museum about the Nobel Peace Prize.

community's role was to support these monastics and they, in return, would perform ceremonies to help members of the lay community secure a good rebirth.

Thầy called for radical change that drew on a deep tradition within Vietnamese Buddhism, as a “living religion”, to adjust and adapt to the social milieu of its time.²⁶ South Vietnam was a society in crisis. Thầy proposed that Buddhism should move beyond the monastery walls to help the people. It should be active in education, economics, politics, social work, and at bringing about peace and reconciliation between conflicting groups.

Over the next decade, Thầy elaborated upon his thinking in a succession of books which were widely read in Vietnam. He advocated a form of Buddhism that included *both* a contemplative life, for personal healing and transformation, *and* activism to help bring an end to religious and political oppression, intolerance, social injustice and the turmoil of war. For this, he coined the term “Engaged Buddhism”, which in Vietnamese means “entering into life, social life”.²⁷

Engaged Buddhism became the spiritual foundation of Thầy's movement for Buddhist reform and renewal in Vietnam, and of the peace activism that led him write to Dr. King. Today, it is the mainstream Buddhist movement throughout the world.

APPLIED BUDDHISM – ENGAGING ON A DEEPER LEVEL

Thầy wrote more than 50 years ago that “the forms of Buddhism must change so that the essence of Buddhism remains unchanged.”²⁸ As the 21st Century dawned, Thầy already knew that a fresh breakthrough would be needed to deepen and sustain the foundations of Engaged Buddhism for the long term.

He foresaw that if Buddhism continued to be practiced in much the same way it

was practiced 2,500 years ago, it could not succeed in helping current and future generations transform personal suffering and societal conflict. Even what we practice today could easily be obsolete in ten years because of the speed at which people, society, knowledge and technology are changing.

Thầy also observed that, often, Buddhism is taught only theoretically. Students and participants gain knowledge but, sadly, do not experience the personal healing and transformation that is the true gem of the Buddha's teaching. They are unable to attain the happiness that is necessary for inner peace and, by extension, for peace in society and the world.

With these and other considerations, Thầy set out to transform theoretical approaches to Buddhism into a form focused on applying practical techniques to help individuals heal and transform themselves in today's world, with all of its uncertainties, pressures and challenges. Thus, Applied Buddhism came into being and with it, in September 2008, the European Institute of Applied Buddhism.

Thầy favors a scientific, open-minded approach that allows for experimentation with new practice techniques, tools and applications, and that enables us to change and evolve with the times. We do not hesitate to adopt insights from different spiritual traditions, from Christianity to Judaism and, from Asia, Taoism and Qi Gong. We also tap into latest discoveries in neuroscience, quantum physics, social psychology and other secular disciplines. So long as such disciplines can be applied in a way that follows the guidance of the Buddha's teaching, helps people to resolve their suffering and further strengthens the foundations of Engaged Buddhism, we will use them.

For Thầy, the essence of Buddhism consists of “living principles that cannot bear any specific formulation.”²⁹ Rather than spelling out ideas point by point,

Thầy transmits their essence; conveys the general direction of his thoughts and wishes. It is for his students to realize their meaning and to find ways to actualize them.

Year by year, experiment by experiment, EIAB is endeavoring to crystalize Thầy's vision for Applied Buddhism. Through this challenging, humbling process, we have so far identified five core principles that help to underpin and guide our work.

Principle 1: Non-Buddhism can be Buddhism

Buddhist teaching is not removed or separated from non-Buddhist teaching. We should not discriminate between the spiritual and non-spiritual domain for, in the language of Thầy, they “inter-are”. If we know how to use non-Buddhist teaching, then it becomes Buddhist teaching.

For example, if we go for a walk when our mind is on other matters and we are chatting with companions without being aware of our steps, then that is just an everyday walk. But if, when we walk, we are truly aware of each step and of dwelling in the present moment, then that element of mindfulness makes it a Buddhist walk. In other words, whether a teaching is Buddhist or non-Buddhist depends upon how we apply it.

Principle 2: The Four Noble Truths are our compass

The Buddha's Four Noble Truths are our “true north”. Thanks to the Four Noble Truths we know that suffering exists – usually in the form of unease, ill-being, dissatisfaction, emotional or physical pain or lack of personal fulfilment; that the root of our suffering can be found by looking deeply into ourselves to discover how the process of suffering operates and gives rise to different accumulations of ill-being; that our suffering can be transformed or removed, and that the Buddha has

"Moving meditation" is part of spiritual training. During courses, we start each morning with warm-up exercises which, true to EIAB's inter-disciplinary approach, introduce participants to Qi Gong and Tai Chi. Below, Sr. Song Nghiêm leads a recent session.



given us the path to heal ourselves and attain enlightenment.

As those who visit EIAB discover, we do not practice Buddhism out of some metaphysical idea, intellectual curiosity or theoretical investigation. We apply the Buddha's teaching because we want to solve the everyday problem of suffering, here and now. In the words of Thầy, we help our students "recognize, embrace and transform painful feelings and emotions."³⁰ We also help them to develop a new perspective or outlook on life. For example, depression has become so common that in many societies it is now considered a serious public health issue. Often, the cause

is stress and workplace-related. EIAB shows individuals how to bring the practice of mindfulness into their daily life so they may cope better. The courses we offer are equally aimed at those who wish to become more skillful in handling personal conflict in their family or workplace.

Principle 3:
Bodhisattva aspiration;
Bodhicitta mind

Regardless of how enlightened we might become, if people around us still suffer, our enlightenment is not complete. It can only be complete when, by accepting that our suffering

is deeply related to theirs, we give rise to the Bodhisattva aspiration to help all living beings heal and transform themselves.

This fundamental realization is a vital source of spiritual energy for EIAB. Without the Bodhisattva ideal, we would lack the drive to move beyond theoretical knowledge or to experiment with practical applications and new tools that can help others.

I can offer a simple illustration. For many years Thầy, has patiently given much the same basic teaching using much the same words: follow your breathing, walk mindfully and embrace



During a dialogue with Waldbröl community leaders, we shared the Bodhisattva ideal and mission of EIAB. Thầy Pháp Ân presented an original piece of Thầy's calligraphic art, with the words "For a better world" in German, to Mr. Peter Koester, the Mayor.

your emotions. For a brilliant, original thinker like Thầy I doubt it brings him much joy to keep repeating himself. But Thầy has not spoken out of any need of his own to speak. His emphasis has always been on the need of people in the audience to listen because, for many, his message is still new. Thầy wants them to be able to hear and practice it, even though it is elementary.

On a related note, I once directly received a teaching from Thầy that I shall never forget. He said that we work not to earn praise or recognition, fame or power, but to satisfy a deep need arising from the Bodhisattva ideal within us, the mind of love known as the Bodhicitta mind. It becomes our spiritual career. We feel uplifted whenever we are able to fulfil our deep wish to help others transform their suffering.

Thanks to this Bodhisattva motivation and Bodhicitta mind, we are constantly

re-energized and refreshed at EIAB – despite having a packed year-round program of activities! The moment we see suffering in someone who comes to practice with us, we know that something needs to be done; we have to find a technique to help him or her. It is our duty as an Institute. We cannot say: "I've already shared with you everything I know. Why can't you "get" it? Why don't you practice? Why don't you transform?" No. When a person cannot transform it is a sign that our methods and tools are not yet effective. We need to go further, to find what truly will help him or her.

Principle 4:
We teach from our own practice and transformation

Thầy has made it clear that if we do not directly experience personal transformation when testing new techniques

and tools of practice, then transmitting these to others would be like selling fake products.

Monastics at EIAB are encouraged to be creative in our own practice. But if an experiment does not work, we have to ask ourselves "why?" and "what can we do about it?" In this way, EIAB functions like a laboratory. We test new applications and tools for Buddhist practice in a safe environment where experiments are carefully monitored and evaluated before we share their results. Only through such authentication do we add new discoveries to Applied Buddhism's expanding body of freshly-adapted teachings, techniques and tools.

Principle 5:
We cannot succeed alone

As individuals, we can accomplish very little on our own. Just thinking about



During construction of the Gate of Interbeing, Thầy Pháp Ân climbed the scaffold to express his joy when the beam inscribed with Thầy's "Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World" was finally in position.

the causes, scale and complexity of suffering in the world today can be overwhelming. For Applied Buddhism to succeed in the long term we need, like the Buddha, to build a strong and successful community of practice, a Noble Sangha equipped with practices and techniques that can help us address the age-old reality of suffering in the modern era.

That is why EIAB invites all who seek refuge in our Sangha to engage fully

with us as we develop and refine Applied Buddhism. As Thầy likes to say, one Buddha is not enough. We need a community of Buddhas.

A "COSMIC RELIGION" FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

EIAB is a loving gift of peace that has come out of the suffering of discrimination and war. It is, in particular, a gift from Thầy, Vietnamese Buddhism

and the Bodhisattva Dr. Martin Luther King, who in a dark hour for the US as well as Vietnam, joined Thầy in a non-violent movement for peace, just as Thầy joined Dr. King in building a global Beloved Community.

Thầy's entire life is a "Peace Prize". He has been the recipient of many prestigious awards acknowledging his contributions to peace, humanity and spirituality.

Most recently, Thầy was among 100 global thought leaders whose insights are featured in a novel 3D-printed book, entitled *Genius: 100 Visions of the Future*, part of a program in Canada to celebrate the centennial of Albert Einstein's General Theory of Relativity.³¹ I had the honor of representing Thầy at the event in Montreal last September for the book's hand-picked contributors, and to share about Thầy's vision and life.

In his extraordinary essay for the book, Thầy looks deep into the future and explains that every advance in our understanding of ourselves, nature, and our place in the cosmos is an expansion

The Sangha was so happy that Thầy's health enabled him still to travel to preside over EIAB's formal inauguration on 22 August 2012. Thầy and honored guest Mr. Peter Koester, Mayor of Waldbröl, performed a ceremonial unveiling of the Asoka Institute's newly-renovated ground floor. Thầy also gave his blessing for us to proceed with construction of the Stupa of Inclusiveness and the Gate of Interbeing, which were formally inaugurated a year later.



in human consciousness: “As Einstein said, the more we understand the great harmony, elegance and beauty of the cosmos, the more we feel profound awe and love.”

Thầy notes that many scientists still believe there is a subjective consciousness independent of the outside world: “They think there is a world, a universe, moon and stars that are objective and are always there whether there is consciousness or not,” he says. “But whenever we look up at the sky, moon, stars, and galaxies, we must see that they are not independent of consciousness: *they are also consciousness*. Consciousness and the object of consciousness cannot be separated, just as we cannot separate right from left. This is the insight of interbeing.”

In Thầy’s view, it should be possible in the 21st Century for us to create a spirituality and ethic that can unite

all peoples and all nations, removing all separation and discrimination. He calls this “a cosmic religion”, one based not on myth, belief or dogma, but on evidence and the insight of non-duality, of interbeing.

“Science and religion will then go hand in hand, and the insight of non-duality will lead to many important breakthroughs and discoveries. A cosmic religion founded on evidence, and a new science founded on the insight of interbeing, would truly represent a giant leap for humankind,” Thầy writes.

A LONG JOURNEY AHEAD

A spiritual future such as that envisioned by Thầy goes further than Applied Buddhism, just as Applied Buddhism goes deeper than Engaged Buddhism. Helping it to manifest upon the foundation of Thầy’s Bodhisattva

vow and deep insights into suffering and the way out of suffering, will surely keep EIAB on our toes for the next 100 years and beyond! We aspire not only to fulfil Thầy’s intention to create a modern Buddhist institute in Europe that is a model for the world but, also, for EIAB to become a springboard for humankind’s “giant leap” to the new cosmic religion as conceived of by Thầy.

We are at the beginning of what will be a long journey. But thanks to the generosity and support of so many friends in Germany and around the world, EIAB has made a good start in our first 10 years.

We now have 38 resident monastics and the capacity to welcome more.

On our campus, alone, we have received a total of some 50,000 students and visitors, based on enrolments for EIAB courses, retreats and other activities during that period. The total number is

For a time, EIAB’s resident monastic community was expanded to 50 with the arrival in 2011 of 28 brothers and sisters from Vietnam. In September 2009, they had been driven out of Bát Nhã (“Prajna”) Monastery, in the Central Highlands, by authorities there. Pictured below is the expanded community during the 2011–12 Winter Retreat.





Close to 1,000 people flocked to EIAB for the 2012 summer retreat, led by Thầy. We erected a high-tech tent as a temporary meditation hall. Above, retreatants listen to Plum Village and EIAB monastics chanting before Thầy's Dharma talk.

Walking meditation led by Thầy during EIAB's 2010 summer retreat.





EIAB regularly welcomes a total of about 100 students and practitioners for our Day of Mindfulness each Sunday. Some are in residence while they take courses; others just come for the day.



Above and below: ceremonies in October 2014, during our Vietnamese Retreat, to initiate construction of EIAB's new kitchen and dining hall.





An elevated view of the kitchen and dining hall construction site in April 2015.



Waldbröl's Mayor, Mr. Peter Koester, visited our construction site in March 2016, accompanied by his wife Mrs. Bertamini-Koester



EIAB's new kitchen and dining hall – able to seat 200 – were ready in time for the 2017 Easter Retreat.



Sr. Song Nghiêem with Dr. Lilian Cheung, co-author of Thầy's book Savor, Mindful Eating, Mindful Life. It is a source of much culinary inspiration and spiritual guidance for "eating meditation" in the new facility.



EIAB sisters enthusiastically don aprons, ready for action in the new kitchen/dining hall complex upon its completion in April 2017.



Having a seriously modern kitchen – at last – is cause for a fun-filled celebration by EIAB sisters.



We created a water feature that we named Spring Buds Pond (Hồ Mầm Xuân) directly in front of the new dining hall, ensuring diners a beautiful, tranquil outlook.



In September 2017, Spring Buds Pond (Hồ Mầm Xuân) welcomed its first lotus flowers.

much higher if we include attendance at retreats lead by EIAB in Europe, Hong Kong, Thailand and other parts of Asia. Each year, the number of students and practitioners EIAB attracts and reaches continues to grow.

On the practical side, we have renovated 20 % of the 12,000 meters² Asoka Institute and its ground floor, with plans to renovate other sections still very much alive. With exceptionally generous donations from three kind

EIAB supporters and from many other contributors worldwide, we have been able to build a light and airy dining hall that can seat up to 200 monastics and guests. We have also built a state-of-the-art kitchen so we may offer our



As we greeted the Year of the Earth Dog last February, EIAB held a solemn ceremony in the Asoka Institute to initiate work for the construction of our future meditation hall.



Thầy Pháp Ân performed a symbolic ground breaking at the spot where the meditation hall will connect with the Asoka Institute.



At day break, our ceremonies moved outside, where Sr. Song Nghiêm and Thầy Pháp Tri turned the first clod of earth on the actual site of the future meditation hall.



Thầy Pháp Xà and Sr. Biếu Nghiêm continued the work of digging into the icy ground. Other members of the Sangha soon followed, joining in this joyful act of blessing for the future hall.



EIAB is a vision of Thầy for future generations, including those who today are amongst the Sangha's youngest members.



Finally, the foundation stone for the new meditation hall was gently lowered by Thầy Pháp Ân.

guests delicious, nutritious vegetarian meals prepared mindfully and with love by EIAB monastics.

Earlier this year, we formally made a start on our project to build a meditation hall, for which we have started a new fund-raising campaign. (Please see also page 46).

Many other important projects and interesting programs are on EIAB's drawing board for coming years. We shall need to be patient as well as persistent for we have – in every sense – embarked upon a work of generations.

A JEWEL IN THE FLAMES

On the opening page of *Vietnam – Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, the book that so impacted Dr. King, Thầy published his English translation of a poem by the Vietnamese Zen monk Ngô Ân (1019–1088; 8th generation in the lineage of Zen Master Vô Ngôn Thông):

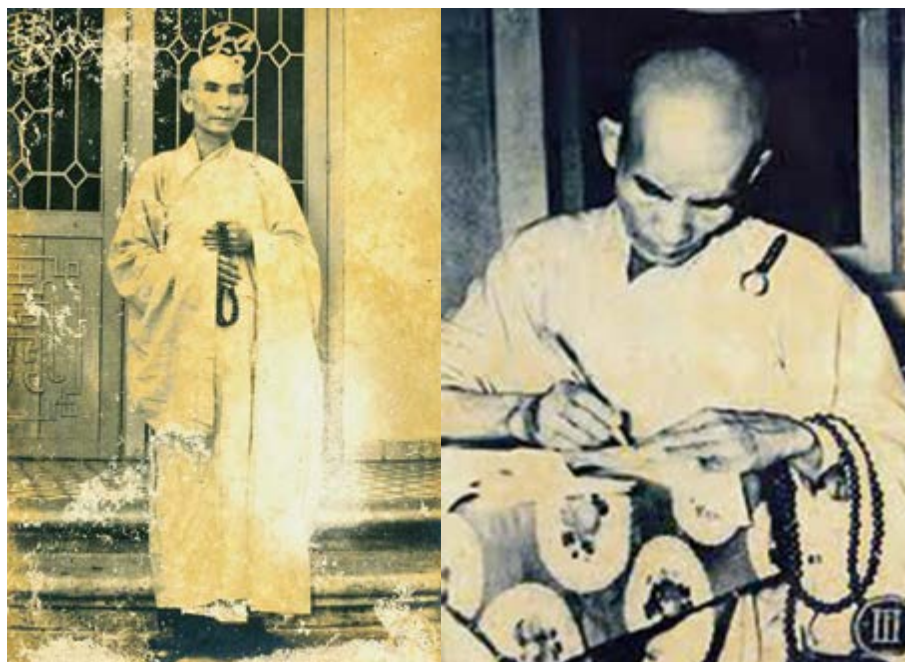
*The jade burned on the mountain retains its natural color,
The lotus, blooming in the furnace, does not lose its freshness.³²*

Reading it brings to mind the historic photograph of Ven. Thích Quảng Đức, seated in the lotus position; straight, still and serene in a circle of fire. I was

about six years old when I first saw it. My father kept several photographs of the Venerable in a drawer at our home. That particular image had an enormous effect on me.

Even today I cannot adequately express in words my reaction. I was strongly drawn to the photograph. It touched

my heart. Whenever I looked at it I felt not fear or sadness but a deep sense of love for Ven. Thích Quảng Đức. It was a photograph that made me think – and go on thinking. For many years, I kept an enlarged and framed copy in my room at Upper Hamlet in Plum Village and, of course, we have a copy on the ancestral altar here at EIAB.



Ven. Thích Quảng Đức (left) was 67 years old and Abbot of the Quan Âm Pagoda in the province of Gia Định when he self-immolated at a busy Saigon crossroads 55 years ago. Above (right) the Venerable is pictured writing his final letters. In one, headed "My Fervent Vow", he said "...it is with joy in my heart that I have made the deep vow to immolate this illusory and temporary body as an offering to the Buddha so that the merit may go to the preservation of Buddhism." In setting out his "deep wish" he, among other things, asked South Vietnam's President Ngô Đình Diệm "to look with compassion and loving kindness on the people of Vietnam and put into effect a policy of equality towards all religions so that the land of Vietnam may maintain its stability for ten thousand lifetimes". Thầy later observed in his well-known three-volume history of Vietnamese Buddhism: "...in the whole of the letter there is not one bit of hatred or despair expressed. On the contrary, the letter is pervaded by love and hope."³⁵

The photograph also brings to mind Buddhist scriptures, dating back to the 3rd Century AD, about the net of Indra, the Vedic king of heaven. Indra's net stretches in all directions into infinity. At the center of each vertex, or "eye", hangs a glittering jewel whose surface reflects all the other jewels. The jewels multiply and re-multiply each other endlessly. In one jewel there are all the jewels and in all the jewels there is one. Each jewel keeps its own identity while reflecting all the other jewels.³³

This ancient metaphor for interbeing goes to the heart of Thầy's vision of a cosmic religion free of duality, separation and discrimination. The same insight can be found in Christian scripture when Jesus says: "In my Father's house are many mansions...."³⁴ In other words, there is enough spiritual, cultural and social space for us all to live together in tolerance, harmony and peace; for each to keep his or her own identity whilst respecting the individual identity of all others.

The insight of interbeing is the spiritual ground for EIAB's mission of healing and transformation and the inspiration behind our many projects and activities, including those highlighted in this article – the combined exhibition of Thầy's calligraphy and of the hand-sewn hearts, the building of the stupa and the construction of the gate.

At a desperate time of religious discrimination and war in Vietnam, Ven. Thích Quảng Đức and others gave their lives to the highest cause of a future without intolerance, fanaticism, dictatorship and other "enemies" residing in the human heart.

It is possible to destroy a person's physical being but not the love in their heart. It is, in fact, wondrous that Ven. Thích Quảng Đức's heart survived the flames and is today regarded by many in Vietnam as the relic of a Bodhisattva. Like Thầy, EIAB still feels strongly the Venerable's love and compassion. And as with Indra's net, the brilliant jewel represented by Ven. Thích Quảng Đức

– whose Dharma Name means "Far Reaching Virtue" – continues to reflect, and be reflected, endlessly.

END NOTES

- 1 On 4 April 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee
- 2 *Vietnam – Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, by Thich Nhat Hanh, Hill and Wang, New York, first edition February 1967. Thầy's open letter to Dr. King is reproduced in the Appendices
- 3 A transcript of President Johnson's news conference of 28 July 1965 is archived at The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27116>. Accessed 14 May 2018
- 4 *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by Clayborne Carson, Grand Central Publishing, Park Avenue, New York, second e-book edition, January 2001, Loc 5578
- 5 In the following decade, many more Vietnamese Buddhist monks, nuns and laypeople self-immolated to draw attention to ongoing repression and the intense suffering caused by the war as the US became more involved
- 6 Thầy expressed this sentiment with equal passion in a poem entitled "Recommendation", reprinted below from *Call Me By My True Names: the Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh*. Parallax Press, Berkeley, California, 1999, P18. The poem touched the author of this article deeply. Soon after his ordination, he set it to music and sang it often to the Sangha at the request of Thầy. The poem was also musically adapted into other languages, including English, by the Brothers of Weston Priory in Vermont, US

Recommendation

by Thích Nhất Hạnh – 1965

*Promise me,
promise me this day,
promise me now,
while the sun is overhead
exactly at the zenith,
promise me:*

*Even as they
strike you down
with a mountain of hatred and violence;
even as they step on you and crush you
like a worm,
even as they dismember and disembowel you,
remember, brother,
remember:
man is not our enemy.*

*The only thing worthy of you is compassion –
invincible, limitless, unconditional.
Hatred will never let you face
the beast in man.*

*One day, when you face this beast alone,
with your courage intact, your eyes kind,
untroubled
(even as no one sees them),*

*out of your smile
will bloom a flower.
And those who love you
will behold you
across ten thousand worlds of birth and
dying.*

*Alone again,
I will go on with bent head,
knowing that love has become eternal.
On the long, rough road,
the sun and the moon
will continue to shine.*

- 7 *At Home In The World: Stories and Essential Teachings from a Monk's Life*, by Thich Nhat Hanh ©2016 Unified Buddhist Church, Inc. Parallax Press, P12
- 8 Ibid P72
- 9 Ibid. See also a transcript of a May 2010 television interview with Thầy by Oprah Winfrey. <https://plumvillage.org/thich-nhat-hanh-interviews/oprah-talks-to-thich-nhat-hanh/>, accessed 13 May 2018
- 10 A facsimile of Dr. King's letter can be viewed on the website of The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change ("The King Center"), established in 1968 by Mrs. Coretta Scott King, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-mlk-nobel-institute>. Accessed 12 May 2018
- 11 *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Ch 30, Loc 5599
- 12 The prepared text of Dr. King's speech "The Casualties of the War in Vietnam" can be viewed at the King Center <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/casualties-war-vietnam>. Accessed 12 May 2018. An audio recording of the speech, in which Dr. King states that the civil rights and peace movements should be combined, can be heard at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjyM7V16SHI>. Accessed 26 May 2018
- 13 The text and audio of "the Riverside Speech" can be accessed at Stanford University's *Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute*, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>, accessed 12 May 2018
- 14 Dr. King quoted from *Vietnam – Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, P81
- 15 1968 also saw the assassination, on 6 June, of Dr. King's political ally Senator Robert Kennedy while campaigning to be the Democratic candidate for that year's US Presidential elections, and the sudden death in Thailand, on 10 December, at the age of 53, of Thomas Merton, the US-based Trappist monk, social activist and scholar who had written the foreword to Thầy's *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*
- 16 *At Home in the World: Stories and Essential Teachings from a Monk's Life* P73
- 17 The King Center, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy#sub4>. Accessed 11 May 2018

- 18 From a note handwritten by Thầy on 4 July 2007, in which he outlines his vision for EIAB. The original is kept in EIAB's archives
- 19 Ibid
- 20 EIAB receives visitors from many European countries, including Holland, Denmark, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Italy, France, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, Poland and some from Asia. It also organizes outreach programs in Europe and Asia
- 21 *Zur Geschichte der Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Waldbröl 1893-1938*, by Hans Simon. In: *Beiträge zur Oberbergischen Geschichte*. Hg.: Bergischer Geschichtsverein Abteilung Oberberg. EV 1924, Bd. 2, Gummersbach 1989, P126
- 22 Erratum: the caption set into this photograph should read Sr. Hien Hanh (not Sr. Hien Han) and Br. Phap Nhat (not Br. Phat Nhat)
- 23 See also the Hong Kong announcement for the exhibition, which was entitled: "Calligraphic Meditation: The Mindful Art of Thích Nhất Hạnh". http://www.umag.hku.hk/en/exhibition_detail.php?id=714344. Accessed 19 May 2018
- 24 A remark by Jochen Fassbender, a musician based in Walbröl, upon his first visit to EIAB in the summer of 2013. He felt inspired by EIAB and a duty to support Thầy's vision of peace. Mr. Fassbender has since offered music courses at the Institute and regularly performs in the foyer of the Asoka Institute to help raise funds for EIAB
- 25 "History of Engaged Buddhism" a Dharma talk by Thích Nhất Hạnh, Hanoi, Vietnam 6-7 May 2008. Reproduced in *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, VI, 3, Summer 2008, P30
- 26 *Vietnam – Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, concluding chapter
- 27 "History of Engaged Buddhism", P31
- 28 *Vietnam – Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, concluding chapter
- 29 Ibid
- 30 From Thầy's handwritten note of 2007
- 31 A multi-faceted project started in 2015, the centennial year, by the Canadian Friends of the Hebrew University. See <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/marking-the-centennial-of-the-theory-of-relativity-on-a-global-scale-503570801.html>. Accessed 15 May 2018. See also the website for the 3D-printed book *Genius: 100 Visions of the Future* <http://genius100visions.com/100-visions-of-the-future>, which lists the contributors, including Thầy. Accessed 15 May 2018
- 32 *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, Nguyễn Lang (Thích Nhất Hạnh), Nhà Xuất Bản Lá Bối, Sài Gòn, 1973. Vol 1. Chapter 8 (Chương 08: Tổng quan về Phật giáo đời nhà Lý (1010-1225))
 妙性虛無不可攀
 虛無心悟得何難
 玉焚山上色常潤
 蓮發池中濕未乾
 (Thiền Uyển Tập Anh, 1715 edition, Sheet 23b1)
 Điều tính hư vô bất khả攀
 Hư vô tâm ngộ đắc hà nan?
 Ngọc phần sơn thượng sắc thường nhuận
 Liên phát lô trung thấp vị can
 (Sino-Vietnamese phonetic transcription)
 Chân tính hư vô khó đến nơi
 Chi hư tâm đạt đến mà thôi
 Trên núi ngọc thiêu màu vẫn thấm
 Trong lò sen nở sắc thường tươi
 (Vietnamese translation by Thích Nhất Hạnh)
 The wondrous nature of emptiness cannot be grasped;
 Yet why should it be considered hard to comprehend when, with an empty mind, it can be understood?
 Burning a piece of jade on the top of a mountain only intensifies the brilliance of its natural luster;
 (And) a lotus that blooms within a furnace never withers or loses its freshness.
 (Literal English translation by Thầy Pháp Ấn)
- 33 See also *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*, by Francis H. Cook. (Penn State Press, 1977) P214 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indra%27s_net; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indra%27s_net#Avatamsaka_Sutra
- 34 John 14:2 King James Version; <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=-John+14%3A2&version=KJV>
- 35 *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, Nguyễn Lang (Thích Nhất Hạnh), Nhà Xuất Bản Lá Bối, Sài Gòn, 1973. Vol 3. Chapter 38 (Chương 38: Cuộc vận động chống chế độ Ngô Đình Diệm – Ngọn Lửa Quảng Đức)



ELAB's journey: milestones and mindful steps

The backdrop

1954 – Thầy writes a series of ten articles in Vietnam calling for a fresh look at Buddhism. This marks the beginning of what he later calls “Engaged Buddhism”

1963 – *11 June*: Ven. Thích Quảng Đức is the first of five monks that summer to self-immolate to draw the world's attention to the violent suppression of Buddhism by the regime in South Vietnam

1965 – *1 June*: Thầy writes an open letter to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. explaining the true meaning of the self-immolations and calling on Dr. King not to remain silent about “the indescribable suffering of the Vietnamese people”, at a time when US military involvement is escalating

1966 – *1 June*: Thầy and Dr. King meet in Chicago. At a press conference, they combine the cause of peace in Vietnam with the fight for civil rights in the US

1967 – *25 January*: Dr. King nominates Thầy for the 1967 Nobel Peace Prize, though none, ultimately, is awarded that year

1967 – *4 April*: Dr. King delivers his historic speech “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence”, in which he quotes from Thầy's book *Vietnam – Lotus in a Sea of Fire*

1967 – *May*: Thầy and Dr. King meet again, in Geneva, and continue their discussion on peace, freedom, the building of community and how to end the war in Vietnam

1968 – *4 April*: Dr. King is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee

The Institute

2006 – *May*: Thầy decides the time is right to open an Institute of Applied Buddhism, an idea that has been in his mind for some years, and assigns the project to Thầy Pháp Ấn. He chooses Germany for its location

2007 – *4 July*: In a handwritten note, Thầy sets out his vision for EIAB

2007 – *18 July*: Dortmund-based lawyer and notary Dr. Alexander Puplick is appointed our legal representative in Germany to establish EIAB as a legal entity and to purchase a property here. German Sangha friends begin an extensive search

2008 – *7 March*: Thầy inspects and chooses a property at Waldbröl, near Cologne. The 5.7 hectare estate includes a vacant 12,000 m² building, 150 meters long. It was constructed more than 110 years earlier as a hospital for the mentally and physically handicapped. Acquisition of the estate begins

2008 – *May*: While in Hanoi, Vietnam, Thầy announces that an Institute of Applied Buddhism has been founded in Europe, with other campuses to be established in Asia and America

2008 – *7 September*: 22 monastics leave Plum Village for Germany. *10 September*: EIAB “has arrived” as we take up residence in the building we now call The Asoka Institute. *11 September*: Thầy comes to Waldbröl. The following day, at a press conference with Mr. Peter Koester, the Mayor of Waldbröl, Thầy announces EIAB’s establishment. In these first weeks, we experience unusual phenomena suggesting the presence of wandering spirits with unresolved suffering from the Nazi past. Thầy requests us to offer our energy of compassion. Soon after, he writes a letter of reconciliation which we still read aloud every day

2009 – We work intensively to build the Institute’s faculty, curricula, program of courses and administrative infrastructure. *September*: As renovations to the Asoka Institute begin, resident monastics move into a nearby building – since named the Great Compassion Monastery – which we are in the process of acquiring. Now, we can also accommodate guests taking EIAB courses

2010 – *June*: Renovation of 20% of the Asoka Institute is completed. Thầy agrees to an EIAB fund-raising proposal, developed with the help of the Hong Kong Sangha, for a travelling exhibition of his calligraphy. *November*: The exhibition, entitled “Calligraphic Meditation: The Mindful Art of Thích Nhất Hạnh”, opens in Hong Kong

2011 – Thầy’s calligraphy exhibition travels to New Taipei City, Taiwan, and Vancouver, Canada. At EIAB, we conceptualize two construction projects to help heal and redirect the energy of the land – a tall stupa and a massive gate – using stone columns abandoned by the Nazis

2012 – *May*: EIAB launches a campaign for hearts to be sewn by hand in memory of each of the 700 handicapped patients the Nazis removed from the (then) hospital in 1938–39. *August*: A combined exhibition of Thầy’s calligraphy and the hand-sewn hearts opens on the ground floor of the Asoka Institute. The theme is suffering, healing and transformation. *22 August*: Thầy formally inaugurates EIAB and gives his blessing for EIAB to construct a 21-meter high stupa and a stately gate for the estate’s new entrance. Thầy also leads EIAB’s summer retreat, attended by nearly 1,000 people

2013 – *August*: We inaugurate the Stupa of Inclusiveness and the Gate of Interbeing

2014 – *April*: We begin to overhaul the fire alarm system of the Great Compassion Monastery, as required by government regulations. *October*: We initiate construction of a spacious modern kitchen with a dining hall to seat 200

2015-16 – Renovation and construction projects initiated in 2014 continue; we also complete landscaping – including a lotus pond – around the future dining hall. We continue to expand and develop EIAB’s course offerings and to organize outreach programs to cities across Europe and, in Asia, Hong Kong and Japan

2017 – *April*: EIAB’s new kitchen and dining hall are ready in time for the Easter Retreat

2018 – *19 February*: To welcome the Lunar New Year of the Dog, we hold ceremonies to initiate work for construction of our future meditation hall. *May*: As of now, EIAB has 38 resident monastics. We welcome some 100 people each Sunday for our Day of Mindfulness, including those taking residential courses. Nearing our 10th anniversary, this September, EIAB has so far received a total of some 50,000 students and visitors on our campus and reached many more people through our programs offered across Europe and beyond. The numbers continue to grow each year



EIAB: how we made it happen

When our beloved teacher Thay determined in 2006 that the time was right to pursue his vision for an Institute of Applied Buddhism, Sr. Chan Khong sent a heartfelt appeal for support to Plum Village friends around the world. Dortmund-based lawyer and notary Dr. Alexander Puplick, and his wife Beate, were among those who answered the call. Dr. Puplick became our legal representative to establish the future Institute as a legal entity in Germany and to purchase a property here. As they recount below, it was no easy task....



Dr. Alexander Puplick (right) and his wife Beate with Thay at EIAB on the historic day – 12 September 2008 – when Thay announces its formal establishment.

A great connection arising

In the summer of 2006, my wife Beate and I attended the summer retreat at Plum Village, in France, for the second time. Once again, we were in Lower Hamlet where we enjoyed the calm, the peace and the mindfulness. We were deeply impressed by Sr. Chan Khong

and by Sr. Jina, who told us about her stays in Japanese Zen monasteries.

We had the great joy of spending our two-week retreat with the “Sunflower Family”, led by Sr. Song Nghiem. Our family was responsible for breakfast and we met each morning at 5.45 a.m. to prepare it. Sr. Song Nghiem was there

to greet us warmly with a beaming smile and provide us with gathas, which she wrote on tiny slips of paper for all participants every morning.

It was the year in which our highly-esteemed Thay Phap An gave his moving talk “Beauty in the Sun, Beauty in the Rain” in which he described

his childhood and youth in Da Nang, central Vietnam, up until his flight from Vietnam in a small fishing boat overloaded with hundreds of refugees. His life story touched us all deeply. I felt transported back to my own childhood. In the late 1960s and early 1970s almost every night the news was full of terrifying images of the war in the oppressed country of Vietnam. Thay Phap An described the war, the destruction and the unimaginable suffering, which caused so many wounds that are still apparent, in such a way that brought it to life and moved all who listened.

Although we and many other retreatants had read Thich Nhat Hanh's *Fragrant Palm Leaves* and Sr. Chan Khong's *Learning True Love* – or at least some chapters – we were shocked and many cried. The listeners were impressed by the way in which Thay Phap An had succeeded in transforming that great suffering and misery, and his apparently-lost childhood, into so much goodness and compassion.

Out of this arose an even greater connection and compassion with all those monks and nuns who had come from Vietnam and made the summer retreat possible.

The Dharma talks that year by our highly-esteemed teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay) seemed to us to be particularly deep and clear, penetrating and true. We admired Thay's ability to teach the experiences of the Buddha in a way that was so relevant to modern life – to our individual and, at the same time, collective fears, difficulties, worries and conflicts – that those present felt that these teachings could be directly applied to their own lives.¹ Thay's words repeatedly helped us appreciate our own lives, regardless of our life situation. Many were surrounded by death, separation, severe illness, life crises, fears about economic survival. They had come to Plum Village searching for a way to deal mindfully with themselves and others, and for healing and direction.

“The miracle is to be born as a human being and to be able to walk on this earth” (Thay)

We felt gratitude for this life as a human being and compassion for all living beings and manifestations.

Inspired by Thay's vision

The previous year, 2005, Thay had been able to visit his homeland after 39 years in exile. Thay Phap An and members of the Sangha had negotiated with the authorities in Vietnam for many months to enable Thay and a group of 100 monks and nuns, and 100 practitioners from 30 nations to make this journey².

Perhaps inspired by the experience of this return to his homeland, Thay was moved to act upon his great vision to establish an Institute of Applied Buddhism – and to locate its campus in the center of Europe. In 2006, Sr. Chan Khong sent a letter to Plum Village friends around the world in which she said:

Our planet is so desperately in need of people who can help others discover that peace is possible in this world, there are concrete ways to make peace a reality in our lives, and we only need to learn and practice these methods to realize happiness for ourselves and everyone around us. For the amount that one person typically spends on a university education, we can train many monastics, and the return on the investment is very high in terms of relieving suffering and bringing more light and hope into the world. And we don't have to wait a number of years before reaping the benefits; already during training every monk and nun is serving many people, helping them to be (at)

peace, to liberate themselves, to be a light unto others.

Please help us realize Thay's deep wish to ensure the continued training of monastics in the tradition of Plum Village... We wish that you could contribute the maximum that you are able, even just one time – one time that will make it possible for generation after generation of monks and nuns to continue Thay in the most authentic way.

– Sr. Chan Khong

During that summer retreat of 2006, we felt that something concrete would happen. After a Dharma talk in the second week, Sr. Chan Khong spoke to us. She shared with us that Thay would like to talk to us about this project. In his small, very modest hut on the eastern side of Upper Hamlet, not far from the newly-erected bell tower, we found ourselves together with our beloved teacher and Sr. Chan Khong for the first time. Tea was handed round. After a few minutes of stillness Thay looked at us, full of inner peace and energy, and enabled us to feel an inner connection. Sr. Chan Khong introduced us. Then Thay began to talk in short, succinct sentences:

The project is about research into Buddhism on the basis of personal experience – as the Buddha himself had taught it.

The intention is to create a campus that provides an experience of Buddhism, not another scholastic or philosophical teaching institution.

The focus will be on practitioners and the application of Buddhist principles, so that each individual practitioner, regardless of his or her reasons for coming to the Institute, will have a direct experience of the teachings. It will not be about lectures but about experiences that transform.

It is about creating an institution in which the insights gained can be integrated and practiced in a way appropriate to everyday life.

The Institute should be open to people of all backgrounds regardless of education or beliefs.

The Institute should also be recognized as a research centre.

In addition, programs offered by the Institute – in particular, in the healing professions, natural sciences and social sciences – should one day be officially accredited by government and professional bodies; EIAB students should be able to apply credit points from courses successfully completed at EIAB to their other academic and professional pursuits.

We signaled to Thay that we had understood. We then drank our tea together and, with a deep bow, departed. We “felt” the deep meaning and had an inkling of what was meant, without being fully aware of the full extent of what Thay had in mind. And we felt a sense of responsibility. These moments with our beloved teacher Thay and Sr. Chan Khong left a deep impression on our life.

Thay was not founding a university for the first time. As we later learned, he had already co-founded the Van Hanh University in 1964 in what was then known as Saigon (today’s Ho Chi Minh City), after a study visit and lecture tour at Princeton and Columbia, in the United States.³

We agreed with Sr. Chan Khong that we would wait for further news. At the same time she told us that there were Sangha members in Germany who believed they had already identified a possible site where the future Institute could be established. She mentioned her friends “Bich” and “Thien” from Rheine.⁴ Subsequently, Sangha members Bich Lien-Anh Nguyen and her husband Thien Dang Nguyen, from Rheine, contacted

us and invited us to visit them in November 2006.

Addressing the legalities

It was a beautiful afternoon in a very hospitable atmosphere when we held our discussions with Thien and Bich, who prepared delicious homemade Vietnamese specialities. Bich explained that she had received very specific questions from Plum Village, which we tried to answer as well as we could. We examined the different options for the best form of legal structure for the acquisition of property, and for the subsequent operation of a seminar and study center. We told of our discussions with Sr. Chan Khong in Plum Village and the goals and vision that connected Thay with the proposed Institute.

Bich reported back to Sr. Chan Khong and the next task for us was to form the most suitable legal vehicle for the acquisition and operation of the campus for which we were searching. It soon became clear that the most appropriate vehicle would be a “legal person” resident in Germany, as this would offer future contractual partners a transparent structure which they could understand and trust.

We therefore created – and adapted, taking into account Thay’s and Sr. Chan Khong’s own legal understanding, plus the format of the Plum Village organization which already existed in the United States – a corresponding synopsis, with the future Institute in mind. We explored various forms of (tax privileged) charitable status, such as trusts or (partially) incorporated foundations, as well as a range of different forms of company (such as a company with limited liability) that might be considered.

Sr. Chan Khong shared her experience of establishing Plum Village entities under American and French law. These insights into what was possible in other legal systems were very helpful. Based on these, we focused on setting up a foundation in Germany, and drew up

corresponding articles of incorporation. We explored the possibilities, advantages and disadvantages offered by an officially-recognized foundation established under civil law.

The question of whether the EBU (Église Bouddhique Unifiée), with headquarters in Plum Village and articles of association (from 1986) established under French law, could be this legal entity was examined closely. It turned out that although the EBU was recognized as an “association” under French law, it was not recognized as an independent “legal person”, which meant it did not possess full authority to act independently as the “bearer of rights and duties”. Under French and European law, however, it is necessary that a legal entity is recognized as a “legal person” under the laws of a member state of the European Union in order to be able to act as a legal entity in legal affairs in another EU member state. Consequently, the EBU in France could *not* act in Germany as an independent bearer of rights and duties.⁵

With that avenue closed for setting up the future Institute in Germany, the project working group discussed other options, from trusts to foundations, all the way to limited companies. There was also a need to clarify tax requirements for charitable status. For this, at the beginning of 2007, we got in touch with Dr. Olaf Clemens, tax advisor and auditor at the firm WWP (Weckerle, Wilms and Partner GmbH, Dortmund/Sundern). Ever since, EIAB has been excellently advised and guided by Dr. Clemens who also clarified all tax and social security questions arising for EIAB and for the monks and nuns registered there.⁶ Ultimately the Sangha decided in favor of establishing a charitable company with limited liability (a GmbH).

Choosing a name

Then it was the 2007 summer retreat at Plum Village. In preparation, we had gathered our various documents, plans and checklists so we would be able to

offer a detailed outline. Sr. Chan Khong once again invited us to drink tea with our beloved teacher. Thay had further developed his ideas about the goals and purpose of the future Institute, making these more specific.⁷

In this more intimate discussion in Thay's Upper Hamlet hut, with its wonderful view of the eastern valley, the name the Institute bears today was decided upon. The name needed to encapsulate the idea of an institution which encouraged study and held seminars and courses based on Applied Buddhism. Inspired by our great teacher, we arrived at the name "European Institute of Applied Buddhism".

Beate and I felt connected with Thay and his vision. We were deeply moved that Thay included us in the process of choosing a name and that we could help give the Institute its final name. All present, and the monks and nuns involved in the project, understood what Thay intended and the power he had invested in developing his vision.

After intense exchanges over many months, involving long telephone calls, many emails and drafts, we were finally ready on 5 November 2007 to formalize the articles of the "European Institute of Applied Buddhism GmbH". The aims, and the means of achieving these, were described as follows:

1. *The advancement of the Buddhist religion and the world view of Buddhist philosophy as well as the advancement of Buddhist science and research.*
2. *The statutory purposes will be advanced in particular through:*
 - a) *The creation and operation of a Buddhist research and teaching institution ("the Institute").*
 - b) *The establishment of a Buddhist study and course program, including its implementation, and the holding of scientific/academic Buddhist events, conferences, Days of Mindfulness and lectures for Buddhist teachers, therapists,*

psychologists, members of Buddhist orders and lay people, regardless of religion or world view.

c) The publication and distribution of Buddhist texts regardless of the specific medium.

Our friend Dr. Thuc-Quyen Nguyen-Ryzek was appointed as Director to act with legal authority on behalf of the company. On the basis of her close contact with the Sangha in Plum Village, our dear Thuc-Quyen had already taken on significant tasks for the Sangha in 2007 and provided the Sangha with support and assistance.

On 1 November 2008 the "European Institute of Applied Buddhism GmbH" was entered into the register of the District Court in Dortmund, with its head office in Kronenburgallee 1. EIAB formally came into being that day. In November 2010, following a decision at a general meeting of the company, EIAB's head office was transferred to the Institute itself, in Schaumburgweg 3 at 51545 Waldbröl.

On 17 February 2009 our esteemed Thay Phap An formally took over the Institute's management. We would like to thank Thuc-Quyen, who managed EIAB during its start-up phase with so much commitment and so successfully until handing over to Thay Phap An. Without Thuc-Quyen's special commitment, particularly in 2007 and 2008, EIAB would not have been able to begin so successfully!

The road to Waldbröl

Returning to the spring of 2007, the Sangha became more and more interested in the Rheine property that had been suggested to Thay and the Plum Village Sangha by Bich and Thien. In May, Thuc-Quyen and Bich, together with Ilona Schmied (House of Maitreya), had a site viewing, followed by a meeting in the Rheine town hall

with the head of the city's planning department and his staff. The meeting lasted several hours and, on the basis of our criteria for suitable properties, a comprehensive progress report was drawn up by the project working group and presented to Thay.

After the 2007 summer retreat, Sr. Chan Khong, Sr. Jina, Sr. Song Nghiem and other nuns made their way to Germany. Over the weekend of 4-5 August, they travelled more than 1,000km visiting five properties identified as having potential in locations that included Marienthal, Göttingen, Hannoversch-Münden and Salzgitter. Dozens of photos were taken at each property and, with many positive impressions, our nuns returned to Plum Village where they reported back to Thay. Additional recommendations also came in from the Sangha. By autumn 2007, we had a short list of four properties to consider.

Each property was carefully checked. Our particular criteria were: quality of existing buildings, accommodation possibilities, infrastructure, and possibilities for further development, including construction of a meditation hall. We wanted to ensure that the decision-making process was transparent – and that we could avoid any sudden surprises!

Our checklist was divided into several categories: commercial and legal aspects, infrastructure and location, and finally, comprehensive due diligence regarding technical and environmental issues. Development possibilities, site use and the character of the surroundings were also taken into account. It was necessary for the future campus to have separate living quarters for the monks and nuns. The property should also possess a "monastery atmosphere", in particular for times when neither courses nor retreats were taking place. All said and done, our search was about having an attractive and welcoming environment in which monks and nuns, participants and guests could feel welcome, secure and comfortable.

From one end of Germany to the other, members of the OI (Order of Interbeing) and committed lay practitioners helped us by participating in the property search. They gave the Sangha many recommendations, with a great deal of information about possible sites.⁸ As it turned out, most of the properties suggested by various Sangha members were situated in the north-west or central Germany.

Among properties under consideration were redevelopment sites such as military barracks, small estates, hospitals that had been closed down and old monastery buildings. Some were available only for short-term lease, or their owners wanted to retain leasing rights. This did not correspond with the Sangha's thinking. The objective was to establish EIAB so that it could continue to exist for years – decades, even – without being subject to leases or changes in property ownership that could create uncertainty and, potentially, impose burdens in the future. So, after a closer look, some sites were dropped from the list.

Recommendations from Sangha members were also taken up by Ilona Schmied and Thomas Barth. They traveled across Germany, prepared visit reports and, on the basis of their checklists – which included 11 categories and filled more than 10 pages – reported on the results of their investigations.⁹ By the autumn of 2007, the Sangha was focused on just two possible sites: the Haus Uhlenbusch, an historical property in the south-western city of Hanstedt, and a former barracks complex known as Gellendorf, in Rheine.

Uhlenbusch, which dated back to the 1920s, had been used as a military hospital and had subsequently been used as a sanatorium. Hans-Hermann Lahtz and his wife Jutta Besser-Lahtz were active in negotiating with authorities in the district of Harburg; discussing the state of the building as well as the need for renovation. In addition, Sr. Chan Khong commissioned a surveyor

to examine the building's structure and renovation potential. Future use was an important consideration as Uhlenbusch was located in a conservation area, which meant there would be significant constraints on possible building alterations or extensions.¹⁰

The other property in question was Gellendorf, in Rheine. As early as November 2006, when we first visited Bich Lien-Anh Nguyen and Thien Dang Nguyen, they had talked with great enthusiasm about converting this property. It had been vacated in the year 2000 by the peacetime German armed forces (the Bundeswehr). The city of Rheine was planning to reinvigorate the area, and the entire site of the barracks was to be transferred to a project development company which would be responsible for its development and marketing. City authorities had drawn up a number of land-use plans to ensure the area could be economically productive. These included housing and a mixed area for commercial and industrial usage. We considered it to be a possible location for the future Institute as it offered many advantages and met many of the criteria we regarded as important.

However, in subsequent negotiations with Rheine city authorities it became apparent that there were conflicting interests over their planning intentions. Understandably, the city also wanted to keep the area open for other forms of use, in particular commerce and industry, and to create new and attractive living spaces for young families. These differing interests needed to be reconciled. Further investigations revealed that future use as well as interim use – including talks, retreats and seminars – could potentially contravene some planning laws. In the autumn of 2007, the city's administration concluded that if EIAB were to be established on that site, the planning laws for the entire area would need to be changed or supplemented. It became clear that such a "special area" would also have spatial and planning limits. So, finally, in the spring of

2008, this building, too, fell out of contention.

In early 2008, our lay sister Thuc-Quyen found out that the Institute for Federal Real Estate (abbreviated in German as BImA) had a government-owned property, known as the "Centre for Transformation", available for purchase. It was situated in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia's Bergischen Land, east of the Rhine River, and an area known for its natural beauty.

BImA provided documents about the building, together with a map of its location in the center of the town of Waldbröl. These documents alone sparked immediate interest. Thuc-Quyen informed Sr. Chan Khong and the Sangha in Plum Village.

An appointment was made to meet on 25 February – initially with the Mayor's representatives – at Waldbröl's town hall. Thuc-Quyen wrote to me: "If you arrive earlier and are curious to look at it, here is the address: Centre for Transformation (what a coincidence!)." This first meeting served as an initial orientation and chance to get to know one another. The town representatives outlined Waldbröl's history and development and briefed us on its current situation and development.

Naturally, tolerance and respect as lived values – especially in relation to foreigners – was, and remains, an important criterion for the Sangha's choice of location. Thus, the subject of religious harmony was a key topic in the discussion and the prospect of the future EIAB co-existing peacefully in the local community with monotheistic religions was highlighted.

Thuc-Quyen gave an introductory talk about Thich Nhat Hanh and Sr. Chan Khong, and some insights into the history of Plum Village and Thay's great vision for an Institute of Applied Buddhism. The Mayor's representatives were deeply impressed, especially as their own historical experiences enabled them to sympathize with the fate of the

Vietnamese people. They had also taken the time to inform themselves about our teacher, Thay.

Even at this first meeting it became clear that the Waldröhl site offered numerous benefits above and beyond those of other properties we had been considering. The infrastructure met our anticipated needs, the grounds were large – with apple orchards that would be perfect for walking meditation (something we thought would particularly please Thay) – and a neighboring building, the former civilian service school, presented clear possibilities for expansion.¹¹

However, we also learned that the main building, a mighty structure from the era of Imperial Germany and originally built as a hospital, had a very sad and oppressive history from 1933 to 1945. (EIAB's monks and nuns have since done a great deal to contribute to healing and transformation from these terrible events.) After World War 2, the building was used again as a hospital until the late 1960s, when it was given over for "privileged military use". This meant that, any revitalization proposal that involved returning it to civilian use would require regulatory approval and necessary permissions.

We knew from the outset that if EIAB were to be established there we would have to submit a comprehensive application for building permits in line with prevailing regulations. Thuc-Quyen sent the information that had been made available to us to Thay, Sr. Chan Khong and the Sangha in Plum Village, and reported on the discussions and the insights gained.

On 13 March, a week after Thay and Sister Chan Khong visited to inspect the property, more detailed discussions took place in Waldröhl regarding the building, the planning issues (from a legal perspective) and possibilities for future use of the building and its environs. The previous post-war uses of the building – as a hospital, up until 1969, and as a facility of the Federal

Ministry of Defence until 2006 – were also discussed.

Future use would entail commencement of a building application process. Consideration also needed to be given to the fact that since 1975, during the period when the site was a military facility, additional building and renovation work had been undertaken that had not been recorded in the building documentation made available to us. This made it necessary to compare the current building stock with the available plans and, where required, to draw up new plans of the building stock.

The municipality of Waldröhl stated that – subject to approval by the Council – in terms of planning law requirements no objections to the intended use would arise. We also gave a cursory overview of future operations for the purposes of project planning. The planning office of North Rhine-Westphalia's Oberbergischen District clarified the current situation regarding requirements for fire safety, supply of drinking water, heating and additional technical matters related to intended future use as an institution offering courses and retreats and offering accommodation.

Securing EIAB's future home

It was a great advantage that at this early stage, on the basis of the information available, we were able to apprise ourselves of potential risks – beyond the visible state of the building – and could begin to clarify these, at least superficially, with the other parties and responsible authorities involved. Although there was no list of measures that would need to be implemented and no cost estimates regarding these, we knew that we could use this knowledge as a basis for negotiation with the Federal Republic of Germany, as the owner and seller, if and when Thay and the Sangha wished to proceed further.

We reported back to Thay, Sr. Chan Khong and the Sangha. After the

Sangha's further discussions, we were informed that we should proceed with preliminary work and an assessment of the building, which would involve appointing an architect from Waldröhl (who also happened to be a member of the Waldröhl Council) to draw up a feasibility study based on the current state of knowledge.

A date was set – 18 April – for our next meeting with the Council of the Oberbergischen District. Steps for fire safety and prevention were agreed among the Council, fire safety authorities and local building authorities, as well as the Office for the Preservation of Historical Monuments. We knew that a preliminary assessment of the site's overall viability was necessary in order to get a rough idea of the total cost of the project, and that this assessment would be linked to the question of the purchase price in subsequent negotiations. The question of whether donations would be available and, if so, how much, also needed to be clarified.

Thay and the Sangha wanted to be sure that if a decision was made for a specific project, then the building would indeed be available at a certain point in time for use by EIAB, and that the Sangha would be willing and in a position to cover the costs of modifying it for future use, as well as the operational running costs. It proved to have been a good idea to have founded the future institute as a charitable EIAB GmbH (company with limited liability) and to have put the necessary structures in place with an eye to the future, as negotiations began to assume a concrete form.

While Thay and numerous monks and nuns once again traveled to Vietnam and Hanoi in the spring of 2008, and visited Thay's root temple, we were still able, thanks to their instructions, to proceed with the negotiations for EIAB. However, the project and our negotiations with the authorities clearly could not remain confidential for long. Already, in May 2008, the local newspaper *Westfälische Rundschau*,

reported that the “Association for Living in Mindfulness” wanted to open a day center in Waldbröl in September 2008. This was subsequently taken up by the Waldbröl press.

Thay asked Sr. Jina to proceed with negotiations whilst he, Sr. Chan Khong and Thay Phap An were in Vietnam. Once again we had received the mandate and, from May 2008, negotiated with representatives of the sellers for EIAB’s acquisition of the property. In mid-June, Thay, the Sangha and also Thuc-Quyen returned from Vietnam. Thay and the Sangha reviewed the results of negotiations, to date, in relation to the overall decision-making process. In the meantime, the project’s appointed architect, Mrs. Anne Theuer, had submitted to the Sangha an estimate of what it might cost to renovate the building and make it fully compliant with all relevant government requirements.

By now, we were ready to prepare the purchase contract and negotiate on the basis of it. However, the seller, BlmA, insisted on drafting their own contract,

which we received for review on 2 July 2008. We worked our way through their draft and proposed amendments. In parallel, we asked for more information from relevant authorities. Gradually, we received answers to our queries from the other administrative agencies, unfortunately sometimes without specific details. Then came the 2008 summer retreat at Plum Village. In July, we travelled to Lower Hamlet and again spent the retreat in the group of our beloved Sr. Song Nghiem. During this time we held further discussions with Thay, Sr. Chan Khong, Sr. Chan Duc, Sr. Jina and, of course, also with Sr. Song Nghiem.

We returned home to Dortmund and, in August 2008, continued with the negotiations. At this time we received the first estimates for the basic remedial work that would be necessary for the building to be habitable again. These enabled us to adopt a clear negotiating stance with regard to additional contractual details, and the purchase price. In August, and at the beginning of September, a series of draft contracts were negotiated with BlmA.

Putting the finishing touches

On Wednesday, 10 September 2008 the moment had come to “seal the deal”. Representatives of BlmA, and Thuc-Quyen, as Director of EIAB GmbH, signed the purchase agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and EIAB. That very day, the monks and nuns who had traveled from Plum Village to form Thay’s new monastic sangha in Germany moved in.¹² Two days later, on Friday, 12 September 2008, a press conference was held to announce EIAB’s establishment. This also served as the occasion for the formal handover of the property to Thay by BlmA’s representatives, in the presence of the Mayor of Waldbröl, Mr. Peter Koester.¹³

Technical support was provided to the newly-resident monastics by Jörg Meyer, who had previously looked after the building for BlmA. On 22 September, a meeting was held with the building supervision authority of Oberbergischen District. In parallel, other necessary measures such as ensuring provision of electricity and water, as well as

Dr. Puplick, accompanied by his wife Beate, arrives bearing a celebratory gift on the day of EIAB’s formal establishment. Receiving the gift on behalf of the newly-formed EIAB Sangha is Thay Phap An (far right), beside Waldbröl’s Director of Economic Development, Mr. Eckhard Becker.



sufficient and appropriate insurance protection for the large building were undertaken.

With the Sangha's agreement, we proceeded with our official application for occupancy. The matter of obtaining permits for the monastics to live there was dealt with at Oberbergischen District level by the Foreign Residents' Department. Although the application involved a number of different nationalities, a standardized and uniform procedure was agreed upon, rules were also agreed with the social security offices and an accounting system set up at EIAB. In such matters the monks and nuns of EIAB were generously supported by Dr. Clemens (WWP GmbH). The construction requirements for the change of use were further clarified, in close consultation with the local authorities, the Office for the Preservation of Historical Buildings, the local fire service and a project manager recommended by the Sangha, Dr. Wilhelm Busch.

A special vote of thanks

Thanks to the support of the Sangha, all the monks and nuns, lay friends and many other friends and donors, and finally also to Waldbrol, we succeeded in turning the vision of our beloved teacher Thich Nhat Hanh – to establish an Institute of Applied Buddhism in Europe and to locate it in Germany – into a physical reality.

We wish to say a very special “thank you” to our own Federal Republic of Germany. Both in the contractual negotiations and in the financial terms of the contract, itself, our country proved to be very generous towards our beloved Thay and EIAB. We are happy and feel privileged to live in this country! We would like, also, to offer our warm thanks to the Mayor of Waldbrol, Mr. Köster, the members of the Waldbrol City Council and also Council staff of both the city of Waldbrol and the Oberbergischen District, in particular to Ms. Gabriele Keil-Riegert for the positive support

she offered throughout the building application process.

Under such favourable conditions, EIAB's first programs were soon up and running, lovingly prepared by our dear monastic brothers and sisters; courses were successfully held and, today, EIAB is a large and important center for Applied Buddhism in Europe. We wish to congratulate our beloved teacher Thich Nhat Hanh and our esteemed Thay Phap An and all the monks and nuns who have served so many people – above all, families and children – so well. We wish from our hearts that the European Institute of Applied Buddhism will continue to provide people throughout Europe and beyond with access to the teachings of the Buddha and enable them to gain direct experience of what it means to live in mindfulness.

Beate and Dr. Alexander Puplick

EIAB expresses its deep gratitude to Dr. Puplick for being EIAB's legal representative and a legal advisor to Thay, Sr. Chan Khong and the Plum Village community. We also express our deep gratitude to his wife Beate for her years of loving support to EIAB in legal and other matters.

END NOTES

- 1 Thich Nhat Hanh is one of few teachers who have written a history of the Buddha based on source texts which he searched out, researched and presented in their historical context. In many of his talks he has referred to the results of this research regarding the teachings of the Buddha, which were not transcribed during the Buddha's lifetime. He has also succeeded in structuring these teachings in such a way that they are understandable for Westerners with no previous knowledge of Buddhism. The contents of Thay's talks correspond so closely with generally-accepted findings of Western thought – in particular physics – that Western listeners can recognize the truth of the Buddha's experiences and ask themselves why they cannot succeed in behaving and living in accordance with his insights
- 2 Thay Phap An notes that the actual number of monks, nuns and lay people who participated in the trip was far higher than the number officially allowed. Lá thư Làng Mai số 29 ra ngày 12 tháng 01 năm 2006

(Plum Village newsletter number 29, 12.01.2006). P1, <https://langmai.org/tang-kinh-cac/la-thu-lang-mai/la-thu-lang-mai-29/>. Accessed 28 July 2018

- 3 According to Thay Phap An, after Thay returned from Vietnam in 2005, where he had observed the current state of Buddhist and monastic education, he expressed a wish to “correct” what he now considered to have been a mistake he made as a young Dharma teacher when helping to found the Van Hanh University in Saigon. That pioneering university introduced the Western model of highly-intellectual academic teaching to Vietnamese Buddhist education. But Thay's special insight, after decades of monastic life, is that Buddhism needs to be applied to daily living. Beyond acquiring knowledge of Buddhist theory, a student should be able to transform his or her own difficulties, which better equips him or her to contribute to society
- 4 The city of Rheine is in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, in north-western Germany
- 5 These intensive investigations undertaken in 2006 and 2007 to establish EIAB as a “legal person” under Germany law had the positive effect of prompting EBU in France to apply for an upgrade of its own legal status, from “association” to “congregation”. The conferring of this higher status, which was a particular honor for Plum Village, was finally confirmed in 2012 by French ministerial decree
- 6 Dr. Clemens has supported EIAB and the Sangha from the very beginning of the project. Together with his wife, Alexandra Clemens, he is one of EIAB's largest patrons. We all owe these friends a debt of gratitude!
- 7 Please also see page 7 and the handwritten note in which Thay articulated his vision for EIAB
- 8 At this point the Sangha members deserve warm thanks! They came up with so many suggestions for potentially-suitable sites and answered so many questions. Warm thanks are also due to all those who allowed us to view their properties, patiently answered many questions and provided a great deal of information
- 9 Sr. Chan Khong later wrote that, in total, more than 50 different properties were carefully considered regarding their possible suitability for the future EIAB
- 10 A short while ago we found out that the building was demolished in 2017 for structural reasons
- 11 In September 2009, one year after the establishment of EIAB, this additional property was acquired and became the Great Compassion Monastery. It was named after the first pagoda Thay entered and where he lived on his path of becoming a monk
- 12 Initially, even though the building had hundreds of rooms, we were allowed only the use of six rooms for monks and six rooms for nuns
- 13 Mr. Peter Koester took office on 18 June 2008, three months before the formal establishment of EIAB

Celebrating EIAB on our 10th Anniversary

By Sr. Chan Duc (Sr. Annabel)

This article is about my sense of gratitude to EIAB. Without gratitude I know I cannot be happy and expressing gratitude is a way of expressing happiness.

Land ancestors

First of all I wish to express my gratitude to the land ancestors of the EIAB; in particular, the evangelical pastor, the reverend Hollenberg, and Doctor Karl Venn. It was these two gentlemen who founded, more than 100 years ago, the hospital for mentally and physically handicapped poor people, that stood where the EIAB now stands. Their motivation was purely to help those who otherwise would have received no help. Their photographs stand on our ancestral altar. Thay in his wisdom told us to honor these two gentlemen and wrote their names to be placed on our ancestral altars along with their photographs. Their compassionate action continues to support us.

In 1938 when plans were being set afoot to take away and kill the 700 mentally and physically handicapped inmates of the hospital – according to the Nazi policy of purifying the Aryan race – there were doctors in the hospital, who, out of bravery and compassion, tried to find, at the risk of their own lives, ways to save these lives by not disclosing that the patient was there or not certifying that he or she was handicapped. We do not know the names of these doctors but their compassion and bravery continue to support us.

Later on, after World War 2, the new Nazi building (which is now the home of EIAB) built on the foundations of the

former hospital, became a hospital for Waldbrol and the many compassionate actions of doctors and nurses in their daily lives of ministering to the sick, continue to support us.

After there was built a new hospital for the region of Waldbrol, the German army founded the “Centre for Transformation” in today’s EIAB main campus. But it should take until September 2008 that the building was allowed to serve for true transformation.

Our land ancestors include the trees, the squirrels and the birds. I am very grateful for the many ancient trees that stand around the EIAB like Dharma protectors. We have the run of the park which separates us from the busy main road, a place where Thay would like to go in his free time and hang his hammock. In that park there are a huge oak tree and weeping beech that are more than 100 years old. The park was part of the hospital and at its entrance there is still an old notice reminding us that this is a place of recovery and healing and we should protect its atmosphere of quiet. On all sides of the EIAB there are large trees with luxuriant foliage. The size of the trees is no doubt due to the frequent rainfall that Waldbrol enjoys.

The trees are the home of squirrels and many birds. Thay remarked upon the birdsong of EIAB in a Dharma talk. The birds sing very loudly and joyfully often beginning before dawn. They

have found a safe refuge from the town and are happy and bring joy to our hearts. To see a red squirrel leap from branch to branch or stand chewing a nut, shows us what it is to enjoy the present moment.

Our land ancestors include the four elements: earth, water, fire and air. I am particularly grateful to the air we breathe at the Institute, although we are not far from a very busy road the air we breathe comes from the forest and is always fresh and clear. Every time I have been too long indoors the first thing I notice as I step outside is the good fresh air.

Every week I take a walk into the forest with my sisters to fetch spring water. This is the only water I drink while I am in the Institute. The water comes from deep in the earth and is always very cold. In the past this water supplied the hospital. Now anyone who likes can come and put it into bottles. There is nothing more refreshing than washing one’s face in cold spring water.

Spiritual ancestors

Thay has brought to Waldbrol a lineage of spiritual ancestors. Thank you, Thay for your insight and compassion. Many German people could not understand why you agreed to come to Waldbrol to found the EIAB. They thought that by coming to a Nazi building you were somehow condoning the Nazi

régime. They wanted the EIAB to be in a place that had a peaceful energy and wholesome history. They did not want to be reminded of this dark past. You said, Thay, that we did not choose Waldbrol, Waldbrol chose us. There were land ancestors there who approved of and supported our coming and of course all our spiritual ancestors supported us too. We needed to come there in order to transform the cruelty, intolerance and discrimination of the past with understanding and compassion. Dear Thay, you yourself remarked and many people also say that after we had been practicing a couple of years in that place the atmosphere of that heavy, dark building began to lighten. People who, on their way to work, had to walk through our grounds said it felt different now, more peaceful. Lay friends who before did not want us to set up the EIAB in Waldbrol are now moved by the transformation of the place.

Thank you for the letter you wrote to the hungry spirits that are the continuation of the hospital inmates who were sterilized, cruelly treated or put to death and of the perpetrators of these actions in the 1930s. We read this letter at our ceremony of offering to hungry spirits. It always waters the seeds of compassion and forgiveness in our hearts.

Thank you for coming in September 2008 when the EIAB was opened and going into every room, 400 rooms in all, chanting the name of Avalokitesvara, in order to cleanse the energy of the building with consecrated water and the energy of concentration and compassion.

Thank you for all the calligraphies that made up the calligraphy exhibition which extended the full 150 meters of the hall, especially the calligraphy: *With the mud of fanaticism and intolerance we grow the lotus of non-discrimination and inclusiveness*, which always reminds of the reason why we are in the EIAB practicing. (One brother once said to me: why are you not more grateful for the mud you have

here?) These calligraphies have done much to transform the energy of the building reminding us at every step of the essence of the practice.

Dear Thay, often when you came to the EIAB, especially in more recent years, you were not in good health. Still you came to give the talks in the German and Dutch retreats, nourishing so many people with joy and transformation. In August 2014 when you were living on volition food alone you made that wonderful revision of the Heart Sutra in your small room of the third floor of the huge building. That revision is essential for our correct understanding and practice of Buddhism and we are honored that it was made in the EIAB.

Dear Thay, you wanted us to have a Sangha of Buddha statues from Indonesia sitting in meditation to the south of the building on the hill in the orchard in order to offer support and protection. Three Buddha statues moved there. Unfortunately some local young people in their ignorance broke off the finger of one Buddha statue. A lay friend, specialized in mending broken statues, mended the finger and the young people broke it off again. Our friend mended it again and so far so good. It remains intact. Some of us did not dare to put the other Buddha statues up there on the hill, in case they were broken too, but in our hearts we want to move all the Buddha statues up there in accordance with your wishes. It is so wonderful on walking meditation to be able to sit down peacefully amongst beautiful Buddha statues that radiate peace and joy.

The fourfold Sangha

Many lay practitioners inspired by the presence of EIAB have moved house in order to be in close proximity to the EIAB, to join the daily sitting or walking meditations and the weekly Waldbrol Sangha gathering. It was Thay's suggestion that we should start offering the practice to the inhabitants of Waldbrol and in the beginning we

organized the Waldbrol Sangha in the rooms over the library in the town. Now that Sangha meets with the support of monastic brothers and sisters in the EIAB. Not only do these practitioners support us with their practice but also with their voluntary service in the office and in the garden.

I am grateful to my monastic sisters and brothers who have, although still very young in age and in Dharma age, organized programs of study for monks and nuns. This is in accord with Thay's wishes. Thay said that the fourfold Sangha of the EIAB can be compared to a peach. The monks and nuns are the kernel of the peach and the lay friends the flesh. The kernel has its own program of studies and Dharma teachers with four or five younger brothers or sisters take turns to lead the practice for lay friends, leaving the kernel for the flesh for a while and then returning to the kernel to teach their younger brothers and sisters. Thay emphasized the importance of taking care of the kernel.

There are monastic brothers and sisters who have learnt German and this has brought much happiness to our German lay friends. German is not an easy language, very different from Vietnamese, and it takes much time and commitment to learn. Our lay friends said that in the first year or so of the EIAB they did not feel so welcome. I think we were all too busy adjusting to the new environment. Now, however, they are heartened by the warm welcome they always receive from the monks and the nuns.

I am grateful to elder monks and nuns who have borne the heavy burden of administration and finance, attending lengthy meetings and having to deal patiently with German bureaucracy. It is not easy to avoid anxiety in these situations and a strong practice of mindful breathing, walking and smiling is the only way. In the early years of the EIAB I also attended these meetings but it was too much for me. If it were not for these monks and nuns the EIAB could

not continue to function. Occasionally we are lucky to meet an official who is kind enough to turn a blind eye to our non-compliance with the stringent German regulations but such an official is rare. These monks and nuns are the EIAB's interface with the legal and governmental world. It is a task which no one enjoys very much to do but it has to be done and done in a way that

increases the faith that people, who do not practice, have in the spiritual life. I am very grateful for the self-sacrifice of these elder monks and nuns.

Over 10 years many changes have taken place in the EIAB. Slowly the great building is being renovated. Monastic brothers and sisters have come and gone, but everyone has left something

precious and everyone has something to be grateful for; maybe what we remember most of all is the brotherhood and sisterhood that we have enjoyed together while we have been there. As long as there is brotherhood and sisterhood the EIAB can continue to offer transformation to Waldbrol, Germany, Europe and the world.

Greetings from the Mayor



Dear Readers,

When our Buddhist friends arrived in Waldbrol in 2008, probably neither they nor the residents of Waldbrol, could have known just how they would shape the future here together. After 10 years of the EIAB in Waldbrol, we can now say without fear of contradiction that everything has worked out wonderfully. The EIAB with its sisters and brothers enriches us in uncountable ways and a Waldbrol without it is inconceivable.

Now, in 2018, our Buddhist friends have been living, working and helping here for 10 years. In the name of the city of Waldbrol, as well as personally, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my warmest congratulations.

I wish all of us all the very best for the future

Best Wishes

Peter Koester

Mayor

Benefit concert

In early February EIAB enjoyed an “overtone” concert performed in our Asoka Institute by Christian Bollmann, Thomas Kagermann and Jochen Fassbender



10th Anniversary reflections

I was very happy when I heard that Thay wanted to set up an Institute of Applied Buddhism in Germany. But when I got to know the building and its history in autumn 2008 when the nuns and monks moved in, my first impression was, "That is a really gigantic project they have taken on", nonetheless I liked the surroundings with the wonderful park and orchards all the same.

As I knew about the transformation of the negative energy in relation to the history of Upper Hamlet in Plum Village (executions of French citizens by the SS or German soldiers), I was not worried by the negative energy of the former psychiatric clinic and the eviction and even killing of the inmates by the Nazis.

"No Mud – No Lotus" is a central insight gatha of the Plum Village tradition... and just as the Buddha managed to convince the mass murderer Angulimala to mend his ways, so Thay and the Plum Village Sangha will succeed in transforming this place and all its difficult energy.

When I once asked a Jewish Dharma friend from England, who was attending a retreat at the EIAB, how she felt in this place, she replied: "When Thay and the Sangha are here I am not afraid of these energies."

I felt the same way. My trust was great, and I have never regretted supporting Thay and the Sangha from the very beginning in their aspiration to transform this place into one in which people have the opportunity to recognize their suffering, to breathe with it and to embrace it with all their love and compassion in order to transform it. This exercise is central to the Plum Village tradition and always finds expression in some form or another in every course held here.

The Sangha has now been here for 10 years, and already a lot of smaller and larger miracles have happened: inner transformation in the people who have attended retreats and courses, and the outer changes to the place itself.

The exhibition of "Healing Hearts" for which people from Waldbröl and

surroundings, together with people from across the world, sewed hearts for all those who suffered in this place, was the first big step in the direction of healing.

This was followed by the official opening and the wonderful exhibition of Thay's calligraphies in the long, spacious corridor of the EIAB, that opened peoples' hearts in a very concrete way and also pointed to the freedom of the ultimate dimension: "Letting go is a source of happiness", "Peace is every step", "Listen with compassion", "I have arrived, I am home" "Breathe and know you are alive", "Happiness is here and now", "The miracle of being awake", "Be free wherever you are", "No death, no fear".

In another room there was an exhibition of Thay's many books, which have spread his teachings throughout the world, and been translated into approximately about 50 languages.

The lay out of the garden and the paths around the stupa, completed with the pillars found in the cellar of the EIAB



originally intended for the “Strength through Joy” hotel for the upper echelons of the Nazi Party, conjure up the flair of a contemplative Buddhist monastery.

The construction of the new dining hall, through whose enormous glass doors, visitors have a direct view of the beautiful lotus pond and babbling brook by which the Buddha sits in complete calm, conveys a sense of peace and tranquillity.

The courses offer a diverse range of topics that address the many needs of people in our society, and the presence of the nuns and monks with their mindful, calm movements – at work and whilst walking – their friendliness and youthful freshness immediately offer participants the opportunity to immerse themselves in the energy of mindfulness from their very first day at the EIAB onwards. Above all, the experience of eating together for at least half an hour in stillness are balsam for our restless minds, which are constantly looking to do four things at once. I once asked a Sangha friend what he liked best about the EIAB, he replied, “the mindful meals together with the monks and nuns in stillness.”

I also like the fact that the courses have completely different formats: very small, medium and large. Some people enjoy the strong Sangha energy during a large course, others are happy that there are smaller courses, which offer a greater sense of security.

On a recent visit to the EIAB for a week, I thought, “That there is space here for so many different things is really a miracle”. I experienced members of the International Order of Interbeing and Dharma teachers from many different countries who had come together for a course, and I enjoyed the presence of pregnant women, some of whom had come with their partners, who had come for a course about mindfulness during childbirth. What better start could parents give their children for their lives than to treat them mindfully

and lovingly. I remembered that Thay always wanted to create a program or institute for people who wanted to start a family.

For him it is so important that the Dharma should penetrate all areas of life, and I think the EIAB has taken a big step in this direction with its large range of courses.

The EIAB is sustained by the Community of nuns and monks from the Plum Village tradition. There are a few very experienced Dharma teachers who have been practicing for many years, as well as the very young monks and nuns from Vietnam and Thailand, who are in the process of learning German.

The retreats and courses are led above all by the experienced monks and nuns. Some courses are also led by Western lay Dharma teachers to whom Thay has transmitted the Dharma Lamp, i.e. the authorization to teach.

However, there are also course leaders from the Order of Interbeing of Thay, or course leaders with a close connection to the Plum Village tradition. Their courses are accompanied by a nun or monk.

The main burden of teaching and organising rests on very few shoulders. The organization involves more than just the normal organization of an institute; over all these years it has also involved the planning and supervision of renovation and conversion work as well as the construction of the kitchen and dining hall. Some of us who are closely connected with the EIAB get goose pimples when we think of what might happen if these brothers or sisters were forced to take a break due to a burnout. Over the longer term it is important to find more shoulders willing to share this burden.

It would also be good if the almost exclusively Vietnamese monastic community could be enhanced by a few experienced Western nuns and monks, who could help the older monks

and nuns deal the many enquiries. The schools, hospitals and universities etc. in the near and more distant surroundings have a great need, not least of all due to the MBSR movement (Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction according to Jon Kabat-Zinn) for training and education in the theory and practice of mindfulness, and the EIAB receives many requests to teach mindfulness.

The teachers in the Plum Village tradition, with their very specific methods, could introduce new areas and aspects of mindfulness, especially in the area of mindful and loving communication and ethical behavior.

Annabelle Zinser
 (“True Fragrance of the Mindfulness Trainings”),
 Berlin



Life is movement

For each of us life is a journey, Outwards and inwards. Over and again we discover new land, where we have to learn new things, and receive new chances.

I too have begun on a long journey, without knowing it. I grew up in America, and was washed up on the banks of the Rhine in 1981. Since I was 18 I have been interested in Buddhism, Asian culture and thought. The foundations of which have had the power to form and alter my life. I am a philosopher and poet, but these are not lucrative pastimes, so in 1983 I began as a bio pioneer, baking organic bread and cakes.

In 1991 I founded the DLS wholemeal mill-bakery. Since then we bake 100% organic, freshly ground in house. Since 2006 we have made a deal with Demeter*. One hundred per cent of our grain comes from where we live, 90% of all ingredients come from the immediate vicinity. We grind the grain freshly every day in house.

In 2009 I learnt about the EIAB. Since the beginning of the 1980s I have been reading Thay's books and I am an enthusiastic reader. In 1996 I got to know him.



I wanted personal contact with the Institute in Waldbrohl and in 2012 I found it. On a busy autumn day I got to know Sr. Song Nghiem and Thay Phap An. The first thing that struck me was their open heartedness, mindfulness and curiosity. Despite all the activity they had an open ear and open mind for me. I was so naïve and thought I could help them with a modest donation. When I saw the size of the project they had really begun with, and the construction problems that confronted them I became very quiet. In my eyes it looked like an almost insurmountable situation. I had to grasp that I couldn't

really help my heart was so touched, what an enormous "outreach" program (constantly offering workshops and courses for people in their surroundings) they had created. The way they deal with their construction problems, and their open-heartedness meant there was nothing left to do but to offer them my daily support.

We at the DLS wholemeal mill-bakery are proud that we are able to bring joy to the monks, nuns and guests and make their lives and work a little bit more pleasant. We would like to thank Sr. Song Nghiem and Thay Phap An, for giving us the chance to be part of their wonderful project.

Many thanks
Much happiness

May you help many people
May many people help you

David and the DLS Team

* the Greek goddess of the grain, harvest and nourishment.

EIAB expresses our deep gratitude to David (top right, removing a freshly-baked loaf) and the DLS team (left) for, literally, giving us our daily bread.



In and on the Middle Way

Planning, managing and crafting the next phases of EIAB's renovation and expansion, including construction of a meditation hall for 500 people.

When Thay Phap An asked me in May 2017, my 25th year of self-employment, whether I could take on the renovation planning and construction management for the second phase of construction at the EIAB, I felt very grateful and appreciated. Out of this gratitude arose a great love for this task. Here something is being created that will be of benefit to many people. At the same time, it is important to me that the donations will be invested efficiently and prudently, as they are what primarily guarantees the realisation of the project. One way I can help achieve this is by creating a community of craftsmen and construction helpers. If they are happy then the project can be completed in happiness. This is often not just a question of payment, but rather a question of “how do I communicate with all those involved in the construction work”? This project, like all others, is a community project. Together we will create something good here. This is already recognizable in the planning and gutting work, which was begun in February of this year after the symbolic ground-breaking. It may even be possible to complete work for the second phase of construction by the end of this year.

I got to know the EIAB nine years ago, and in the time since I have learned to truly appreciate the wonderful work the nuns and monks do for the region and the visitors from all over the world. All the nuns and monks offer their practice to serve those who come to visit the EIAB. And this often extends to include their families and relatives. A key saying that I have learned at the EIAB is: There is no suffering that does not exist side by side with happiness.

Alongside embracing my own suffering, this also allows me to see the many possible solutions.

Overall, approximately 1,000 square meters of usable floor space will be redesigned on three floors during the second phase of construction. This will create 18 single and double rooms and three family apartments, each with its own new bathroom. In addition, three new communal areas and a new meditation hall are planned. The construction of the meditation hall needs to be incorporated into planning for the second phase as the two will have the same fire safety systems and building evacuation routes. There is already a good existing plan for this which can be extended further. This also means that we are already planning, and will soon build, emergency escape routes for the new meditation hall in order to ensure we can apply for the necessary planning permission. This gives us a wonderful opportunity to recognize how everything is interconnected. We can only complete building of the meditation hall once approvable escape routes have been created during phases two and three.

The more I get involved in planning the project, the more respect I have for the work of the craftsmen and the planners, who created and maintained the building in its current form. They have invested innumerable hours combined with great effort and incredible attention to detail. Together we are now carrying on with this work.

At the moment the fire safety concept for the second phase is being adapted, structural analysis for the new external

staircase is underway and technical specifications for the construction are being finalized. Soon, the renovation plan shall be submitted to the planning authority, seeking approval.

Overall, I feel incredibly supported by the community of monks and nuns of the EIAB on all levels. This is even reflected in my blood pressure, which has improved considerably. Commenting on this my teacher Daya Mullins said: “When we say ‘yes’, the universe gives us the energy we need”. I have said “yes” to this task and look forward to completing it with the many helping hands for the benefit of the EIAB and its visitors. For this we also need your help in the form of donations and/or your craftsmanship. As I have many years of experience with fund-raising, I am also happy to help the EIAB with a fund-raising project. If you feel you would like to volunteer then you can certainly get in touch through Thay Phap An and Sr. Song Nghiem.

If we assume that everything is in contact with everything else, that we are all a whole, then who are we donating to when we make a donation to the EIAB?

With this in mind I wish us all a lot of fun and joy during the renovation of the second phase of construction as well as with the meditation hall for 500 people that will soon follow.

In loving affection,

Frank Jungjohann-Feltens

Letter with a request for support for

Constructing a meditation hall



Waldbröl, 1 May, 2018

Dear Sir or Madam,
Dear Friends of the EIAB,

To commence the new lunar year, we, the monks and nuns of the EIAB, have asked all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Patriarchs and Matriarchs with all our hearts for your protection, peace and well-being. May the new lunar year, the Year of the Dog 2018, bring you and your family love, harmony, health, happiness and stability in the practice.

On 19 February, the 4th day of the Year of the Dog, at 6.30 a.m., the fourfold community of the EIAB held a ceremony to celebrate the commencement of the building of the meditation hall and the restoration of the Asoka building. The ceremony was conducted in a friendly, contemplative and spiritual atmosphere. Amongst those present were many friends, who had come from far and wide for the Tet celebrations, and Frank Jungjohann-Feltens, the head architect for the upcoming construction project.

Thanks to the love and support of many friends from across the world, 10 years ago we were able to found a center for study and practice in Europe in accordance with the ideal of Applied Buddhism of the Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. In the name of Thầy and the Sangha of the Institute, we would like to

thank you for your support in fulfilling Thầy's heart's desire, namely to bring the teachings of the Buddha to people all over the world, and to free them from suffering. The European Institute of Applied Buddhism, its founding and development, is a concrete example of this.

According to the Buddha's own words as well as in Buddhist narratives, in his innumerable lives the Buddha exemplified the vast range of virtues of a Bodhisattva. In the story of King Vessantara from the collection of little texts (Khuddaka Nikaya) it is said that in his previous life the Buddha practiced "generosity" – "the perfection of giving" (Dana Paramita), one of the 10 virtues of a Bodhisattva, at the highest level. Through this story we can clearly feel the miracle that the practice of generosity can bring forth, to purify our minds and also to contribute to our own awakening and that of all living beings.

When I was a young monk, I practiced primarily Zen Buddhism and had very unpleasant sensations when I had to ask others for donations for charity events or building projects. But the older and more anchored in the practice I become, the more clearly I recognize the infinite merit of the "perfection

of giving", although all three terms "donor", "recipient", and "object" are empty. The merit of generosity has the potential to liberate us from the cycle of birth and death.

With this insight, in spring, we began with the construction of the prayer and meditation hall, as well as the restoration of the Asoka building. On the one hand the official requirements for a public venue need to be fulfilled, and on the other course participants and visitors will be provided with the appropriate facilities and rooms for longer stays.

Over the last 10 years participants in the large retreats in summer have had to use marquees as temporary meditation halls, dining rooms or dormitories. In winter visitors had to listen to Dharma talks, and take part in Dharma sharings and other retreat activities in the icy corridors. The sight of children and adults wrapped up in several blankets touched us deeply. The building project is, so to speak, an opportunity for us all to sow the seeds of the practice to support the Three Jewels and promote the Dharma.

From the bottom of our hearts we ask you, friends and Buddhists from across the world, for your support with

this project. It will enable us, together with Thầy, to bring Buddhism into the modern world, to strengthen our path of practice and to offer the Buddha's teachings as a refuge for everyone in this crisis-ridden world.

Once again we, the monks and nuns of the European Institute of Applied Buddhism, ask all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Patriarchs and Matriarchs with all our hearts for your protection,

peace and well-being in the new lunar year of the dog 2018.

With great appreciation and best wishes

Bhikkhu Thích Chân Pháp Ấn together with the monks and nuns of the European Institute of Applied Buddhism

pháp ấn

Account for donations to the European Institute of Applied Buddhism:

Recipient: EIAB

Institute: Kreissparkasse Köln

IBAN: DE27 3705 0299 0341 5529 32

SWIFT-BIC: COKSDE33XXX

Ceremony to inaugurate construction of our prayer and meditation hall, and EIAB's ongoing renovation

at 6:30 a.m., 19 February, 2018

1. Prayer ceremony in the large hall of the EIAB



2. The symbolic ground-breaking and laying of the foundation stone for the construction of the prayer and meditation hall



3. The symbolic ground-breaking and laying of the foundation stone for the restoration of the second phase of the EIAB



4. The symbolic ground-breaking and laying of the foundation stone for the restoration of the third phase of the EIAB



5. The symbolic ground-breaking and laying of the foundation stone for the construction of the prayer and meditation hall



E-I-A-B: an astonishing transformation

“The EIAB”, at the beginning this was for many of us an astonishingly sober combination of letters to signify Thay’s great vision and, at the same time, name the huge building with hundreds empty rooms, that the community was confronted with. A building whose sheer size and history left us intimidated and scratching our heads. How is this going to work out? But this just made our joy greater as we witnessed how these four letters, in a completely unexpected way, evolved year by year, and increasingly developed their own character. And that despite all the challenges facing it. Vietnamese spontaneity and improvisation meets German fire regulations, Buddha statues meet Nazi mosaics, Europe discovered Waldbrol and the Waldbroler got to know and respect their new brown-robed neighbors. So many contradictions under one roof. Wow. I am still not clear in my mind how this could work and still works. Is it the love for the Dharma and the inner space that this gives us?

Your name, dear EIAB, still remains a challenge for many of us to this day. What shall I say when people ask me where I go four or five times a year? Should I say “I am going to the European Institute of Applied Buddhism.” These are the words, or 43 characters. Virtually no-one can take that all in. So, perhaps an abbreviation?

E - I - A - B.

How do we pronounce it? “Ei ab”: Is catchy and was my favorite for a long time, however it sounds a bit like a vet.

Or perhaps the classical pronunciation: “Eeh Ieh Aah Beh”: this sounds quite

hard, a bit staccato and military. Not even English can save us: “Iiuh Ei Aye Biii”: a real tongue twister that just creates more confusion about English and German vowels.

Perhaps something completely different? “Plum Village Waldbrol” or “Asoka Meditation Center”? No thanks, the four letters have grown close to our hearts and in the meantime are quite well known. Ten years ago Google answered our search with “Europäische Institut für Arbeitsbeziehungen” (EIAB) and complicated terms like Extra-Intracranial Arterial Bypass (EIAB) on its first page. Today, it shows page after page of our EIAB and it is clear to see how powerfully and widespread the seeds of the last 10 years have been sown. Something has been transformed, the fruits of continuing practice are showing themselves.

Just like the enormous, unwieldy building that appeared so uncanny to many of us in its first years and has been transformed year by year. Thanks to the constant practice of the community, through ceremonies of the heart and so many healing steps. Today, as I walk across cold marble I can feel warmth and peace. The “Strength through Joy” energy has been dispelled. A miracle. Another source of joy has moved in. An angular house and an angular abbreviation smile at us. For more and more people “the EIAB” has become “my EIAB” or “our EIAB”. A project of Thay’s heart that takes its own unpredictable and extremely challenging path. Behind the many things that look so effortless, light and joyful stands a hidden layer of patience, forbearance and deep trust, which has

made this all possible. A big thank you to all those who have contributed to, and contribute to this process for their patience and tenacity.

And on this path the name of our birthday child has transformed over the years. For a while now I have been intuitively pronouncing it differently, more softly. The hard, angular “EIAB” has disappeared and become “Ei-Japp”. A long “Ei” and a dynamic, soft “Japp” like “Jupp” but with a short “a” instead of a short “u”. They flow into each other and give a certain dynamic. “Ei-Japp”. Almost a mantra... It feels warm and familiar. And on closer inspection it contains a “Ja” (“yes”) to the development, the incubation of our potential, our “Dharma Egg”, our Buddha nature,... And when we pronounce “Ei-Japp” a few times with a bit of spirit, then perhaps we discover a certain movement in our voice, upwards into the vastness of space. The way we pronounce things is important; every word can cause a small transformation depending on how it is pronounced, and perhaps also be a small pinch of Applied Buddhism...

Happy Continuation, dear “Ei-Japp” and may you experience and support still more transformation.

With a bow from Berlin,

Kai Romhardt (“True Precious Practice”)



The community we needed

Dear Friends,
I see that the EIAB is present,
and I am very happy!

I am glad to celebrate the continuation of the EIAB, on its 10th Anniversary. I know the EIAB was present in the wishes and visions of our teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, before it began to manifest in Waldbroël. And I can tell you that the EIAB is also manifest in me, in my family and home in Leiden, in my Sangha in The Hague and in the Dutch-speaking Family Sangha, right now and continuing into the future. I see the European Institute of Applied Buddhism as a fruit of the loving mindful practice of the EIAB monastics and the lay friends they warmly welcome. The EIAB is also the practice itself and what nourishes this practice of being aware and caring for what is present, embracing and sustaining joy and beauty and embracing and transforming pain and suffering.

The EIAB has brought happiness and healing to me and my family since our

first visit in 2012. We frequently return to live and practice together with our beloved fourfold Sangha. Thank you, dear EIAB, for being here for us!

I am very grateful that life brought us to you, without our even really knowing where we were going. Out of my childhood experiences, I developed a deep desire to live gently with Mother Earth and her children in awareness of the interconnectedness of life, and to care for children in particular, physically, emotionally and spiritually. In 2007 I had begun looking beyond the small circles of family and friends I held in my home for a larger community that takes good spiritual care of its children. I am well-supported by various spiritual communities but found in them not enough nourishment and support specifically for children and families. Through his books, Thich Nhat Hanh was an inspiring teacher and guide for me in my years of meditation practice. Although I was not a Buddhist, the peace I felt reading and practicing with his books on meditation and the intense

joy I felt reading his book on the Lotus Sutra moved me to seek a Plum Village tradition Sangha and, upon hearing about the family retreats, to visit the EIAB with my family.

With some struggles and mishaps, we made it to Utrecht Central Station and boarded a bus to the EIAB for the August Family Retreat 2012, with Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village monastics. In the bus we unexpectedly met old friends, and we made new friends. So began the flow of gifts we continue to receive in connection with the EIAB to this day. Let me tell you about some of these blessings from that visit, which continue to be a source of joy for me:

- Eating dinner outside with our Dharma family, I looked up and saw a small rainbow high up in the sky. It was a beautifully sunny day. I had never seen such a thing. It felt like confirmation of the miraculous beauty of this Sangha, Thầy and the monastics and the lay friends, the



children and the adults, and this spot on Earth.

- Thay's straight back as he sat on the podium in front of us during the morning meditation.
- The group of monastics and teenagers that swept up our eldest daughter in a week of joyful and mindful togetherness in the teenage program. (I had convinced her to come by telling her that Thich Nhat Hanh was so special and important that even if she didn't want to come back again, later she would be proud to be able to say she had met him.)
- The patience of our family head sister, who stayed with my husband and I as our youngest daughter slowly, slowly, finished all the food on her plate.
- The loving, child-friendly and earth-honoring community and fun children's program, which I saw close up when I went to some sessions with our youngest daughter.
- The happiness I felt that my family was indeed all happy here.
- The joy of finding not only what I sought – a larger spiritual community for adults, children and family – but also what I'd not been looking for, my true teacher, Thay.
- My impression of Thay Phap An as a joyful mountain, as he spoke to the community about the EIAB, warmly welcoming us and inviting us to return again.
- Formally receiving the Five Mindfulness Trainings and the support of the Sangha to continue practicing them, empowered by my new name, Noble Commitment of the Heart.

The gifts of the community and the practice continued when we returned home.

- Inspired by Thay, I broadened my search for a Sangha, and joined The Hague Sangha, developing new relationships and deepening my practice in the Plum Village tradition.
- I joined the just-formed the Dutch Family Sangha and began helping with the children's program at Days of Mindfulness for families, glad to

be part of providing this support. The EIAB supports us practicing together as families every May when we hold a special retreat there. My involvement has brought me much joy and growth and fed my aspiration to receive the 14 Mindfulness Trainings.

- A fruit of the Beginning Anew ceremony at the retreat with our eldest daughter: although I was probably too effusive and did embarrass her (sorry!), at home she began to welcome my hugs again, and to hug me back warmly, truly present.
- Our family had been doing a kind of appreciation ceremony every six weeks. After the retreat, we started doing Beginning Anew every week. I could see the thirsty flowers blooming more fully from the more frequent watering.

We all agreed we wanted to go back to the EIAB for the New Year's retreat. We had indeed found the community our family needed!

And that began our tradition of coming to the EIAB as often as possible, with our entire family, or a couple of us or me alone. The home and Sangha we find at the EIAB support the health of our family. Over the years, there are many more specific moments and interactions I treasure, too many to share now. Instead, I've shared about my first joys with the EIAB, like the sharing Sr. Chan Khong suggests doing to keep love vibrant.

Thanks to the Sangha, the teachings and the heart of awakening – the Three

Jewels – present at the EIAB, I have been able to soften and heal pain and to nourish joy in myself, in my family, in my relationship with my mother, in the moments of my daily life. What is also beautiful to me is seeing this kind of transformation take place with the space at the EIAB itself. During our first visit, the large building seemed filled with heavy pain from the past. Some people were afraid to go into it. Every time we come back, the atmosphere seems lighter. After the bell tower was completed, the transformation of the space continued rapidly. Also at home, away from the measurable sound range of the bell, I feel its power, supporting awareness and healing everywhere. In the last years, it seems with every visit to the EIAB, the land feels softer, the buildings gentler, as more and more beautiful flowers and trees are planted and cared for, and old pain healed.

I feel deep gratitude for the loving practice of the monastic brothers and sisters of the EIAB, willing to devote themselves so wholeheartedly to making this source of wonderful healing and joy available in northwestern Europe. Thank you from the depths of my heart!

May the practice of the fourfold Sangha continue to thrive at the EIAB, welcoming and supporting all who wish to open to the beauty of this moment.

In love and gratitude,

Maria Moonlion
("True Healing Confidence")



10 years of transformation: from compost to flowers

Fact was, that I went to Plum Village and EIAB to reduce suffering. For my family and for myself, and not so much for others, because at that time our lives were pretty filled with problems on a day to day basis, so there was no space for any problems from outside. Global warming was not much of a problem for us, then. We just wanted a bit more peace in our family, be less tired, suffer less.

What happened instead during retreats was that, while becoming more mindful and more aware of all kinds of things around me, I found myself more exposed to all kinds of suffering. Remarkably this did not make me depressed or wanting to go back home. On the contrary, we all were quite relaxed and happy.

The riddle was: how could more suffering making me happy? It could have been one of those Japanese Zen-koans... "Want to be happy? Suffer more!"

Years later, the answer to this koan was found and was, as usual, quite simple to understand if you looked at it from the right angle. So, the less confusing formula was something like this:

"If fear for suffering is reduced, it can be used to transform the causes of suffering".

Fear for a disturbed Retreat

It happened on a camping, not far from Plum Village. We were about to break up our tent after breakfast, when a loud scream and howling cut through the bird's morning choir. Ten minutes later we were on our way to the hospital, to have our son's broken arm repaired.

Mom got a bed next to the operated-on four-year-old boy. Daughter and dad drove away to collect the tent and move to Plum Village, where we arrived at sunset. Black clouds darkened the sky when I started putting up the tent, while the gusts of wind increased and thunderflashes cut sharply through the sky. Rain started pouring down as 10 or 12 other retreatants came running and put the tent up very quickly. One of them had heard that we had not eaten most of the day, and a monastic invited us to the kitchen, where she prepared our late evening meal. Later, in my sleeping bag, next to my daughter, I was worried about this night. Such a wind, such a thunderstorm, so much noise... I was sure, she would not sleep all night, a sensitive child as she is. A little later I heard her modest snoring, just hearable in the midst of the apocalyptic noise above the peaceful monastery. But I couldn't sleep. I worried a long time about this retreat, doomed to fail; having to care for my broken-arm son, for me there would be no lectures, no walking meditation, no practice...

The next morning brought sunshine, a declaration of my daughter that she had never slept so nicely before, and a new insight in my mind. They say, that disasters can trigger the genius in us. I decided that my practice in this retreat would be about applied interbeing: "I am my son's right arm. My son's right arm is me. There is interbeing between my son and I". We had a wonderful time. I was allowed to live so close to my son, look and listen deeply, trying to foresee what his needs would be; it was as if I was allowed to see through his eyes. I was allowed to see through my own children's eyes once more. During this practice I also got in tune with my daughter (she and her little

brother were inseparable), so I learned much about her too. And also about myself and other people I met as well. I experienced that transformation of the situation leads to transformation of yourself.

Through the accident with the broken arm I did not have to go to the practice, the practice came to me. Was thrown right on my path. In the right environment of the monastery it was possible to pick it up, and enjoy it enormously! I got the insight that every situation can be used for our practice.

The next retreat took place in EIAB. After the success of the "broken-arm retreat", I couldn't help thinking, for a second, how the new retreat would benefit if I would break my son's arm... But a practice like this is not allowed in the Netherlands, and without it, the retreat was a success anyway. A new place, full of new surprises.

(As for my son's arm, I should mention that three years ago my dear son started playing rugby, a tough but very friendly sport, and broke his arm again, in the very same place. And, as before, it healed well. Now, he is tall and very strong, so I'm afraid that he will break my arm some day.)

*Using the garbage
of old suffering
to transform
the causes of
present suffering.*

Being aware of suffering is not the same as being skillful to cope with suffering. Just like being aware of a box of matches is very different from being skillful to

make a safe fire. Skillful coping is best learnt in the unpredictable situations that our society provides every day.

EIAB is situated right on the edge of that turbulent society. We always hear the traffic, not too far away, and in a hot summer the main street of Waldbröl is now and then quite crowded with retreatants who want to buy an icecream. We are remembered that we are not separated from this dynamic world and from our own life, with its day to day mixture of struggle and sunshine. The question “how can we keep this peace and harmony when we are back home?” is often heard. For sure, the A of “Applied” in the name EIAB is a clear and true statement. I will tell you how EIAB learned me how to apply mindfulness, and how peace of mind can survive at home.

When EIAB was opened officially, I was lucky to be there. As usual, I was quite late, got out of my car and all was dark around me. The big unlit and sinister building was towering above me and I did not have a clue where to go... After walking quickly around to find an entrance somewhere, I saw the silhouettes of a small group of five or six monks, step by step, mindfully proceeding in the direction of a destination unknown by me. As I came nearer and followed them, I saw that one of the monks was Thay. And this was my change in EIAB: unrestful steps transformed suddenly into mindful ones.

*I have arrived,
I am not at home,
not in the here
and not in the now...*

The German word to describe the atmosphere in EIAB 10 years ago is: “Unheimisch”, which translates as “un-home-like”, or “spooky”. Most people felt it like that, as a kind of shadow over the practice and routines of monastery life. There was a lot of joy and pioneering spirit, co-existing with

this silent, dark shadow. During the years it improved gradually, by performing all kinds of mindful practices, until it became quite clean. There was a ceremony in which the monastics pay attention to the victims of the past, which I found a profound practice of mindfulness. I joined it whenever there was an opportunity. It made me more sensitive to the suffering all over the world. And, strange enough, it also made me quite free of the depressing feeling about bad things that had happened, or are still happening. This may be, because I learnt to take time to look deeply into the suffering of others. Sometimes I felt very sad about it. On those moments I found my mind preparing itself for willing to act rather than feeling sad. After some time I found, that in situations when help is needed (for myself or for others) there is less sadness and less fear. Instead, there is more action. It seems, that reflecting on suffering makes you less vulnerable for the impact of suffering. This exercise was uneasy in the beginning, but very useful. It could be well applied in daily life. It led to being more solid and stable in challenging situations. It has certainly brought me happiness. These experiences led to the following koan: “If you want to *find* peace, then make sure to *lose* it”.

In this way, there is no reason for having fear of losing peace of mind when we go back home after a retreat. Certainly (part of) this peace will be lost. And found back. And lost again. This is necessary to make a strong and solid peace of mind. Shockproof peace of mind is also made by shocks! Shocks and Peace are interplaying friends. Give them some time, and the mind will grow stable. Don't worry about necessary loss... you will find again.

Ten years of transformation in EIAB

The monastic community flows as a river, always continuing, always changing, peaceful, harmonious as a whole with an enormous variety of different

individuals. Some work in the spotlight of public attention, some work on hidden places where retreatants seldom come. Who contributes most to the happiness of me and my children? I don't know... years ago I thought that it must be the Dharma teachers, or the ones working in the children's program, or they who cook in the kitchen. But during the years I came to see deeper in the community, seeing all kinds of beautiful people, full of friendliness and commitment, doing seemingly unimportant tasks. And I often saw that they had a great impact on the community and its harmony, and it had nothing to do with the task they performed. But it had everything to do with the way they were moving, speaking, looking, the way they manifested themselves. And these qualities also develop in the retreatants, the lay friends that transform themselves into the same direction. It is a blessing that there is place for all to practice and participate, in the so called fourfold Sangha of monastics, lay friends, men and women (and children, which would make it a fivefold Sangha ☺).

This flowing community has transformed and healed the EIAB environment, by practice, innovative ideas and hard work. The hearts project and the garden project are examples of making the environment happy and light. The bell tower, made from Nazi building materials, has been used to create a symbol of peace and interbeing. It is an example how the garbage of old suffering can be transformed to take away the conditions of new suffering.

Seeing all this, it is less difficult to make plans to make some transformations in our own environment, and therefore also in ourselves. It can easily become a joyful play, rather than a heavy task.

*The world is a place
that is on fire.
EIAB is a kind of
field hospital,
for healing...*

*...a kind of training
school for firemen,
a kind of garbage
recycling plant,
my home Sangha is a
small EIAB*

When coming back from a retreat, I am aware that my home is a place of

transformation too. That it offers some shelter for my family and friends. I am lucky to be part of a small street Sangha. This strengthens the sense of safety, transformation and playfulness. In a place where this is cultivated, it is much easier to go through the unavoidable difficulties and to enjoy the happy moments. It can intensify life. Sometimes we can absorb difficulties from outside, neutralize them or even transform them into something

good. On those moments we feel like “frontline garbage cleaners”.

When I am in the streets and meet the city garbage collectors, I always greet them. I feel much sympathy for them; they know much about transformation.

Hans Dekens



Live as a lay Dharma teacher

Interview with Bettina Romhardt

by Annabelle Zinser

Berlin, 16 May 2018

Question: *Dear Bettina, can you describe the conditions in your life that led you to Plum Village, where you lived and worked for 5 years and found your most important spiritual teacher in Thay?*

When I look back to that time I see one picture very clearly: I am 11 years old, it is in the Easter holidays and I am cycling to our vicar to ask him about the meaning of life. I grew up in a city with 80,000 inhabitants on the Lower Rhine with loving parents and an older sister. As a teenager I was already trying to find “what life was all about”. I wanted to escape from the narrowness that I experienced, and find openness, freedom and meaning. This culminated in a deep crisis at 19, during which a psychologist introduced me to meditation. This was followed by many years in different spiritual traditions and also the experience of personal healing. My career path led me to psychotherapy via nature healing.

When I met Thay in 1992, I had just arrived back after six months in India. The meeting had a strong impact with the result that I went to Plum Village (PV) the following summer.

There I felt like I had deeply arrived; many elements in my life came together there: the spiritual, Buddhist psychology, the specific paths of transformation, the commitment, the community. The Sangha moved me particularly deeply.

At that time I felt the desire to learn to live with as much love as I had experienced with the brothers and sisters there.

The desire for transparency was also an important motivation.

At that time I was working as a therapist and noticed that whilst I could see how I could help clients, nobody could see how I behaved myself – with friends, the postman. There was something uncanny about the challenge of living completely transparently and this drew me to the Sangha. Each year I stayed a little bit longer until in 1996 I went to Lower Hamlet for a year. After a year I became a resident and remained until 2001. Plum Village had not yet become a monastery in the strict sense of the word: for two years Lower Hamlet was run by lay Dharma teachers. “Resident” meant being really a part of the Sangha, to take part in community meetings, ask for permission to travel....

Accepting Thay as my teacher, from heart to heart, was very simple.

Although at the time I thought I would never be able to commit to a particular path, the decision was totally clear. Today I still like to sit with people from different traditions – I believe it is necessary to have a clear path in order to experience deeply, and it is also a great gift.

Question: *What elements and methods from the Plum Village tradition have touched you most?*

Once, the way Thay lives and teaches mindfulness touched my heart deeply. Alongside his clarity he also expresses the wonder of life, the tenderness and the great amazement. At that time I experienced a “yes”, I want to live in this energy, so dive in, immerse yourself.

The second thing I am very grateful to Thay for is his way of showing

the nature of Interbeing, the way everything is woven together with everything else. It is easy to practice with the idea “I practice” – from the very beginning Thay allows us to experience how all other forms of life are supporting us, that I cannot live separately from the world around me, without other elements – I find this wonderful!

During my first winter in PV I had a key experience: during the oracle reading I had the chance to put a question to Thay and the community. I asked about the fears inside me and I expected to hear – “practice in such and such a way”! The answer was: “A mountain of gold is not enough to pay back all the love the cosmos has for you.”

This shook me, it turned things on their head – to open myself for everything that is and still feel loved. I sat with this for a long time.

Thay’s teaching of dwelling happily in the present moment is also a gift; it gives me space, even when suffering arises, to see the wonders of life. This changed my experience of suffering.

Teaching the ethical exercises with so much space and openness, and the importance of the Sangha, move me over and over again.

What inspired me about the PV Sangha was that it is not about whether someone holds an especially good Dharma talk, but rather about the question “does he or she live in harmony with the others?” – living our understanding and love is the most significant element.

Question: *How do you get on with your existence as a Dharma teacher, as a teacher at your retreats and in your*

Sangha, that you have built up together with Kai?

From the very beginning I have asked myself whether I can live with the title Dharma teacher without losing my inner freedom.

I try to be wary of roles, and expectations from within and without, that circle around the life of a Dharma teacher so that I don't create even more obstacles than there already are.

At retreats it usually works very well; I enjoy sharing the Dharma unbelievably. To pass on what I love and what is a great source of happiness in my life does not feel like a role.

It helps me to know, that there is a great deal I don't know, and to be aware of the areas where I am not free.

In Berlin we have a Sangha model in which Kai (who is also a Dharma teacher) and myself are not the teachers with absolute leadership, nor do we have a model in which everybody does everything; rather, we have a team of Sangha gardeners with experience of the practice and who have been in the Sangha for several years. The Sangha gardeners discuss all aspects with each other and then decide on the evening program. For me my task is to express what I see with Dharma and Sangha eyes on the basis of my experience – and to give space. This model has vitality and is at the same time challenging, as it doesn't function either with clear leadership or with majority voting, and is a model in which experience of the practice and commitment play an important role.

Question: *What effects does your life as Dharma teacher have on your family life? On the one hand it is very important to wholeheartedly accept the role of teacher, but on the other this can also prove an obstacle.*

The family is a great place to learn, the home Sangha.

It is a great challenge for me when I can sense that suffering is present and I have great trust in the practice to relieve it, but others do not want to hear about what I regard as helpful. With those close to me I learn to remain still, be simply present and to listen with an open compassionate heart. I am in the middle of my apprenticeship, i.e. my father always supported me on my path, but didn't want to know anything about it. In his old age he discovered walking meditation, the beauty of small things, eating mindfully – all without any help from me. This encourages me to practice doing/not doing what I consider to be the best thing in a particular moment, and then to trust. The family is a place of learning about equanimity, an element of true love, and a great deal more...

Question: *Thay is a very creative teacher and has included many new elements in his way of teaching the Dharma, for example the “four mantras of love”. As a teacher can you also develop your creative side and bring it into your teaching? How strongly do you feel bound to pass on exactly what you learned in PV?*

I experience it as a balancing act: where are my roots? What is ok and what is not ok? I have had many discussions with Dharma friends about this – I feel relatively free to pass on important teaching and exercises of Thay and also to develop my own exercises, e.g. mindfulness of the senses, body-awareness exercises. In the “year training” in which people practice together for a year as a Sangha, I offer exercises to practice at home and have plenty of my own ideas.

I don't think I find this a difficult subject, as I have had my own experiences with it.

There are practice elements that are not so strongly represented in our tradition, but are important for me – such as longer sitting periods or stillness – and to nourish myself with them is no problem.

One thing that I experienced in PV, and which it is very important for me to pass on and nourish is the spirit of the Sangha, that is lived so strongly there. I feel very connected to this and feel it within me as an inner commitment. Alongside Sangha building in the local Sangha, it is important to find new forms, spaces for people who do not live in a practice community but would like to support each other in the practice, and experience the joy and potential of Sangha.

This was, for example, one reason to develop the “year group”, a form which makes it possible to support each other for a year with second bodies and weekly Dharma phone sharings.

I see Sangha building as a genuine continuation of our tradition; I feel myself flowing together with Thay and the PV Sangha.

Thanks Annabelle for your questions, I'm looking forward to our next interview with reversed roles.

Bettina Romhardt (“Tree of True Awakening”) lives together with her husband Kai, (“True precious Practice”) and her son Jonathan in Berlin. Together they accompany the Sangha Zehlendorf

Annabelle Zinser (“True Fragrance of the Mindfulness Trainings”) lives in Berlin and leads the Quelle des Mitgeföhls (Source of Compassion) in Berlin-Hermsdorf

Walking meditation

Walking meditation outside in nature is a wonderful exercise. Of all the many practices that Thay has taught us this is my favorite. It helps to bring body and mind together, to find peace and to strengthen our connection with nature.

During walking meditation we focus our attention on our steps. We feel each and every one of them. We feel the contact of our feet with the earth, as well as the movement of our legs, the contraction and relaxation of the muscles. We observe the feeling in our joints, in particular our knees and hips. And we observe our arms and backs. There is no need for strenuous concentration; it is enough just to be interested in our body and how it feels.

This brings our mind back to our body, its true home. Of course, our mind can go into the past or the future and occupy itself with abstract questions. But these are excursions into a foreign land. When the mind is with the body, it is in its true home. Here it feels happy, it feels good. We can tell because it becomes calmer and lighter, there are fewer thoughts, and our mind becomes peaceful. This happens all by itself when our mind takes an interest in our body and the many sense impressions.

It is helpful when we walk slowly, in a relaxed way. In everyday life we have a tendency to hurry or even rush; we don't want to lose a moment. This has become a deeply ingrained habit. We want to shake these off. We want to develop new habits – to walk slowly, take our time, and to relax when walking. Already after a few steps we can feel how much good it does us. We take steps without the desire to get ahead, steps for the sake of steps, steps that we take because it is more pleasant to walk than to stand. You have certainly experienced this when waiting. Perhaps there is nowhere to sit

or it is too cold, after a few moments standing becomes uncomfortable, and so we begin to slowly walk up and down. During walking meditation we walk as though we had nothing to do.

Often we are plagued by fear and worry, sometimes these feelings don't leave us any peace, day or night. Fears and worries can be very strong and we don't know how to get rid of them. But they feed on our own thoughts; they need worried and anxious thoughts to exist. Walking meditation can be a great help. When we take an interest in our steps and our body these thoughts receive no nourishment and become weaker and weaker. It is good to find a nice place to practice walking meditation. Perhaps on soft ground along a woodland path with leaves and greenery, or across fields with tufts of grass between rocks, or a narrow beaten path. Wherever, the path reminds us with each step of nature, that we are in its midst, our ourselves a part of nature.

The idea that we are separate from nature, from mother earth, is just an idea, an illusion. It arises through self-centered thoughts. Every time we want something, cover something, or when we reject or rebuff something this sense of separation arises in our minds. An image of an "I" comes up and sets a boundary between us and our environment. This "I" judges the things of the world, divides them into good and bad, and wants the good things and either rejects or wants to be rid of the bad ones. From this viewpoint the word "have" means to bring things that are outside over the border to me, and to reject means to prevent them crossing the border, and getting rid of means to drive them across the border. This involves strenuous thinking, is a strenuous life style. Do we not feel much better when our mind is fully concentrated on feeling our body and nature? Then there is no separation. Then there is no struggle. Then we are one with nature, one with mother earth.

When we do walking meditation with a calm mind, we see a lot of things we normally overlook. Often our mind is so full of thoughts that no room is left for the wonders of nature. But when the mind is at peace, then we come into contact with the flowers, the trees and the birds. Perhaps we stand still to look more closely. We can benefit so much from nature if we allow ourselves to truly engage with it. The joy of life, freshness and a feeling of connection all arise completely naturally.

During walking meditation, the same as in sitting meditation, it can happen that old wounds or unresolved conflicts show themselves. They arise in our minds and demand attention. And we should give it to them. It is completely natural for this to happen when our minds are calm and there is space for it.

To deal with these thoughts skillfully, we should at first be clear that they need loving care in order to heal. Moreover, precisely this moment is a good moment: we have time and our mind is truly calm. In this moment there is nothing else to do. We can offer our old wounds and unresolved conflicts a friendly greeting: "Oh, I had almost forgotten about you. Good that you have come now; I have time for you. Come and sit with me". And we listen to these old stories, feel our breathing and observe the images that arise before our mind's eye. These stories simply need to be told once again. And if we listen with a clear and collected mind, then healing will occur. Perhaps it is not yet complete, perhaps we need to go through it once again. But we are on the right path, on the path of healing.

Concentrating mindfully on our breathing or our steps helps us to listen to the stories or thoughts without losing ourselves in them. That is a small, but very important difference. Mindfulness helps us to remain calm when painful thoughts and feelings are present, and thereby creates the basis for healing.

Thomas Barth, ("True Great Wisdom"), practices with the Community for Mindful Life (GAL)

Coming out, coming home, coming together

Experiences from the LGBTIQ+ Retreat*

This year saw the first retreat at the EIAB to which all those who practice in the Plum Village tradition and feel a sense of belonging to the LGBTIQ+ Community were invited. We wanted to get to know each other, practice together and create a space in which to meet that was characterized by mindfulness and openness.

We had been nurturing the idea of such a retreat for a while, but the tender shoots needed to be tended and cultivated before the arrival of spring when they could finally blossom!

“If the conditions are sufficient, things will manifest” (Thay)

Already in the 90s, when I lived together with my partner Steffi in Plum Village, there were spontaneous meetings of “rainbow” practitioners during large retreats. Since then LGBTIQ+ Dharma families have become an established part of Winter Retreats, and such groups have steadily grown, in particular during the international Wake Up

retreats. In these groups the wish for an LGBTIQ Retreat has often been expressed, and Géraldine from Plum Village passed this wish on to Steffi and myself. We both immediately felt a clear “yes” and to our great delight two old Dharma friends – Georg und Jan – were also ready and willing to help organize the retreat. That the conditions were “sufficient” was demonstrated by the ease and joy of working together during preparation, and the green light that we got from the EIAB for this, until now, somewhat unusual retreat.

Diversity

On 22 March the time was ripe: almost 40 people came to Waldbrol from all directions – a colorful mixture in many different shades of the rainbow, and when everyone took their place on the “map” it turned out that 10 different nationalities were represented (from Switzerland to Denmark, from Tunisia to Indonesia and Vietnam)!

And it was also intergenerational with ages ranging from 20 to 70. This proved to be very enriching for all of us.



I found the participation of monastics, who travelled from Plum Village just for this retreat, very supportive. We were a genuinely multifold Sangha!

What united us in all our diversity from the very beginning was our shared practice, our love for the spiritual path, and for Thay!

*“Be beautiful,
be yourself”*

In the Question & Answer session during the Summer Retreat 2013 in Waldbrol, Thay was asked by a young woman: “What makes a woman a real woman, and a man a real man? (How) should I raise my children in terms of their gender?” Thay was still for a moment, smiled at the young woman and the first words of his answer were simple and clear: “Be beautiful – be yourself!” We looked at this session on our first morning together and allowed ourselves to be moved and motivated by Thay’s wonderful answer in which he expresses his immeasurable loving kindness, and non-discriminating mind. This mantra was also the motto for our retreat; it strengthened our own individual sense of suchness and was an invitation to acknowledge both our uniqueness and our togetherness, to see and appreciate the beauty in me and those around me. Supported by our shared practice we soon created a well-meaning atmosphere of acceptance, ease and immense openness.

* Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual, Queer+.



At this retreat it was once again clear to me, how many practice elements Thay has handed us to embrace both our pain and our joy. We practiced deep listening and speaking from the heart (over and again, also in small groups of two or three), we shared stillness and meditations, practiced walking meditation every day with the larger Sangha, sang songs together which created a deep sense of peace. For many of us the Three Earth Touchings, in which we also included our LGBTIQ ancestors and the global community, were a very special experience. The “open space” on our second afternoon gave everyone the opportunity to raise their personal concerns or offer special talents and was an occasion of joy and creativity. Many different groups were formed with all kinds of topics, such as “Transgender”, “Working out suggestions for Plum Village regarding still more inclusiveness”, “Rainbow families” and “Quick course in Vietnamese”. We nourished our joy above all by (frequently!) singing together, circle dancing around the lotus pond and with a long hike to the source of the Bröl. And naturally we rounded it all off with an informal, very lively tea ceremony in which we once again celebrated life with all our different talents!

Gratitude

Many of us experienced this retreat as a great gift because it offered a safe, non-judgemental space in which we could be present with our “different” sexual orientation or gender identity without fear or anxiety. For some it was the first time that they had left their well-guarded hiding place and “outed” themselves in a large group with the deep pain this brings, but also a sense of relief. Our togetherness in the spirit of the practice gave us the opportunity to live “be beautiful, be yourself” as an authentic expression of ourselves, whilst also experiencing a sense of connection and belonging. In the final sharing many people said they had seldom felt so free and relaxed in a group before. The great diversity of the participants allowed us to look deeper into our “stereotyped thinking” and to meet each other on the ground of our common humanity beyond all concepts.

Despite increasing recognition and acceptance by the public, many of us have experienced discrimination in our families, at work or even in religious groups, and – often sub-consciously – have developed very fine antenna for situations in which our openness

could be dangerous. Even in Germany it is not so long ago that it could be life threatening (and in many parts of the world it still is). This makes it all the more wonderful that this retreat could be held in a place like Waldbroël and helps to take another step on the path to the healing and transformation of its own dark history.

On behalf of all of us: thank you to the EIAB, to all the nuns and monks who keep this place alive through their daily practice and who greeted us with open arms!

While writing these reflections, I hear the words of this Plum Village song running through my mind:

“We are all the leaves of one tree
We are all the waves of one sea
We are all the stars of one sky.
The time has come for all
to live as one.”

May all beings recognize their oneness
– beyond all form and color!

Margret de Backere
 (“True Function of Awakening”)

“You need this for your journey...”

...a Buddhist monk sitting in the lotus position said, as he handed me a rock. This dream I had shortly after visiting Trúc Lâm Tây Thiên, a Zen Buddhist temple, in Vietnam. My colleague from the University of Houston-Clear Lake and I came to visit student graduates there. One family took us to this beautiful temple. Several visits followed. And one of the monks mentioned the European Institute of Applied Buddhism (EIAB) in Waldbroël, Germany.”

During a trip from the United States, where I live, to family in Europe I visited the EIAB and read about Dr. Le Trong Do offering the oriental medicine – acupuncture and herbal medicine course.

Dr. Trong Le Do generously brought a dream of Thich Nhất Hạnh into reality by offering this Oriental Medicine Program at the EIAB. Hải-Thuong Lê Hữu Trác (1720-1792), often called

the father of Vietnamese traditional medicine, became my central interest.

“I’m in my golden years, should I start this?” I hesitated. But I decided to follow my heart and trust that this was the right moment after all. My oriental medicine journey was kindled as a continuum of indigenous healing practices I received through various US Native American medicine people. My

path as a Spiritual Director pointed to a program that included the traditional and ancestral values of meditation and Qi Gong and the healing practices of the Buddha. Dr. Do accepted me in the program. Thus, I traveled four times back and forth from the US to Waldbroël, Germany. I met physicians and therapists from Portugal, France, Brazil, Germany, The Netherlands who also came to study.

Dr. Do's teaching and guidance unfolded a healing path of my fibromyalgia, a disease I had from the age of seven. Western medicine has not found a cure for this disease. My thesis for graduation became a self-study covering a multifaceted approach. It included Dr. Do's method and how I experienced on the spot positive results with his acupuncture method.



Dr. Do developed a unique treatment protocol addressing the roots – spleen, liver and kidney – and establishing global balance. We studied ancient herbal medicine as well. The treatment of patients during modules, made me a believer of this method. Patients with severe diseases including cancer, Parkinson's and multiple sclerosis, received help.

My thesis suggests an integration beyond the strict laws of science. What I'm speaking of and pointing to are the natural laws. A few of this suggested practice are acupuncture and herbs; healing through oxygenizing the muscles and daily addressing the meridians through Qi Gong, meditation, mindfulness, and breathwork.

I live in Montana and hope to build dialogue between the Natural Science of the Indigenous, Western Science and the Oriental Medicine approach. We must learn to have dialogue and be interdependent in advancing healing the body. In the US, Zintkala Oyate, Lakota Medicine man, teaches about the "Oceti Wakan," the sacred fire. Like the Heart of the Buddha we must kindle it for the sake of the next generation.

I found healing through this path of acupuncture and herbs and I became the first graduate of this school and teaching at the EIAB in May 2018. Ingeborg can be reached at vanzanten1sbw@gmail.com

Ingeborg van Zanten Hayes

Dutch Sangha and EIAB



In the autumn of 2009 the board of the Dutch Foundation "Leven in Aandacht" (Mindful Living) visited the new EIAB in Waldbröl. We spoke with sister Annabel and Thay Phap An. Everything was very new and fresh. We had a big question: should Thay once again visit the Netherlands now the EIAB was there? In spring that year we had a very big retreat with Thay in Arnhem and also a public lecture in The Hague. The answer was clear: from now on Thay would visit every year EIAB for a Dutch retreat and we could help the monastics of the EIAB (by that time just a few) to organize it. So in 2010 we started with the first Dutch speaking retreat in Waldbröl. From that time on our relationship with the monastic community of the EIAB grew. Every year there was this big retreat. Last

years the monastics organize the retreat on their own. But still we give support by making publicity and hire buses for transport of Dutch retreatants from Holland to Waldbröl. And in return the monastics came over to Holland and Belgium to teach the Dharma. Brother Phap Xa and other monastics visited our country every year for days of mindfulness and started to give four-day retreats in 2014.

Dutch practitioners found their way to EIAB to participate in courses and retreats. They form one of the biggest visitor groups of the EIAB.

Straight from the start the EIAB also connected with the Dutch Wake Up. Monastics of EIAB facilitated the annual summer retreats for young people at

Maanhoeve in the rural province of Drenthe. Dutch Wake Up youngsters were a regular guest at EIAB.

And another tradition grew, monastics of the EIAB would come over for a short holiday in The Netherlands, especial at Vriendenhuis in early spring. Here they can relax and visit the blooming bulb fields or the old cities of Amsterdam and Utrecht.

So there are several ways we meet, work together and enjoy life.

Dutch Sangha

Cilia Galesloot
Marjolijn van Leeuwen

Dear Sangha!

At the beginning of 2013, I saw a television report on WDR about the existence of the EIAB which touched me and woke something that had slumbered for many years. (I began with Vipassana meditation in the tradition of SN Goenka in 2001, practiced intensively until 2003, and then due to a severe crisis stopped meditating). Before this I had known nothing about Thay, but I then bought several of his books. It quickly became clear to me that I wanted to attend the 2013 summer retreat, so I registered. It all seemed a bit Spanish to me: I had been used to the strictness of other meditation retreats. And for the most part I practiced alone, as I had arrived with a feeling of great suffering and helplessness. The atmosphere in the tent was very intense, and I enjoyed the guided meditations, the Dharma talks, the tasty food and the sharing in families. I think it was very good that I didn't really want anything particular and just practiced wholeheartedly, because this retreat changed my life and practically gave me a new one. I

can describe the moment it happened fairly accurately. It was 20 minutes before the end of the retreat and I was practicing walking meditation behind the main building. (It has to do with my family history, and I don't want to go into too much detail, but it has to do with the unpleasant divorce of my parents when I was 15). All at once I saw before my mind's eye that my mother had been holding out her hands to me for many years to help me. I saw my own delusion that I needed to protect myself against her, and I had the deeply liberating feeling that there was no-one there to protect. Unfortunately, I cannot describe it better in words; it felt like everything occurred within a second. Then came the tears of liberation that had been stored up in me for many years and a great deal began to flow in me. A caring nun calmed me in front of the large tent and said exactly the right words at the right time. I have spent a long time thinking about what happened in that moment, and ultimately I think that I was able to recognize these false

and obstructive beliefs and finally let go of them by shining the light of mindfulness on them. Afterwards I spoke with my mother on the phone and she immediately asked, what is the matter with you? We were reconciled on a completely different level, and subsequently spent six days on holiday together, something that would have been inconceivable beforehand. I am certain that this change was only possible with thanks to the strength of the community at the summer retreat, and that I experienced a moment of grace. Dear Sangha, dear Thay, I am immeasurably grateful to you and will always be. Gratitude has since become a great force in my life, and I believe that in these times in which we witness ever increasing isolation, it is impossible to appreciate the community at the EIAB, and the values it lives, too highly. I wish you all the very best! May we all live in wisdom and compassion. May we all experience the healing power of gratitude.

Thank you,

Nils Schmalenbach

Open the door to your heart

Being in a retreat with Thay Phap An has been one of my wishes for a few years. Such a wish has gradually come about through previous encounters with Thay Phap An in Hong Kong, including a day of mindfulness led by him, Dharma talks he gave and Qi Gong/exercises he taught when he had time (or better, when he made time) to stop over in Hong Kong. It was also my happy surprise to have found Thay Phap An at Thai Plum Village International Practice Center when I was there for the very first time last summer.

Conditions were eventually sufficient for me to join the five-day/four-night retreat "Open the Door to Your Heart," 14-18 March, 2018 at Lotus Pond Temple, Hong Kong with Thay Phap An. The theme of the retreat reminds me the Dharma talk on "Mindfulness of Opening and Closing Doors in Opening

and Closing Doors" by Thay Phap An at Lotus Pond Temple on 26 April, 2015. Though the Dharma talk took place three years back from now, the insights remains lively and relevant (particularly appropriate for Hong Kong, a place well known for its very fast-paced rhythm of living). Please allow me to highlight

this Dharma talk before moving on to my experience in the 2018 retreat.

Thay Phap An started his Dharma talk with an anecdote about a door leading to the meditation hall in EIAB which recurrently need repairing due to negligence of many people to closing



it properly behind them. To ease the problem, Thay Phap An attached signs “Please close the door in mindfulness” in different designs and sizes on that door. The door anecdote reminds us a frequent habit of our minds: our minds never finish our act/thing we begin to do. There are always other commissions that distract our intention from finishing the act we set out/intended to do. Then and there we follow a different course. In following a different course, however, the residue energy (that remains from the initial intention or from the unfinished) remains in our sub-consciousness and will come calling us from time to time. When one

was opening the door, his/her mind was not on the door but on the meditation hall (or the sitting meditation to come), for instance. To mark sitting mat as where meditation begins, according to Thay Phap An, is a false view of meditation. It takes “Mindfulness of an Act A in an Act A” to complete an act – the application of which going far beyond the bounds of the sitting mat. One example is mindfulness of body in body: when doing things with our body, do it with complete awareness and fully allow our body to finish the act. One counter example, which also represents habit of our mind, is to wander by entering and/or comparing

past, present and future in an act. When that happens, our minds are not being present in what we are doing.

“The living of our lives is like burning candles,” said Thay Phap An. For some candles, no leftovers as the burning process has been complete. This stands for those who lived fully and attentively. Living a life with full attentiveness gives rise to liberation and happiness. From there, Thay Phap An talked on Jhana, a path the Buddha has gone through with four processes discovered:

1st process:

sinking in. Transformation of energy (from thinking to feeling our body)

2nd process:

synchronization between body and mind

3rd process:

equanimity mindfulness or emergence of the energy of compassion (deep love)

4th process:

existence of love (accepting as a part of life) or state of deathlessness: with space-time dimension collapsing into the here and now

In the first Dharma talk of the 2018 Spring retreat “Open the Door to your Heart” in Hong Kong, Thay Phap An restated what Thay would like to have in a retreat – “appropriateness of teaching.” The need of our time is to redress isolation/loneliness that goes with building a fort around, or defending, oneself. It is thus important for us to have the capacity to return to ourselves, to be aware of what is happening around us and thus not losing ourselves to what is happening around us. Such capacity is the energy of mindfulness. We need to learn to slow down by practicing the mindfulness trainings (or precepts). By practicing mindfulness trainings, we set up a boundary so that we could learn to distance ourselves from the object of pursuing things. With our mind not being caught by a particular object (practice of emptiness), we could slow down.



In giving a recap on some of Thay Phap An's teachings above, I am well aware that what I wrote might not be precise. I wrote them because they did cast an impact on me during and after the retreat. In the week prior to the retreat, I was in a momentum quite contrary to "Mindfulness of an Act A in an Act A". I was in the multi-tasking hurrying mode: teaching full-time at one university, drafting a fellowship application and seeking endorsement on it, teaching part-time at another university, getting prepared to serve as MC for a public forum scheduled to take place at a university on the fourth day of the retreat. I could still recall vividly my frustration with how late it was (around two hours later than my original plan) when I managed to leave home for the retreat. Needless to say, my energy was bloated in my brain as if I had been doing a handstand for a considerable period of time.

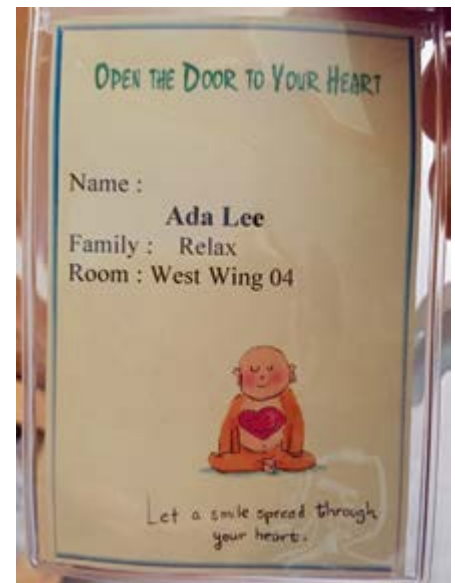
It was near sunset when I arrived at Ngong Ping Village. With heavy rain impending, I was walking as briskly as I could towards the temple. The downpour began just seconds after I reached Lotus Pond Temple. Upon collecting my badge at the registration desk, I yelled in my heart: "Such a timely need of mine it is addressing!" On it printed "Relax," name of my Dharma family! That night Thay Phap An gave the first Dharma talk in the Buddha hall. I have never been to a retreat with Dharma talk starting right on the very first night.

After the Dharma talk, each Dharma family gathered for a short while with the leading brother/sister introducing the tasks that each family was responsible for. For the relax family I belonged, the nature of the tasks matched with the name of family: what we need to take care of was the tea table and to sweep fallen leaves. "In case it keeps raining like this, then no sweeping is needed. So it's really relaxing!" said the brother.

"Discourse on the Dharma Seal" ("Dharma Seal" is the Dharma name

of Thay Phap An) was the theme of the Dharma talk on the second day of the retreat. It brings out the message that "Life is a process (of becoming)," even though human has a strong tendency (due to our language) to fix our idea and cling upon abstract concept ("form") upon seeing/knowing something. At the Dharma talk on the third day of the retreat, Thay Phap An said the loss incurred in failing to capture the core or the form is a particular form of pain according to "Discourse on Dharma Seal." The exits from such suffering are the three doors of liberation (practice): emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness. In the remaining Dharma talks of the retreat, the three doors of liberation and different keys for each of the five aggregates were elaborated through everyday life examples including those from Thay Phap An's own life experience.

I forgot why I turned on my mobile phone during the Dharma talk. Perhaps I was taking photos of the writing on the whiteboard. Midway during the Dharma talk, I received an email request for further elaboration on the fellowship application I submitted right before the retreat. As if it had been



pre-programmed, my mind went through what to put in reply to such a request. When that happened, I realized that I could no longer follow what Thay Phap An was saying as all my energy was totally sucked up by the request that popped up on my mobile phone. Having lost myself to "the request", I was no longer aware of what was happening around me. Then I opted not to continue such kind of reacting. I detached myself from following that object ("request") by having another object to follow:



i.e. the Dharma talk. This has been my glimpse into signlessness during the retreat.

The sun came out from Day 2 of the retreat onwards and so I went sweeping fallen leaves with Dharma family members. I swept so hard (even though no one was pushing me to) that I developed a blister on my thumb. I told my Sangha friend about it. Wittily, she responded: "You definitely need to continue doing it as you have not yet gotten into the right mode of sweeping-the relax mode!"



During the retreat, Thay Phap An said "Don't be caught in the idea of what a Dharma talk should be." In writing this article, I tried not to be caught in the idea of what an article on a retreat should be. Indeed I did not read any article on a retreat before writing this. I wrote simply out of an intention to share memorable and sustainable nourishments through my encounters with Thay Phap An in the past few years, both planned and unplanned.

Ada Lee,
Hong Kong

No coming, no going

**The more we get caught in an idea
the less we are in touch with reality.**

When the European Institute of Applied Buddhism opened, some of us started idealizing and constructing in our mind our own "EIAB", as we were projecting it into the real world.

At that time I was working as a business consultant; as I heard EIAB needed some support in organizing its presence in Germany I volunteered to help in the not so secret conviction to know it better how to integrate Eastern Wisdom and Western Efficacy.

My mind was full of theories, my bag full of tools, my computer loaded with schemes, statistics, graphs. Federico the Consultant eagerly interviewed EIAB inmates in order to grasp the Institute's "Essence", its Corporate Identity, the "Core" of it all... already making hypotheses about brilliant solutions to any "problem" encountered! But no "essence", no "identity", no CEO, no HR, no business plan, no mission statement was to be found at EIAB. And no "problem".

Nuns and monks kindly kept giving answers such as: "Sorry, no statistics, no projections...would you like a cup

of tea?" Or: "We know that EIAB will grow like a tree in the forest: but we don't know which branches will grow stronger, which one will dry out and fall. We only need more resident monastics to support our practice..."

Spiritual practice was, indeed, a very different matter than an academic curriculum!

Still fearing the system was on the edge of a pit, not seeing changes in the desired direction, Federico the Helper felt frustrated and gave up...

He was absorbed in his resentment, sitting on a bench in Waldbröl, when Thay Phap Tri, intentionally, gently, firmly and silently stomped on his foot and walked away, smiling.

In a flash, frustration, expectations, models, wants faded away: only a small group of humble, hard working monastics were left, together with Thay's vision, a huge building and its dramatic history, 2,500 years of Buddhist practice and studies, blossoming trees, fresh air.

Since that moment, slowly, slowly the real EIAB and its powerful functions became evident also to Federico.

1. Transformation in organizations, companies, families is possible when individuals are given the chance to transform themselves, first. EIAB offers to all of us a fresh, solid, clear, practice center for transformation at the base.
2. We need a pause: we need to stop when we think too much, we worry, we speak too much: we need silence, protected spaces, a bell and good nutriments. EIAB delivers such food.
3. We need to train "MEOs", Mindfulness Executive Officers. We need fresh, happy, faithful MEOs in every company, organization, school, hospital, prison. We want to learn deep listening and loving speech to support our meetings and our communications. At EIAB such training is possible.
4. We need to keep our practice solid, in time. We need EIAB's stupa like a ship in a dark night needs a luminous lighthouse.

With gratitude to Thay, to all our ancestors and to all the brothers and sisters already or not yet on the Path.

Happy continuation,

Federico

EIAB – OI and DT Retreat, April 2018

A report by Eduardo from Argentina

Dear Thay, dear Sangha,

A few days before Christmas I got an email message from Plum Village announcing a course at the EIAB that Sr. Annabel would generously offer for the OI and DT friends.

This arrived like a Christmas gift for me. So I promptly registered for the course and booked my air tickets. It was my very first time going to the EIAB, a place I always wanted to know and a special occasion to listen to Sr. Annabel, a teacher who touches my heart.

The course was divided into two segments, the first for members of the Order of Interbeing, the second for Dharma Teachers and official aspirants to DT. Those OI members, who are not DT or aspirants, which is my case, were also invited to listen to the Dharma talks during the second part as well. I live in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and having such a wonderful opportunity to listen to Sr. Annabel is a rare privilege thus, without hesitation, I opted for both.

Four months later, I was boarding a Lufthansa plane and, after a 14-hour flight, I arrived in Frankfurt where I took a train to Cologne connecting to Schladerm. While waiting there for a taxi to drive me to the EIAB in Waldbröl, I enjoyed a delicious strawberry cake at the train station. All this following the clear “how to get here” instructions that are on the EIAB web page. (Ps. the strawberry cake was not mentioned there ☺).

After a 12-minute drive we stopped at an impressive building. The driver said it was the address, I stepped out from

the taxi and saw a sign with a beautiful calligraphy: “I have arrived, I am home”, so I breathed in and out a few times enjoying this beautiful feeling, I am home. A feeling that always arises when I go to any of Plum Village’s monasteries, or Sanghas.

This “Institute” is different and, at the same time, is the same as the monasteries (in this tradition) we are used to. It is different because it is an institute in the midst of a small town, you can see the neighbor’s houses, some two or three storeys buildings, the petrol station and the supermarket, all of them at a few steps distance from our main building. But the peaceful and nourishing energy that the Institute exudes is the same energy we feel when we arrive at any of the Plum Village monasteries. We can really feel at home, no need for words or distinctions of any kind. Together we are one.

The course started. In my imagination I expected a large number of participants. But, unexpectedly for me, we were just a small group, a little more than a dozen OI members, from different countries: Holland, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Israel, USA, and Argentina. What a privilege receiving Sr. Annabel’s Dharma talks in such an intimate audience. We felt so close, like a group of old friends, listening to these wonderful talks in the living room at home. But, at the same time, I also felt a little nervous. The theme of the course: “Have we misunderstood the Buddha?” is really a very great question.

Sr. Annabel’s talks were extremely clear, profound, peaceful, and lively but, nonetheless, I felt the subject she was addressing was so distant for me. “Am I ready for such a journey?” I asked myself.

Luckily, Sr. Annabel shared with us, from her own experience, that many times when she listened to Thay’s Dharma talks, after going out of the hall she could not remember a word of what had been said but she could feel she was a different person, she was transformed. I am so grateful she said this because it’s what actually happened to me. I listened very attentively at every talk, sitting on the first row, paying attention, receiving all what was said. But many times I felt incapable of processing all that information. When I felt this incapacity, instead of struggling I simply gave up, asked my intellectual mind to sit by my side and continued listening with my heart. And when I walked out from the room, I really felt different.

But the course was not just restricted to the room where the Dharma talks were offered. All conditions during our staying were an invitation to help us taste the nectar of reality.

The early morning sitting meditation, then the exercises after it that prepared us for our first meal of the day. The walks through the long corridors, going up and down the stairs, opening and closing the heavy doors mindfully, everything was an invitation to touch the energy that may have infused all those who opened this beautiful Path for us.

What to say about the daily Dharma talks that Sr. Annabel lovingly delivered. Listening to her explain the Buddha’s teachings we felt transported 2,600 years back, sitting in the Bamboo Grove near Rajagriha and next day we were in Deer Park near to Varanasi walking together for our alms round.

Later on we were standing in a circle, singing together “Happiness is Here and

Now” and, after our walking meditation, enjoying the wonders that spring offered us, we headed to the dining hall. Lunchtime was an opportunity to contemplate the wonderful gift we had on our plates and silently enjoy the presence of all the Sangha sitting together, nourishing body and spirit. Sr. Annabel’s talks were so deep and lively. In a flash of light we could travel from samsara to nirvana, from ancient India where the Buddha was teaching a group of Brahmins to the present moment

at the EIAB with a clear example of Sr. Annabel’s own experience on the real truth of transforming our own suffering.

I also enjoyed my lone walks in the surrounding woods, the floor carpeted with brown leaves, the tree branches with their new sprouts. And why not an ice cream in the Italian coffee shop on the main street of Waldbröl, where one of our monastic brothers invited us to go?

Back at home I know I am not the same. And I also know that there is no coming and no going.

The big bell tower, the Dharma talks, Sr. Annabel, the EIAB monastics and my new friends on the Path, they are in me and I am in them.

In gratitude,
a smile and a bow

Eduardo (“True Silent Happiness”)

Mindfulness with animals

“Animals are our sisters and brothers. We want to share our great joy at our togetherness with you, and also to open ourselves to your suffering.” This was the subject of the course held at EIAB in May. Over and over again we were asked by participants from other courses: “What do you actually do on this course?”

What connects us with animals, why have we come to this particular retreat? Just the opening sharing on the first evening was deeply moving. Many of us have had an intimate relationship with animals since childhood. Some even work therapeutically with animals, have a therapy dog, or horse or sheep, who contributes to healing. However, some of us also grew up in cities and as children were deeply afraid of animals

and now want to establish a new relationship to our brothers and sisters. Br. Phap Tri told how as a child in Vietnam he was a buffalo shepherd. Some have come to experience a counterweight to the suffering of animals, which appals them and costs a great deal of energy.

The next morning we drive in minibuses from the EIAB to the animals of Alex and Marco. On the journey we

enjoy the stillness and allow our gaze to wander over the beautiful Bergisch Land.

To help get us in the right frame of mind, Marco explains something about the animals we will visit in the pastures. There are llamas, blackface and heathland sheep. They live on a large pasture of approximately 3 ha, with small woodland and a stream. They are not “pets” we learn but flight animals. For this reason we are curious whether they will flee from us – we are after all a group of 15 people – or whether we will be able to have closer contact with them.

The llamas in particular are headstrong, sensitive and cautious animals. But they approach us with curiosity, and follow us across the pasture during walking meditation. During a guided meditation we focus on our sense of being alive, just as animals are. That we have a heart, legs, that we breathe, feel pain and joy exactly like animals. This helps establish a deep bond with them.



“Why do you keep animals?” is a question that often comes up. “The animals here are not livestock. They are simply here with us and we enjoy being with them”, says Marco.

In Europe sheep are almost always only kept for their meat he informs us. The lambs are taken from their mothers and slaughtered. The mother sheep then need to be milked – the milk is then thrown away, as is the wool after they have been shorn.

During lunch several of us visit the alpacas, who are standing in another pasture. They are domesticated camels without humps who are bred above all in Peru for their fine wool. Here they stand without any “use”, just happy in the meadow. Bianca, the baby alpaca, was born in October of last year. She is totally white and with her quirky haircut looks a bit like a poodle.

In the late afternoon we get back into our minibuses, happy and in silence, after the working meditation and the tea and cake that Alex baked, and drive silently back to the EIAB: a peaceful, happy day that we had the privilege of experiencing.

The next day during her Dharma talk, Annabelle speaks of why most of us love animals and how we can deal with the appalling suffering inflicted on animals primarily in factory farming and in animal experiments. In the third section we receive a variety of suggestions about what we can do to help alleviate this suffering.

Following this we practice touching the earth on the pastures and connect with the animals, with our country, our ancestors and descendants: with the animals and plants, the mountains and the water, which nourish us and bring us joy. And we allow the pain inflicted upon the land, the animals and plants to flow into the earth, who receives, carries and transforms it.

On the last day we watched the film “MediTiere” (MediAnimals) together.

We were all very moved. It can be seen on Youtube. The film shows the animal rescue program at the Felsentor meditation center in Switzerland. Here Sister Theresia takes care of animals rescued from the slaughterhouse.

During these days we could all feel how beautiful it is to cultivate the loving bond with animals, our brothers and sisters. And how important it is to water positive seeds in order to continue to promote the well-being of animals with joy and not succumb to bitterness or hate.

After the course, Antonia, 14, wrote: “The retreat, mindfulness with animals, was very interesting and meaningful for me. We gained an insight into the lives

of happy animals, who are not kept for a specific purpose like slaughter. I also learned a lot of new things about the habits and behavior of different animals. But what impressed me the most was that I noticed that not only do I love animals so much, but also lots of other people. This was something we had in common that created a sense of togetherness. It was a very beautiful weekend!”

Annabelle Zinser, (“True Fragrance of the Mindfulness Trainings”), practicing with the Sangha Berlin-Hermsdorf

Marco Stromberg practicing with the Sangha Waldbröl

Uli Pfeifer-Schaupp, (“True Deep Meaning”), practicing with the Sangha Freiburg



French-speaking retreat at the EIAB

Encounter with the inner child

When I read Thay's book about the inner child and listened to his many talks on the subject, I asked myself how I could concretely experience the presence of my own inner child?

At the French-speaking retreat at the EIAB in January 2018 on the topic of meeting our inner child, we had the opportunity to journey to our innermost point, to that area which although not unknown is all too often forgotten or repressed.

This course was a real gem. After the previous year's retreat on dealing mindfully with our ancestors, this course helped me to come into contact with a very special and precious aspect of myself, my fragility and vulnerability. At the same time, it was about connecting with what is unique and authentic, and makes my life what it is. With goodwill and tenderness I took part in the talks and practical exercises, and was able to welcome and embrace my hurt, my pain, and smile at them without fear.

In the twists and turns of life, the inner child shows him or herself over and over again. I experienced that it is never too late to open oneself to her/his presence, to give the inner child space and to listen to what she/he has to say. The child is always present.

In daily practice the thick knots are loosened little by little, become smaller and smaller and can finally be undone. What joy to experience this!

"Truth is to be found in life", as Thay tells us.

Here I would like to describe my personal experiences with my inner child.

I have two children, a son of 21 and a daughter of 19.

From the age of 11 my daughter suffered from severe stomach pain. Neither the hospitals nor the many doctors we consulted were able to offer a diagnosis. The crises were downplayed and consequently no adequate treatment was offered. It was only five years later that they reached the conclusion they were dealing with a chronic illness. My daughter was 16 at that time, and her illness – accompanied by the turbulent phase of adolescence – was a great test for our relationship.

My daily mindfulness practice helped me to get through this time; however, I didn't succeed in overcoming my fear and other unskillful reactions to my daughter's illness and her suffering.

With each new crisis I experienced a feeling of helplessness, whilst at the same time imposing a range of alternative treatment forms on her that she didn't really want to follow. At her age she was, in any case, generally unwilling to listen to my suggestions and tended towards suppressing her illness, which was also connected to feelings of shame. At the same time her school and social life was heavily impaired by her frequent absences.

Communication between us was difficult

Apart from my suffering as a mother, who had to look on as her daughter hunched in pain and refused to allow herself to be treated, I felt something inside me that made me confused... What did it mean, what was it about?

It confronted me with myself as a child, who was likewise sickly. After

an accident in childhood in which I was catapulted against a wall head first, I developed migraine attacks. As I didn't receive any treatment these subsequently turned into epileptic fits. At this time my mother was not there for me and there were no doctors in the vicinity. There was only a housekeeper who looked after me and my older sisters and brother. In my youth I had to go to a specialist alone. I had to undergo difficult treatment without any support at all.

These rather rational memories nonetheless did not help me to reduce my fear, and the relationship to my daughter worsened from day to day. My heart closed up, I could no longer bear to experience her crises; I could no longer bear to see her at all. Finally, I asked an elder Dharma sister for help.

She encouraged me above all to come back to myself and to really come into contact with the pain of my inner child, the sick, lonely child in me, who lacked care. I entered into a genuine inner dialogue with this child, I touched the suffering that was still there by feeling it. I experienced the fear once again, the feeling of abandonment, the indifference of my surroundings. I allowed my inner child to cry, in her pain and hurt. When she had calmed a little I was invited to offer her courage and security, to embrace her tenderly and to tell her that now everything is alright, that now I am here for her, grown up and stable. When I listened intensively to my child, she asked why no-one had taken care of her; the question came up in relation to the reasons why she had received no support or care in these moments of

panic and pain. Why was there no sympathy or acknowledgement of her illness? And the child answered, it was because she was not wanted, she was not loved, she was worthless and a burden.

Then I was asked to see why my mother could not really be there for me. She worked a lot in her shop, seven days a week, so that we had an income and could give us a roof over our heads and enough to eat. That was certainly a form of love, and once I had taken a closer look at the history of my ancestors I remembered the story of my mother's life. At age five she already had to work on her father's farm; she received neither care nor goodwill nor affection. She did not have a happy childhood and youth. As an adult she did not have the good fortune to encounter the Dharma. My mother had to "fight" for her existence.

Telling my inner child in her pain the story of my mother was the key to a better understanding and relief of her/my suffering, as well as a correction of her/my inaccurate perceptions and the subsequent interpretations that had become ingrained in me over the years. Like a balsam applied to deep wounds, I was deeply aware of the end of the suffering. A purely rational process could not have had the same effect. But by directly experiencing and reliving the pain of my inner child my mind decided, in the midst of the pain, to follow the path of relief and liberation by correcting its inaccurate perceptions.

To complement this understanding came genuine insight, the "insight of the heart" which brought light into the dark and allowed me to understand why I was behaving so forcefully and unskillfully with my daughter. I understood – and everything fitted together like links in a chain – that I had projected what I had myself experienced as a child onto my daughter as a form of compensation. My stress and fears, in connection with the lack of care and attention I had received in my childhood, had become an obstacle to

a peaceful, relaxed attitude towards the illness of my daughter. I was not in a position to offer her the best conditions to allow her to find her own way. This insight allowed me to open my heart, and I wept warm tears of joy.

So, we (my adult I, and my inner child) apologized to my daughter. I described the whole process to her and explained why I reacted so anxiously and inadequately. I promised her that I would not force anything onto her and that I would only offer my presence and support for her treatment if she expressly asked for it. I promised her I would do my very best to show her more tenderness and goodwill, and to trust in her ability to decide for herself what was best for her.

I am determined to continue on this path... My daughter has also changed; she has decided to take responsibility for herself and to allow herself to be treated correctly.

After only a few months there was a significant improvement in her condition and ultimately a complete recovery. She did not have any more crises, and our relationship has become more harmonious and friendly.

I have understood that the inner child can determine my behavior, and when I listen to her I can free her from our pain. It is my task as an adult to do this within the scope of my possibilities – thanks to the practice and the support of the Sangha – and by doing so to prevent my pain being passed on to my descendants.

Within my inner child there is also joy, lightness and freshness. The contact with these parts of her is a wonderful vibration of vitality. What joy to follow the path of the Dharma and the practice!

Naomi



My stay at EIAB

It took me a bit of time to get used to things at the EIAB, but after a settling in phase, the loving and peaceful atmosphere of the monastery enchanted and changed me. I can remember very well the first time I saw Sr. Annabel; she radiated such positive energy that I felt transformed. Sandra also had a similar experience. Her graceful walking and beaming smile very gently changed me completely. The children felt totally at home from the very beginning and came into direct contact with other children as well as with the nuns and monks.

We needed time to adjust to the daily structure of life at the EIAB, but at the same time we wanted to consciously break out of our normal rhythm and discover something new. Our Chinese friend had asked us if we would like to come with her, and we had immediately said yes. Within a short time the meditation with the sound of the bell, the slow and sedate walking, the many mindfulness practices and the loving and peaceful interaction with one another brought us into a different world. Inside ourselves we became very peaceful and relaxed at the EIAB. I had dreams of beautiful music and on the very first night I had a relaxing, happy feeling in my sleep. The conversations at the EIAB touched body and mind in a way that was completely different from other talks that do not have the same calm, peace and power, and mostly only address the intellect.

Particularly new for me was the walking meditation. My gaze was often directed outwards, but inner peace arose through mindful breathing and the inner focus.

The morning Tai Chi was invigorating and a wonderful experience. I am a sportsman and love movement and

various forms of fitness exercises enrich my sporting activities.

Another thing that I wasn't used to was the constant interruptions to the activities by the clock bell. At the beginning I found this disturbing, until I slowly felt and experienced how good it is to interrupt the sometimes over hasty flow of an activity and to get off the treadmill. More and more often I could just enjoy taking a break. This too changed me little by little.

I also enjoyed the Dharma talks, which touched me deeply in a very soft and uncannily peaceful way through their gentle language. I already knew some of it, but thanks to the way the talk was given I could experience it much better.

The family sharings were very emotional and helped connect with the community. However, it wasn't heated discussions, but rather genuine empathy through deep listening. Not judging or criticising enabled deeper more compassionate support for all the stories of the participants, including the monks and nuns, which meant not only that the pain could indeed be eased, but also that the joy could be increased. I felt connected with the community.

And again and again came the relief of the bell, with its healing and cleansing effect.

For families the retreat is ideal. The care of the children was very loving and I could feel that the nuns and monks genuinely enjoyed being with the children. I have never experienced anything like that. This enabled the adults to concentrate completely on the retreat. Nevertheless, there was also a joint program with the children, which was very loving and beautiful for the children.

With a little distance from the retreat, I can now say it caused a lasting change in me, although this was clear from the first day onwards. My understanding of mindfulness, meditation, loving speech and deep listening has grown. I am practicing, and thereby understanding and learning.

Of course, everything hasn't become wonderful all of a sudden, but I understand this as a process of change. For example, I can deal better with situations with the children, where I was previously critical. My anger and aggression has less power over me, and I can react more lovingly and calmly to my children and my partner.

There were even a couple of setbacks after the retreat in which anger and aggression increasingly came up. But they soon went away again.

I am very thankful for the EIAB and happy that I was there. I will be back.

Michael Zabel



Dancing in mindfulness

The first time that I went to EIAB was in spring 2014, for a retreat offered by Sr. Chan Duc to the European Dharma teachers and aspirant Dharma teachers. I was among these latter, together with Letizia (the other Italian aspirant) and some other members of the Italian OI Community who were already Dharma teachers (namely, Diana, Stefano and Silvia).

The subject of the retreat offered by Sr. Chan Duc was “The Twelve Links of Interdependent Co-Arising” according to the new vision given by Thay. At the beginning this theme seemed to me to be a very complex (and unclear) one of the buddhist tradition, but during the retreat, thanks to the talks (and the smile) of Sr. Chan Duc and to the many sharings that we (participants to the retreat) had, it gradually became simple and clear to me and I felt able to appreciate its important place within the buddhist teachings.

That retreat was for me an happy experience for many reasons: for what I learned, for the friendly and joyous presence of the Dharma teachers and the other aspirants (I remember in particular the friends from U.K.) and for the EIAB context that I perceived as appropriate, dharmic and comfortable at the same time. The presence and the dharmic service of the many, gentle and smiling, nuns and monks, and the practices of meditation that we had all together, made me feel that EIAB was one with Plum Village. Also the meadows and the flowers (and the care for them), the huge plants and the fruit plants, the natural spaces within and close to EIAB, were appealing to me

and reminding me of Plum Village. The same was for the silence, the calm and the “voice” of the large bell.

Of course I also noticed the differences from Plum Village and the peculiarities of EIAB. One peculiarity was the co-presence of buildings of quite different style, the huge ones, with high ceilings and murble on the floors and walls, and the more familiar small ones with two floors and a lot of wood. However this contrast (of huge and small) was not disturbing at all, and the spirit of the practice was clearly pervading both. An other peculiarity was the EIAB closeness to, and even the interconnection with the little town of Waldbröl. Walking around the EIAB “campus” some nice private buildings (one of which is a kindergarden) seem to be part of EIAB, but they are not. However there is harmony in this interconnection, and it seemed to me to reflect the peculiar purpose or aspiration of EIAB, that of being a center of Applied Buddhism, implementing various activities more connected and open to the society with respect to the other monasteries and centers of Plum Village in the world. Last year, the latest time I have been at EIAB, I found a new astonishing

peculiarity of EIAB: the new dining hall and the new kitchen!! While I was there a retreat for Dutch families was on, and it was wonderful to experience EIAB so full of life and peace, inside and outside the new dining hall!

After 2014 I have been at EIAB each year from 2015 to 2017, for teaching a course on “dance therapy and mindfulness”, always in spring time (May). Sr. Bi Nghiem has always been among the participants in the course and I felt honored and also somehow protected by her presence (we had already met several times in Italy in retreats and days of mindfulness, where I felt deeply inspired by her).

Teaching such a course at EIAB has been a very important experience for me because I have learned to integrate or harmonize “dance” and mindfulness in a way and at a deep level that I had not reached before. This process already took place in 2015, the first time I taught the course. I realized for instance that it was wonderful to start from a (sitting or standing) meditation and then let the dance rise from the meditative state we all were in, first simply slowly and freely walking and then freely and slowly moving and



dancing and only later acquiring some “momentum” in dancing, frequently with the help of an appropriate music. It is amazing how starting from a meditative state of mind allows us to move our body with no effort at all and in a very armonious way (inhabiting the whole body) and in connection with earth and sky, and the different directions of space. Moving and dancing with lightness and pleasure was the experience of most participants to the course. When movement and dance arise from a meditative state

we also may find ourselves free from judgements and from stereotyped movements. At the same time we are also able to connect with the other people (around us) in unuasually free, joyous and deep way.

This is something that I have observed on my self as well as on the participants to the courses, and is something that has been also expressed and confirmed within the many dance-Dharma-sharings that we have had all along the courses.

At the end of the course, each year, it was clear to me that we (that is I and the participants to the course) had become a Sangha.

In conclusion I wish to express my gratitude to EIAB for having offered to me a very special context in which I have been able to enjoy and share the practice, while becoming – as I do feel – a better dance-movement-therapist.

Giuseppe

A heart's desire finds fulfilment

A good two years ago at an Order of Interbeing meeting, I asked whether it would be possible to offer a course for clowns at EIAB. I have been “playing” the clown in clinics for the past three years and wholeheartedly love this work.

At our last meeting in October, Sr. Bi Nghiem smilingly informed me that it would take place in January. I registered immediately. On the first evening I received two wonderful surprises: firstly that three dear brothers and sisters from the Order were in the group, and secondly the course leaders Terry und Catherine who immediately introduced the course with verve and the joy of life. Moving through the room we practiced combining eye contact with a gentle smile. After a wonderful deep relaxation by Terry, I felt like a little bird in a cosy nest and took my joy to bed with me.

The morning meditation helped me feel the freshness of the flower in me, and was followed by walking meditation in the hall and the concluding sutra about happiness.

In the morning we became fish swimming past beautiful algae to soothing water music. At another moment we were all little mumbling bears. At that point I couldn't imagine that later I would become a nun who didn't know the best way to take off her robe without being observed. After each of these exercises we were asked by Catherine how we had felt and

there was more than enough time for reflection. Her entire manner during all the different exercises was very positive, supportive, and heart-opening for my inner child.

To my great astonishment I discovered the next day that we were slowly but surely being prepared for the stage, without having been really aware of it. What magic!

Divided up into groups of four we fitted on our red noses and hats that were genuinely well worth seeing. Entering the room by climbing over a colored cord onto the stage, we were simply there, feeling and perceiving what happened. Any type of feeling was permitted, even resistance. As if by itself the first small play came into being, and the word that we as a group found for it was “Allah”. In the stillness I thought to myself, “that fits in very well with a Buddhist monastery”.

On this weekend so many little birds came into my nest. Terry and Catherine simply spread out their wings and lovingly embraced us.

Heidi Hawelka (“True Compliance with the Ocean”)



Pushing triggers

How do I not yield to strong emotions that cause harming actions to ourselves and others?

The answer is easy: practicing mindfulness, especially mere recognition that does not judge, and knowledge of ourselves and our ancestors

Certain key experiences in the make-up period of life, childhood and later puberty are responsible for our feelings and patterns of behavior that, if unreflected, will trigger automatism in actions we are not able to control so easily. Our ancestors as well left a big part of their habits to us. Exactly this has to be thoroughly reflected intellectually and emotionally by the help of meditation for example.

Supposed your child's action has caused great anger in you because your mother or father has also become angry when you did not want to go to bed. So we are on the path of our parents. We don't control the situation because we have become an instrument of anger. We are torn away by the maelstrom of emotions, loose yourselves and in this moment we are not present. When the trigger in us has been pushed an automatic program has been started. Whatever it is, for example shouting or beating etc. your child the damage has already been done. When the emotion has died down we become aware of what we have done. This happens every time anew and the vicious circle is closed again and again. Your child is going to leave it to its own children. The suffering is manifest.

The crucial point is to become aware of our triggers we have inside in order to be prepared for these situations. To do that we have to know and experience ourselves. By observing ourselves we should learn how we normally behave in different kinds of situations of conflict. This is the first step. It is important not to live in one's past, but to know it because we are also the product of our past and that of our ancestors.

In the heat of the moment we can then mindfully welcome this trigger

and its following emotions by breathing consciously in order to diminish the overwhelming power of the maelstrom of emotions. This takes time and a lot of practice. When doing so we gain time that weakens this emotion. Every emotion just stays for a certain time and fades relatively fast.

Thus we are in the position to experience mere non-judging recognition in order to commit a reflected and self-determined action. In brief words we stay cool. Supported by constantly practiced meditation we gain inner silence, serenity and clear sight. Stress is reduced or is not existing anymore and we feel really well. Best case is we do love ourselves more and more which is a required condition to be able to give love to others. Thus we become less susceptible to these triggers and we develop patience which is another required condition for compassion and understanding. In other words:

meditating in good times will help you in moments of distress.

Practicing regularly we become more mindful, calmer and relaxed. So we are more understanding and compassionate and we break the vicious circle. We can hug our child with love and bring it to bed with a beautiful, loving and cultivated ritual.

Especially our own children are testing our triggers. They want us to overcome our suffering. Each push of triggers of the children is a chance to do so. Sooner or later other people will also push these triggers in us. We all know these people unconsciously testing us.

By recognising these moments as gifts and chances we break our vicious circles sustainably and leave this positive energy to our children and other people.

Michael Zabel



Hiking is the Tiroler's joy

Joy, ease and learning on a deep level

“How was the hiking retreat?”

This was the question I was most frequently asked after the hiking retreat in Obernberg am Brenner (Tirol/Austria) with Thay Phap An, Sr. Song Nghiem and other monks and nuns of the EIAB.

Joy, ease and learning on a deep level

These are the words which best describe the time together. The stability of the mountains, the cloudless sky, the friendly group and the experienced monks and nuns were wonderful conditions for joy and ease.

However, the “real magic ingredient” for joy and ease were not the mountains, the sky or the group.

The “real magic ingredient” for joy and ease was our practice:

- walking in silence,
- feeling breath and body,
- the sense of being at home in myself.

The wonderful thing about it: this “magic ingredient” is available all the time. This makes me very happy.

But how did we learn on a deep level?

Was it the fascinating and wise Dharma talks from Thay Phap An or the witty and wise comments of Sr. Song Nghiem?

Words certainly taught us something and inspired us ... but here too practicing together with the monastics and the group over several days was the crucial factor: it allowed the practice to penetrate deeply to a place that “hard facts” often can't reach.

Learning on a hiking retreat or at other retreats is completely different from learning at university or in school.

Here, learning is based on experiencing

My “mindfulness muscles” are trained, and insights and understanding arise without my rational mind initially even being able to give them a name. And during this hiking retreat this was the way I experienced learning, as something that flowed into my everyday life... would you like to read about my learning?

Recognizing old beliefs

Vietnamese monks and nuns have a completely different understanding of hiking from a lady from Tirol who has been weaned on “hiking adages”.

Here are just a couple of those I grew up with: “A Tiroler sets off early for the mountains!” “Never take a break until the most strenuous part of the hike is over!” And especially important: “You need good shoes”. I was given the task of leading the group and noticed how I set off at quite a speed for the first hike. Inside me I could hear words from my childhood, “Don't stop, keep in rhythm, always keep going”. In addition, I felt a slight – or perhaps a great – pressure inside me.

It was with relief that I heard the words of Thay Phap An after the first break: “We can also stop and enjoy the view. That is a form of meditation.”

The burden of being a Tiroler fell from my shoulders.

It was wonderful to recognize my old beliefs, to breathe with them and feel the freedom of understanding that it

doesn't have to be this way, it can be completely different.

So often I hold on to old certainties, restrict myself, and spoil the most beautiful days or declare others to be ignorant just because they do things differently.

Thay Phap An did not point out our old beliefs to us; rather we had time, and also the necessary quantum of mindfulness, to recognize them for ourselves. I felt the pressure, the narrowness, the sense of being remote controlled in these old certainties, and also felt the ease, joy and trust as I noticed them, embraced them and they fell away.

They will certainly reappear on the next hike, but I will recognize them sooner, and carry on without them.

Insecurity

Can you remember the last time you were in a new group? How did you feel? Can you remember a slight feeling of insecurity, one we often feel when we are in new situations and meet new people?

For some of the participants the experience of a retreat, being together with Buddhist nuns and monks and the daily routine, was completely new. I felt their insecurity and their need for more information and stability. When I feel this in others, then the strong desire arises in me to give orientation and stability using many, many words. Thanks to Noble Silence (above all in the evenings and mornings) I couldn't follow these impulses as usual – how wonderful!

So we had the possibility to once again experience the magic of a beginning with all its many facets. We could feel

what it is like, when we dare to do something new.

A magic dwells in each new beginning. Yet how often do I reject this magic? My mind seeks a foothold, control, security... but life is a flow, uncertain and completely new in every moment.

Am I prepared to feel this gentle tingling, this ache in the pit of my stomach? Am I prepared to recognize that it doesn't mean there is something wrong with me? Am I prepared not to try and get rid of it?

Dare I feel that to be insecure at the beginning is simply part of this moment?

Here too learning occurs on a very deep level: I could feel a slight sense of insecurity with the group and just be with this feeling. It helped me to learn to trust the Sangha a little bit more, and I saw how everyone, step by step, arrived, and how we allowed ourselves to sink into the flow of the retreat and how joy and ease arose.

I can still feel this ease and the relief at "not having to have everything under control" today. Something in me at a very deep level understood – I am very grateful for this: grateful for this way of learning and grateful to the nuns and monks of the EIAB. What a blessing your practice and sharing is for me and for all of us. How wonderful that you are here!

Susanna Mühlbacher ("Gentle Energy of the Heart") lives with her family in Hall in Tirol and practices there with her Sangha

Let go to once again feel happiness

with the Healing & Transformation meditation

Majestic mountains, brilliant sunshine, lush green meadows – this is my experience of Tirol as I travel to my first retreat there; my view broadens and my heart opens with every mindful step we take on our hike together, listening to Thay Phap An's Dharma talks. Without expectations, without a goal I have arrived and am completely unaware that this will be, by far, not the greatest gift I receive.

In one of his talks Thay Phap An told how he had helped a woman at the EIAB to heal the wounds of trauma. One of the many successes that the Vietnamese teacher has achieved in his many years of working with traumatized people. He has himself experienced trauma and been able to overcome it. It is immediately clear to me, here is someone who will understand my suffering. And this is my chance to heal and I will take it. In a quiet moment I ask him to show me how he helped the woman and also to help me. Thay Phap An smiles and nods.

What felt like only five minutes later, and to my astonishment, together with the Sangha I experience Thay Phap An's Healing & Transformation meditation. I never imagined that – after over 10

years of suffering due to repeated traumatization – it would happen so quickly. To confront this trauma so spontaneously in Tirol without falling back on my healthcare network or my familiar surroundings in Munich took a lot of courage: every attempt at resolution contains the possibility of being re-traumatized. The alternative – to suffer from trauma for the rest of my life – no thanks! And I had no idea what a wonderful experience was awaiting me, and how easy it would be...

The first part, breathe – in and out, calm down, was familiar and comforting. Then came the second part, releasing the trauma. Accompanied by Thay Phap An's soothing voice I returned to the difficult situation, allowed inner images to arise, the pain, fear of death, desperation. Tears flowed down my cheeks, and to my surprise the scream that arose previously in my throat was still stuck there and choking me. I could not breathe, wanted to scream, to let the blocked energy out. Impossible in a shared meditation room I thought – you are not alone. A very comforting thought – I am not alone, I am with the Sangha and with Thay Phap An. I can do it! So, I breathed,

puffing loudly, deeper and deeper into the constriction until my throat was free. I felt nauseous, I breathed into the nausea until it disappeared and only a feeling of breathing freely remained. And then Thay Phap An was there and led us out. What remained was an experience, one however without stressful emotions. I breathed freely and for the first time in a very, very long while I was simply happy. I was here, free and happy. Nonetheless, I needed an entire retreat day just for me to find my balance – even a healing experience needs to be integrated.

It is my heartfelt desire that this healing meditation reaches as many people as possible, and can be practiced regularly together both in Sanghas and at retreats. I would like to help start a group in Munich that meets just for this every 1–3 months. If you are interested then please speak to me about it at any time or write to me: ElisabethFalgnier@web.de. And I am looking forward, with my whole heart, to continuing on this path with all of you at the retreats of Thay Phap An, next of all in Weyarn and then again in Tirol.

Elisabeth Falgnier, ("Radiant Love of the Heart"), member of the Munich Sangha

Wake Up your **artist**

For a week in April, 30 young people from across Europe gathered at EIAB for the latest Wake Up Your Artist week. With the aspiration to bring together mindfulness and creativity, Larissa Mazbouh and Joe Holtaway – this time with Annica Bauer, too – put together a week of workshops and activities to look at what it means to be an artist. From bringing attention to inner child and inner critic we took an adventure into colors, voice, movement and words. We painted, we sang, we danced and we wrote. We laughed and we cried.

We invited our artists to give reflections on their week, and here's what we've received:

"...Colorful togetherness. A warm and safe place that invites my inner artist to shine through. Facing fears of rejection. Gentle guidance towards unconditional love."

"Walking hand in hand with our eyes closed, a human chain of uncertainty, towards the crackling of a fire."

"When I think of the Wake Up Your Artist Retreat, I think of love and trust. Everyone was so open, accepting and beautiful in his and her own unique way. I enjoyed being in nature, drinking tea, singing and listening to songs and, of course, spending time with the kindest people I have ever met. Although these seems like simple actions, they are not."

"Lying on the floor just before total relaxation and peeking at our self-

drawn safeguards which are smiling at us from the wall..."

"The talks we had from Sr. Annabel, Br. Phap Tri and Br. Phap Trung were touching, honest and wise – we take your wisdom with us in what we do, thank you ☺"

"With the help of the mindfulness practice I realized that being alive is such a precious wonder, so there is nothing more important than enjoying it in every moment. And how can you do that in a better way than in that safe and peaceful environment we created together?"

"I felt like I could dare so much more than I would normally do. In me stays the wish to keep this love alive and to spread it into the world."

"Laughter, tears, walks in the forest and my inner garden. Friends who encourage each other to show their true colors."

Thanks to all those who came and supported the project. Special thanks to Ahmad from Syria, who with his joy, sincerity and reverence for life is an inspiration to us all.

With a deep bow of gratitude for the Community at the EIAB for their care and support during the week.

As a conclusion, a poem by Philip:

Mindful Lunch

We are home,
we have arrived,
lying in the field.
Joe plays guitar
and Annica translates.

The monk with the bell
has fallen asleep in his hat
so we cannot leave
any time soon.

Nowhere to go,
home, arrived,
rise with our eyes closed



quiet beside the beech tree
the grass glints silver.

Oh, live for days
of eyes and ears
bodies of sun
and water!

Oh, live for days
of shoulders and toes,
bodies of sun
and water!

Wake Up Sangha



Short biographies of EIAB sisters



Sister Chan Duc (Sr. Annabel), EIAB's Dean of Practice, was born and grew up in England. She taught there as a teacher for 15 years and in 1988, in India, she became the first western nun to be ordained by Thich Nhat Hanh. From 1997 to 2007 she was the abbess of Green Mountain Dharma Center in Vermont (USA).

Since 2008 she has been the Head of Practice at the EIAB and predominantly teaches the nuns and monks at the EIAB as well as Dharma teachers and members of the Order of Interbeing. As one of the oldest and most experienced Dharma teachers in the Plum Village tradition she is in great demand around the world, and spends several months at other centers in the Plum Village tradition to offer her deep knowledge of the teachings and the practice to help support and teach monks, nuns and lay friends.



Sister Bi Nghiem was born and grew up in Bad Kreuznach. She is a qualified librarian and from 1975 to 1985 lived in Montreal, Canada, where she studied French and Italian literature. In 1998 she was ordained by Thay, and in 2006 she received transmission of the Dharma Lamp from him. Since 2008 she has been at the EIAB, where she offers courses and is also responsible, among other things, for the Program and Newsletter. In addition, she also gives courses in a number of other countries, both in and outside Europe. Her particular interests include Western and Buddhist psychology, neuroscience, alternative medicine and interreligious dialogue. She loves walking in nature and deep human encounters, and finds great joy in improvised dancing and clowning.



Sister Song Nghiem came to Germany at the age of 18 as a student. After completing her doctorate in chemistry at TU Darmstadt, she spent 18 years in research and business before moving to Plum Village in France to become a nun.

As a lay person, she had been involved in Thay's social projects in Vietnam and worked in the Maitreya fund. She also led the Vietnamese Sangha in Munich until the last day before she drove to Plum Village to become a nun. For this, she received the Dharma Lamp as a lay person.

Through constant contact with monks and nuns, the spiritual seeds were watered in her. When a fruit is ripe, it falls to the ground. The step to become a nun was not difficult for her. She was ordained in 2004. In 2012, she was re-appointed a Dharma teacher by Thay – now being a nun.

At EIAB she is responsible for administration, financing, accounting, organizing courses and solving many problems. She really enjoys gardening, cooking and enjoys having fun with all people. Swimming, Qi Gong, Tai Chi and movements are her favorite hobbies.

With her lightness, her joy and her humor, she very much relieves the suffering of other people.



Sister Bang Nghiem was born in 1986 and grew up in a large family. She was ordained a nun at the age of 20. Of 10 siblings, eight have become monks and nuns. Sr. Bang Nghiem wanted to be a nun since early childhood. When she learned about Thay's Prajna Monastery in Vietnam, she went there as an aspirant. After a six-month probationary period, she was accepted as a nun. Later she moved to Plum Village in France and practiced there for four years before joining the EIAB. In 2014, she received the Dharma Lamp from Thay.

Sr. Bang Nghiem practices with great discipline and zeal. As a big sister, she is a wonderful role model for the young nuns at the EIAB. Her job as a shopper for the whole EIAB Sangha and our guests leads her out with much love and mindfulness. She has learned a great deal and her request to help and serve others has been encouraged. She can also get to know other people and German culture. At the moment she likes to learn German in order to communicate with our guests. When it comes to cooking, the brothers and sisters and the guests are very happy about her culinary skills. She gives a lot of love and effort to offer the tasty, vegetarian dishes.



Sister Bieu Nghiem was born in 1982. She comes from North Vietnam.

Before she met Thay, she had little knowledge of Buddhism. There are no institutions in North Vietnam proclaiming Buddhist teachings. As soon as she heard Thay's first Dharma talk, she decided to become a nun to help herself, her family, and her friends alleviate and transform suffering. Just three days after this meeting, she went to the Prajna Monastery to become a novice. She was only 25 years old. Before that, she had studied economics at the University of Hanoi. She is the daughter of senior government officials. She has given up her career as a successful business woman, despite all the protests of her family, and turned her back on her family.

Sr. Bieu Nghiem has four siblings. Although she is very gifted and talented, she always had the inferiority complex that she was not good enough and not as pretty as her three other siblings. As a nun, her first practice is to overcome this complex. Her tremendous joy is the

Dharma, and her greatest fortune in meeting and learning the Buddhist practice of Plum Village. She practices with all her heart and supports the Sangha, her brothers and sisters in the monastery, as well as she can. She loves children just as much as older people. She can play very well with children and guide them, but spoils them at the same time.

Her strength and her professional skills as a saleswoman make her available to the EIAB. She is the treasurer and also responsible for the bookkeeping at the EIAB.

She is very proud of her North Vietnamese cuisine and is a really a great chef.

She is very generous and sacrifices her time, her talents and energy to all people. Sr. Bieu Nghiem is very happy to serve and help.



Sister Chieu Nghiem was born in 1976 and ordained at the age of 31.

Since her entire family is warmly devoted to Buddhism, the good seeds in her were already watered in her childhood.

She waited a long time for Thay to come back to Vietnam to be ordained by him.

Her own sister, Sr. Ich Nghiem, had joined the Interbeing Order six months before her. Sr. Chieu Nghiem also needed time to break from her job as an accountant.

As a nun, she first lived in Bat Nha Monastery in Vietnam, then in Plum Village in southern France and finally in the "Maison de l'Inspire" in Paris, before settling in the EIAB.

Sr. Chieu Nghiem is a wonderful sister with great talent and skill. She brings a lot of new ideas and creativity into the work. She has a good feeling for an attractive design of our Institute. At the EIAB she designed the garden with deed and strength and decorated the interior and exterior of our buildings.

Sr. Chieu Nghiem feels at home everywhere. She helps her sisters and brothers at the EIAB to build up the Institute and tries to help wholeheartedly wherever help is needed, despite a thyroid disorder. Her main job at EIAB is to look after our bookstore.



Sister Chinh Nghiem was born in 1982 and ordained at age 25. She already wanted to become a nun at the age of eight. In her childhood, she loved to hear stories about the Buddha's life before his enlightenment or the story of the venerable Mahamaudgalyayana, who went to hell to save his mother, or the story of the Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha. These stories have greatly influenced the little child.

When Thay returned to Vietnam in 2007, many young people came to him to become his disciples. Among them was the younger brother of Sr. Chinh Nghiem, who is now our Br. Phap Tho. During a visit to her brother in the Bat Nha temple, the sister was so deeply impressed by the teachings and practice of Plum Village that she immediately decided for the monastery. At that time, she worked as an employee in a natural rubber processing factory and earned quite well. With the money she supported her family. Nevertheless she felt guilty to her parents because she was not nice and affectionate enough. She gave them the money, but not enough love. She felt that if she were a nun, she could devote her spiritual merit to her parents. From Plum Village in Thailand she moved to Plum Village in France and then came to the EIAB a few years later. In Germany she especially appreciates the environment, the weather, the landscapes and the people. At the EIAB she wishes for more joint activities of the nuns and monks, such as common instruction or additional joint meditation. She wishes that the nuns and monks of the EIAB will soon be able to sit together with their guests in the new meditation hall.



Sister Dien Nghiem was born in 1986. In 2005 she met Thay. In 2007, at the age of 21, she was ordained a nun.

Sr. Dien Nghiem's desire was to take responsibility for her life. However, her mother did not want her daughter to become a nun. She feared that her daughter would suffer from the restrictions of the monastic life, because it means hard work, getting up early, many commands and numerous prohibitions. Therefore, Sr. Dien Nghiem initially withheld her intention to ordain. She only told her mother that she wanted to attend a retreat for young people at Bat Nha Monastery. After the retreat, however, she remained in the monastery and was ordained.

Only after the ordination did she inform her mother about it. Now the mother is very happy about the decision of her daughter. Because Sr. Dien Nghiem was a very happy novice and that was something her mother could accept. For Sr. Dien Nghiem, the monastery of Bat Nha is the place that nurtured her own bodhicitta, her will to help and serve the people, and the bodhicitta of many other brothers and sisters.

At EIAB she feels happy and at home. The beautiful surroundings and the helpful living conditions in the Institute favor her practice and nourish her happiness.



Sister Duy Nghiem was born in 1983. She was ordained a nun at the age of 25. As a bank clerk, she led a comfortable life in Vietnam, yet she did not always want to return to the circle of suffering, samsara. Sr. Duy Nghiem was greatly supported by Thay's book "How Siddhartha Became Buddha". When she expressed her desire to become a nun, her father threatened to kill himself. Her mother was indifferent: she neither supported her daughter's desire nor did she prevent her from achieving it.

Sr. Duy Nghiem is the youngest daughter in her family and was her father's favorite child. After Sr. Duy Nghiem became a nun, her father did not want to see her anymore and refused to accept her as his daughter. It was not until a year later that Sr. Duy Nghiem went home to her father, apologized for the pain her decision had caused him, and worked with him to seek a path of reconciliation by holding the New Relief Ceremony together.

In Germany, she especially likes neatness and discipline. She appreciates the regular Buddhist study of nuns and monks while living at EIAB. She really enjoys that the brothers and sisters live in harmony with each other, support each other and always give priority to each other. Every day she experiences how everyone recognizes their own responsibility. Everyone practices together to transform themselves and to help each other on the path of healing.



Sister Hien Nghiem was born in 1983 and became an ordained nun in 2007. In 2005 she heard for the first time one of Thay's Dharma talks, in Vietnam. This was the first time that she learned of a new way of presenting the Buddhist teachings. Thay has said that we can be happy right now, that we don't have to yearn for it sometime in the future. Thay also spoke of the suffering of many young people, and of the suicides among them, due to not knowing how to handle their strong emotions and the stress they felt in their lives. In conjunction with this theme, Thay named different practices with which we can overcome our suffering. Sr. Hien Nghiem has followed Thay's instructions and acknowledges that these practices are very effective and successful in solving problems and difficulties that she is experiencing at the moment.

She asked herself why would she not live 100% of the time in this healing environment so as to have the possibility to practice it all the time and so be happy and peaceful. Besides that, she wants, through the practice, understand herself and live happy. In the past she had studied information technology. After graduating, she worked for a year before she entered the order. She has two brothers and two sisters. Both sisters have become nuns in the tradition of Plum Village.



Sister Ich Nghiem was born in 1975 and ordained at the age of 31. She comes from a family with strong Buddhist roots. Her grandparents had built a monastery as lay person and founded it, so that the monks had the opportunity to practice.

Thanks to the spiritual roots of their grandparents, the children and grandchildren are also very spiritually oriented. Of the 11 siblings of Sr. Ich Nghiem, five have become nuns and monks. Her mother is a nun too. Her brother is the Abbot of the Hoi Ton pagoda, a famous pagoda in Vietnam with beautiful ancient Buddhist architecture. Sr. Chieu Nghiem, who also lives at EIAB, is her sister.

Sr. Ich Nghiem received the Dharma Lamp from Thay in 2014.

At the EIAB she is a wonderful big sister and takes care of her younger sisters in a touching and responsible way. She is quiet but fine, conscientious, works very attentively, carefully and only for the benefit of the Sangha and all beings.

What she likes very much in Germany and in the EIAB are the good conditions for the practice of cultivating a spiritual life. She appreciates the culture and the environmental protection in Germany very much.

Her practice and her desire for the EIAB is to live in harmony with all, with love and acceptance for each other.



Sister Luu Nghiem was born in 1989 and ordained at the age of 13. Already as a small child, she loved to visit Buddhist monasteries and often stayed there. Before she was admitted to the monastery as a nun, she spent a one-year probationary period there.

In her life as a nun, she has experienced many difficulties and challenges. But since she lives at EIAB, she's thriving. Now she has become a big sister in the Sangha and also a Dharma teacher. She is very tender, very soft, very gentle and very conscientious in her work and also in practicing the Buddhist teachings.



Sister Huyen Dieu was born in 1986 and became an ordained nun in 2010. She is the oldest of three sisters. Since the age of six she has been exposed to Buddhism through activities taking place for the children of the monastic community. At the age of 14 she began reading book by Thich Nhat Hanh, such as “How Siddhartha Became Buddha”, “Youth, Love and Ideal” and “Dialogues with Youth in their 20s”, which greatly influenced her in deciding to become a nun.

In 2007, at the age of 23, she met Thay in person. Many of Thay’s views have impressed her. His light-footed way of walking, his radiant presence, his authenticity and his calm nature made lasting impression on her. Her heartfelt wish since her childhood was to become a nun, but her vater would not let her fulfill this wish. Over a period of three years, she often ran away from home to the cloister in order to live as a nun. Every time her father brought her back home. Due to her persistence, her father finally gave up his opposition and so

Sr. Huyen Diêu could finally follow her heart. She lived four years in Plum Village in France and then decided to join EIAB. Here she is very happy. The Sangha’s harmony is especially important to her. Simplicity and humility are ideals that she values as a nun. Through the daily practice she sees herself more clearly and can live free of attachments. The goal of her practice is the further growth and development of the Sangha and the EIAB



Sister Pho Nghiem was born in 1980. Her parents have six children, of whom three are monks and nuns. Her practice is it to be happy in every situation and to overcome difficulties.

A few years ago she learned that she had breast cancer. Without telling anybody in the Sangha or her physical family, she secretly treated herself with Chinese herbs, meditation, and massage.

When she finally came to the doctor, the doctors determined that the cancer was already in the advanced stage. After years of chemotherapy and surgery, she is now no longer in mortal danger.

Despite her serious illness, she is always cheerful and confident. She never doubted her healing and was not afraid at all.

She accepted her illness and is always friendly and kind to all people. She says that the practice has helped her a lot, to stay stable and always positive and to have strong confidence in life.



Sister Thuc Nghiem was born in 1981 and entered the Order at the age of 27. She grew up in a family with four siblings and is the only daughter of her family. Before entering the monastery, she worked for five years in a Taiwanese company that manufactures shoes in Vietnam. When she was seven, she decided to become a vegetarian with her younger brother. She has already experienced suffering in her family as a child, because her parents often argued with each other. Her mother was an only child and mentally very unstable. That’s why Sr. Thuc Nghiem wanted to go to the monastery very early. But her mother had forbidden it. Her younger brother then prepared everything so that she could go to the monastery of Bat Nha Monastery to be ordained there.

In the monastery, she has always thought of her parents and still wants to practice very well today to help her parents. Now, after nearly seven years as a nun, she is the spiritual support for her parents.

At the EIAB she is very grateful for the security she experiences here in Germany. She thinks the German language is very difficult and therefore practices to let go of this thought so that she can master the foreign language even better. Meanwhile, she speaks German very well and can talk to the guests.

Sr. Thuc Nghiem likes to support the students because she feels that many people here are very lonely. When they come to the EIAB, they seek a way out of their suffering and loneliness. Therefore, Sr. Thuc Nghiem likes to engage with the students to help them on the path of healing and transformation. Sr. Thuc Nghiem values the practice very much and is aware of how much it helped her to overcome many difficulties in life.



Sister Trang Hien Ngoc was born in 1989 and in 2012, at the age of 21, she was ordained. After her studies, she had planned to become a teacher. She met Thay in 2008 at the Mat Nha Monastery, when she was 19 years old. Within a month, after she got to know Thay and the Sangha, she decided to enter the order.

She saw much love in Thay and the Plum Village Sangha radiated much peace and happiness. What especially impressed her was that the monks and nuns, although so young, were very calm and serene and as a result were very peaceful.

She recognized that the young monks and nuns were leading such a beautiful life. They did not follow the worldly life such as that of money, power, possessions, alcohol, or were only interested in their own happiness. Sr. Trang Hien Ngoc wanted to be like them.

Because of the closure of Bat Nha Monastery, and that it was not allowed to take in young people, she had to wait another couple of years before she was finally ordained in Thailand.

She has four siblings. Her oldest brother is already a monk (Br. Phap Lich, also at EIAB), as well as her youngest brother (Br. Phap Bang at Plum Village in France). She also has a cousin who is monk (Br. Hien Luong, also at EIAB).

She volunteered to come to EIAB because of having her oldest brother and cousin here. At EIAB she especially appreciates the favorable conditions for making spiritual progress.

She is very independent, pays attention to order, shows much discipline, and cares for the garden as well as the decorations at EIAB. Using her creative skills, she does all this with love.

She's very diligent and supports the Sangha with all her heart. Not only does she work in CTC (Care Taking Council) at EIAB, she's also an outstanding cook that serves fantastic and complex dishes to the Sangha and the guests.



Sister Trang Huyen Khong was born in 1992 and ordained at the age of 18. Her mother died when she was 15 years old. Her single father raised six children, three of whom became monks and nuns.

A brother of hers, Br. Phap Xu, who currently serves as an attendant of Thay in Thailand. Sr. Trang Huyen Khong always wanted to become a nun because she realized early that there is so much suffering in life.

Since she had to replace her mother when she was still young, she developed the responsibility, discipline, orderliness and attention to the needs of her family. These good qualities make her a wonderful nun.

At the EIAB she is very touched when she sees that many people come back to the EIAB to practice and to transform their suffering. She also experiences that these friends are very successful with their practice, because they also appear lighter and happier than before.

The practice of Sr. Trang Huyen Khong is to practice every day that her spiritual path remains as beautiful as at the beginning and that she maintains her bodhicitta energy.



Sister Trang Ngan Phuong was born in 1996 as the youngest of four siblings. Since her home was located close to the local temple she visited the monastery very often and very joyfully when she was 6-7 years old. At age 8-9 she already moved into the monastery.

In this temple there lived just one nun accompanied by four lay women who supported her. In the neighborhood there was also a nine or 10-year-old girl who came from a poor family. The parents sent their daughter to the monastery so she could receive food and education from the nun. Since the girl was lonely, all by herself, the nun asked Sr. Ngan Phuong, if she could come to the monastery to play with her.

Sr. Ngan Phuong loved the monastery life from the very beginning and wanted to stay there. Her parents always brought her home but the next day she would run back to the temple, often secretly. This went on for several months until her parents gave up and let her stay at the monastery. The other girl however did not like it there and left after a few months.

Sr. Ngan Phuong remained though. She slept by herself in the monastery kitchen. She was only nine years old but she helped out a lot: sweeping the grounds, doing dishes and washing laundry. She also got up with the nun at 3 a.m. in the mornings. This went on for over two years. Sr. Ngan Phuong also loved to chant and recite the sutras. When she was 11 she was officially accepted as “Dieu” (preliminary stage before becoming a novice, for children who are yet too young to be ordained). She went to a normal school for two years before moving on to a Buddhist school. At that time three other “Dieu” joined her monastery. Her brother threatened to bring her back home. In order to protect Sr. Ngan Phuong her nun-teacher sent her to Dieu Tram monastery in Hue. This nunnery belongs to the root pagoda of our teacher Thay. At that time she had never heard of him or of Plum Village. Thus she came to learn how to practice in the Plum Village tradition and was ordained in 2012 at age 15. She spent three years at Dieu Tram monastery in Vietnam before moving on to Plum Village Thailand. There she stayed for three more years before being sent to the EIAB in 2016. In the beginning she felt very home sick because everything was so unknown and strange to her. Now she is slowly getting used to the new practice place, its culture and its colder climate. She is the youngest sister at the EIAB, very fresh and pure.



Sister Trang Sang Soi was born in 1993. She ordained at the age of 18.

She grew up with five brothers. Sr. Trang Sang Soi enjoys reciting the sutras, translated into Vietnamese by Thay, because that is how she waters her positive seeds and finds inspiration on her spiritual path.

She prefers to follow the stream of life, being happy and content with the given conditions and manifestations of life.



Sister Trang Thanh Tuu was born in 1990 and was ordained in 2012. She has six siblings and three of them have become nuns and monks.

As a nun she wants to cultivate happiness and joy not only for herself, but also for others. She likes living at EIAB. Here in Waldbröl and at the EIAB it is very quiet and peaceful. The brothers and sisters are very honest and kind to each other, just like a family. Because of the monastic life she has come to recognize what true happiness is and practices with all her heart. She appreciates the advice of the other brothers and sisters and knows they can help her to be a better nun. She greatly appreciates Thay Phap An as a great Dharma Teacher and Director of the Institute.



Sister Trang Thong Dong is from South Vietnam and was born in 1983. Five of her family members are Buddhist monks and nuns. She likes the ease and is not a complicated person.

Sr. Trang Thong Dong likes to live in Germany. She appreciates nature, the weather in Germany, the culture and also the people here.

Her favorite activity is the basic Buddhist practice of sitting meditation, walking meditation, listening to Dharma lectures, as well as Dharma sharing. She is very happy to live with the Sangha. She wants to practice to be more beautiful, happier and easier.



Sister Trang Tuoi Tho ("Childhood Moon") was ordained in the family "Yellow Bamboo" in 2010 in Plum Village Thailand when she was 16 years old. She has three siblings. Her oldest brother was ordained as a monk when he was 13 years old. Her parents are devoted buddhists. They also led Buddhist programs for young adults in their community. The family was poor and could not afford any schooling for their children. They wanted the children to be involved with the temple in order to have a good, healthy and wholesome life instead of floundering around without direction.

When Sr. Tran Tuoi Tho was eight years old she was already reading Thay's book *Old Path White Clouds*. She was very inspired by the story of Buddha's life and wanted to become a novice right away, just like her brother. Her monastic brother visited the family from time to time and she adored him. Her father however asked her to wait a few more years to have her dream of a monastic life come true, because she was still too young. When Thay returned to

Vietnam her parents supported her ordination in Thay's tradition. She was sent to Thailand to become a novice.

After 20 months of practice in Thailand she moved to Plum Village in France. There she served for four years before she was sent to the EIAB. In the two years of living here she has learned a lot through her daily practice and life itself. She grew in her spiritual path due to the new experiences she was exposed to. She observed how not only the landscape in and around the EIAB changed but how the people here changed too. Many brothers and sisters moved on to different monasteries, new faces joined the Sangha. And the course participants have also transformed.

The healing and peaceful energy of the house and gardens of the EIAB have transformed the dark, cold and depressive atmosphere of the buildings former days. Sr. Trang Tuoi Tho feels at ease and relaxed in this huge house. The chill of the walls is every day penetrated by the warmth of the practice of the fourfold Sangha. She asks the Three Jewels for their protection of the Institute so that this place gets firmly established in order to be a refuge for all seekers and their future generations.



Short biographies of EIAB brothers



Brother Phap An (Thay Phap An), EIAB's Director and Dean of Studies, was born in 1963 and ordained in 1992. He is the only brother in the ordination family named "Bodhi Tree". Br. Phap An is the fourth monk ordained by Thay in Plum Village, France. Br. Phap An has a lot of love, understanding and acceptance for all people. Through his careful heartfelt practice of loving speech and deep listening, he can help many people to alleviate their suffering. He is also a master in watering the flowers in the others. His preferred practice is deep relaxation to relieve stress, emotional blockages in the body and mind. As a former scientist, he enjoys researching the history of Buddha, modern neuroscience, and Western psychology, and is excited to share his knowledge and practice with everyone.



Brother Phap Tuyen was born into a large family in 1973. His parents had 10 children. He's the one before the last child. Thanks to his grandmother and his parents, he became acquainted with Buddhism at the age of 10. His whole family are devoted Buddhists. He saw that all around him, in his family, his relatives and acquaintances, there was much suffering, and many unhappy marriages. To transform his own suffering and to help others with theirs, he wanted to become a monk. At the age of 24, he was ordained in the monastery in his village.

In 1997 he read for the first time Thay's book "Dialogues with Youth in their 20s" in Vietnamese. During his time in the monastery he read more of Thay's books. He realized that he did not just want to sit and practice alone. In the tradition of his culture, one remains in one's monastery, recites the sutras and practices the various ceremonies. In the Plum Village tradition it is all about helping people, especially the youth. For this reason he changed over to the Bat Nha Monastery. He lived there for two years before moving to Plum Village in

France. In 2013 he came to EIAB.

Although Br. Phap Tuyen is one of the older brothers in the EIAB Sangha, he is very modest. He is very diligent and takes care of many tasks: shopping, cooking, gardening, washing dishes, and so forth. At the moment, his main responsibilities are shopping for the whole Sangha and taking care of the vegetable gardens. He fulfills both responsibilities with great dedication and is always happy to work for others.



Brother Thay Phap Luong was born in 1958 and ordained as a monk in 2001. His parents had four daughters and four sons. Two of his brothers died during the Vietnam War. When he was only eight or nine years old he was already acutely aware of the suffering in the world. While growing up he developed the strong desire to alleviate the suffering in the world.

At the age of 10 he often went to a Buddhist temple in his neighborhood to secretly snatch fruit from the Bodhi tree. One day a monk caught him in the act. But instead of scolding him, the monk would just watch and wait below the tree, always ready to catch the boy in case he fell out of the tree. From time to time the monk would warn him not to climb to wildly in order to prevent branches from getting broken and to keep the boy or the tree from getting hurt. Then the monk would ask him: "Do you have enough yet? Are you still hungry? Can you leave some fruit for the birds?"

In those questions Br. Thay Phap Luong could sense boundless love for all beings. Although he went to a Catholic school and had no interest in Buddhism, he would go every day for the next four years to that Buddhist temple in order to meet this monk. A true friendship between them unfolded. The monk would not give him any Dharma talks but would just spend time with him as a friend. When Br. Phap Luong was 14-15 years old that monk died of a brain tumor. It was a tragic loss for him. But the Buddhist seeds had been planted in him already. Due to this chance encounter Br. Thay Phap Luong came to see the essence of Buddhism as being love, caring and acceptance.

In 1980, Br. Phap Luong escaped from Vietnam. His small nutshell of a boat was insanely overcrowded with 106 people on board. Water flooded into the boat, sinking was imminent and Br. Phap Luong had already accepted his death. Just before this disaster could occur a ship named Cap Anamur came to assist the drowning refugees and Br. Phap Luong was rescued.

Br. Phap Luong first went to Indonesia and then on to Germany. In Germany he lived at first in a refugee camp near Schweinfurt. Later he worked for 16 years for Siemens in Munich before he went to Plum Village in France to become a monk. Br. Phap Luong deeply appreciates the monastic life, especially the practices of Engaged Buddhism as taught by Thay which helps bringing peace and harmony to families, communities and nations. We nicknamed him lovingly “the Bonsai monk” because he is skilled in cultivating and nurturing beautiful Bonsai plants. His talent for flower arranging is outstanding. He loves to eat German bean soup. Br. Phap Luong is very generous at heart and that is also reflected in the order name he received from Thay.



Brother Phap Xa was born in December 1974 close to the city of Arnheim in the Netherlands. He lived on a farm, where he had a Christian upbringing and went to church every Sunday. At university in Enschede he studied mathematics and also got to know meditation, yoga, Kung Fu and Tai Chi. He decided to study Chinese medicine and began to learn Chinese. Thanks to his Japanese Zen practice he came across Thay's books, which he found very useful for everyday life. He took part in Zen retreats in the Netherlands and in 2000 visited Plum Village for the first time. In 2002 he left his job to spend a few months practicing in Plum Village. He enjoyed his time there so much that he decided to become a monk. He was ordained as a novice in February 2003, received full ordination in January 2006 and received the Dharma Lamp in January 2010. After three years in Blue Cliff monastery, in New York state, he came to Waldbröl in July 2010, and has been living and teaching here since.

He enjoys walking in the forests and being in connection with nature. Alone or with others he is happy when he can take the time to enjoy a cup of tea 100%.



Brother Phap Cu was born in 1987 and lost his mother at a very young age. His father had to raise four children on his own. As a result Br. Phap Cu, already as a child, developed qualities such as prowess, personal responsibility and self discipline.

Br. Phap Cu was ordained at the age of 20. He received the Dharma Lamp in 2016. He is an enthusiastic cook and has already given several successful cooking courses. He has many talents and abilities. Not only is he a wonderful Tai Chi/Qi Gong teacher, he also leads courses in calligraphy and tea meditation.

Br. Phap Cu also oversees young guests with much love, understanding and care. For these reasons he's much loved by young and old.

At EIAB he plays the role of problem solver and emergency helper. Wherever there's something broken, he comes to the rescue and wholeheartedly and with all his ability helps to fix things – with calm and ease.

Br. Phap Cu is interested in everything and would like to learn more about nature, about different countries and different people.

He leads a healthy life, thanks in part to two hours daily physical training (Qi Gong, Tai Chi and Kung Fu), healthy eating habits (little fat and sugar and plenty of vegetables) and plenty of sleep.



Brother Phap Hiep was born in 1988. In 2007 he went to visit his blood brother, Br. Phap Tri, in Bat Nha Monastery and stayed there on for two whole months, because he liked it very much there. In 2008 he became an aspirant then in 2009 he was ordained as a novice. Having been driven from Bat Nha monastery as were all the brothers and sisters, he went to Tu Hieu Pagoda to continue his practice.

In 2012 he went to Plum Village, where he remained until joining us at the EIAB in May 2018.

He feels he needs time to adjust to the new conditions and situations here and is very happy to follow the Sangha in the spiritual practice.

He is at present working in the guests team. He enjoys very much dwelling in the orchard, climbing the trees to pick the cherries.



Brother Phap Kinh was born in 1989. He is the youngest son of five siblings and his oldest sister has been a nun since the age of 12. At that time Phap Kinh was not even a year old. His sister's cloister was near his home and he was allowed to visit her there and because of those visits, he came in contact with Buddhism. Although he hardly lived with his sister and did not really get to know her, he felt the deep love and connection she had with each member of his family as well as with him.

The Buddhist roots in his village are very pronounced; as a result, all children already at an early age live the Buddhist tradition and are fully integrated. In his parents' home, spirituality has a fixed place and in the dedicated room there was also the familiar and beloved altar. At EIAB he is a very dependable monk who enjoys the respect and recognition of all the brothers and sisters. In his role as personal assistant to Thay Phap An he was able to prove his great abilities. The extent of his mindfulness is admirable and he is seen as an

example to many young monks and nuns. He's always cheerful, polite and helpful.

Since the 10th class he's wanted to become a monk, but his father recommended to him to first finish his high school before becoming a monk. He took his ordination at the Bat Nha Monastery for which he had a special pull. And so, in 2008 he became an ordained monk and in the end changed to a monastery in Thailand where he stayed for well over two years. He came to EIAB in 2011 and he likes it very much here, especially the seasons of the year which are not present in Vietnam and Thailand. His favorite practice is walking meditation, because then he can enjoy the nature.

To further himself spiritually and to keep upright the Sangha's harmony, he finds that self-reflection is very important. For him it means to have the courage to admit one's mistakes and weaknesses in order to learn from and to better oneself.



Brother Phap Lich was born in 1985. His Buddhist seeds were watered and grown by his mother when he was still a child. His whole family are vegetarians. Since being a child, he has felt strong affection for Buddhism. His mother is a diligent Buddhist practitioner, she recites the sutras and touching the earth, she very frequently visits Buddhist monasteries to offer her service and donates to the monks and nuns. Her generosity and her spiritual life have had an influence on the lives of her children. Although she never encouraged her children to a monastic life, all four of her children have become monks and nuns. Br. Phap Lich used to drive his mother to the monastery and thereby got to know the monks. One of the monks looked at Br. Phap Lich and predicted that he would become a monk. At the age of 21, he decided to join the monastic order, in a monastery, however, which was not in the Plum Village tradition. At the time, he did not yet know about Thay and the Plum Village Sangha. By chance he visited a younger brother of a friend who was a monk in Bat Nha monastery. He was very impressed by the Plum Village practice and Sangha life there. He

changed his mind and ordained in Tu Hien Monastery Thay's home monastery in 2009. This year (2018) Br. Phap Lich has received the Dharma Lamp.

Life in the EIAB has been very nourishing for him, giving him the chance to further develop compassion. He appreciates very much to work as work coordinator, it gives him the opportunity to learn a lot and to grow. He is very happy that the brothers and sisters work wholeheartedly to support the Sangha and to built the EIAB. This strength of will has been of great profit to him.



Brother Phap Thien was ordained at the age of 25. He belonged to the first group of monks and nuns to be ordained by Thay, when Thay returned to Vietnam for the first time in 2005. Br. Phap Thien used to be a math teacher. His talent is music. He writes many beautiful meditation songs he accompanies with the guitar. He can sing very well. His voice touches people's hearts. Unfortunately, he is very shy and does not like to show his strengths and talents. At EIAB he is an older brother who is dependable and calm. For years he has been taking care of registering participants who sign up for courses at EIAB.



Brother Phap Tri was born in 1983 as the second of three brothers in a small village near Hanoi. His father was a bricklayer and his mother a peasant woman. As a child he tended the water buffalos and that's why he was very touched by the story of Swasti, the young buffalo shepherd, in Thay's book *Old Path White Clouds*.

While he was in school he would often have headaches and wanted to alleviate them and keep a clear head by means of meditation. Until he was 19 he had never heard of the Buddha because his family was non-Buddhist and in northern Vietnam there are only a few temples. He went to Tu Hieu Temple (Thay's root temple in Hue, a city in central Vietnam), in order to learn about meditation. It was there, that he saw monks and novices for the first time, among them were children, some were only 10 years old. Br. Phap Tri stayed for 21 days at the temple. At the end of his stay he was convinced: I want to be a monk! He realized that he found a suitable path to take care of himself and to be able to help others.

At first his parents were saddened but then made peace with his life as a monk. His younger brother followed in his foot steps a few years later. In 2007 he was sent to Plum Village in France before he moved to the EIAB in 2008. He was soon certain he wanted to stay here in order put his work, energy and practice into helping this place and its people. He gave a lot of attention to learning the German language. By now he speaks German very well. In the EIAB he often is involved in the children's program because it gives him great joy to play with kids. He has no other desire than to live and practice in a monastic community. There is a lot of responsibility when receiving the Lamp from Thay and becoming a Dharma teacher. He wants to pass on the Dharma in order to benefit many people. His monastic name carries the Vietnamese word for knowledge: Tri



Brother Phap Trung was born in 1978. He was ordained in 2005 at the Tu Hieu Pagoda, during the second ordination after Thay's return to Vietnam. Before that he had already read Thay's books. Although they were forbidden in Vietnam, they were secretly made available at some pagodas and monasteries. Books by Thay such *Old Path White Clouds*, and "The Sun my Heart" made a great impression on him. Brother Phap Trung was brought up by his mother; his father left his mother when he was still very young. He thus witnessed her emotional pain and her subsequent suffering from cancer. Brother Phap Trung felt dissatisfied with his own life, and sought liberation in Buddhism. For him becoming a monk was the solution for his life. As a monk he lives a simple life and spends a lot of time in nature. He also enjoys working in the garden. He would like to resolve the conflict between his mother and the family of his father, as well as the political conflict in his own family between communists and anti-communists. The fact that he has been able to achieve reconciliation with his father and his two half-brothers has nourished him and made him happy.



Brother Troi Dinh Luc was born in 1989; he entered the Order in 2013.

He is the youngest son in a family of four children. His father is a vegetarian. As a result, Br. Troi Dinh Luc grew up as a vegetarian. As an enthusiastic practitioner of Buddhism, his father has spent considerable time studying Buddhism. Moreover, Br. Troi Dinh Luc's father has a deeply rooted knowledge of medicinal herbs and often visits Buddhist temples where he offers the nuns and monks help and support with healing using traditional herbs. As a child, Br. Troi Dinh Luc always accompanied his father on visits to monasteries. This is how he became attracted to living as a monk.

By the time he was 15, he already wanted to become a monk. His mother objected, thinking that he was still too young and would not be able to endure the challenging life in a monastery, especially since he was his mother's favorite child.

When he was 24 years old, he decided to join Thay's monastery in Thailand in order to become a novice. After three years in Thailand, he moved to the EIAB.

He has a special interest in Tai Chi and cooking. He devotes a lot of effort and love to trying out new vegetarian recipes and offering them to the Sangha. He loves the beautiful nature in Waldbröl, the fresh air, and the climate with its four seasons.



Brother Troi Hien Luong was born in 1995 and ordained at the age of 17. He's the older brother of two sisters.

As a small child, he felt the Buddhist influence of his relatives and developed the wish to lead the life of a monk.

When for the first time he saw a DVD of Thay and the Plum Village Sangha, he decided for Plum Village. So, after his ordination in Vietnam he was sent to Thai Plum Village where he practiced for five years before volunteering to change to Germany.

What he really likes about Germany, most of all, is the good climate and the fresh air. Besides that, he likes to practice in a small Sangha. The monastic Sanghas in Thailand are very large. In contrast, the Sangha at EIAB is small and has an easy overview.

In a small Sangha he can try out his strengths and skills to bring to their full prosperity. At the moment he learns German together with refugees from different countries. The contact he has with the latter, he recognizes the quality of life he has at the monastery and because of this he has developed a deep understanding and compassion for his classmates, who live under very dire circumstances. Br. Hien Luong has great motivation to learn German. At a later time he would like to help the guests, lead courses and share the Dharma with others.

His favorite pastimes are soccer, swimming and sports in general. He also likes to cook because then he has the opportunity to dialogue with guests and to have fun with them.

His practice is to, with all people at EIAB, to work in harmony supporting each other.



Brother Troi Tue Giac was born in 1992. He was ordained at the age of 22.

Already as a child he was aware that he was suffering from depression. For this very reason he sought help within the Buddhist monastery. He went from one monastery to another, never staying long, until he came to Tu Duc Pagoda in Nha Trang. Here he met Brs. Troi Dinh Luc and Troi Tue Minh. Together they joined the Plum Village Sangha.

Brother Troi Tue Giac is much happier than in the past. He feels lighter through the practice, even though he still has difficulty in communicating with others.

What he especially likes about living in Germany is the nature, the beautiful landscape, and the weather with its four seasons.

He enjoys the reciting of the sutras and the Buddha's teachings. He is very moved and inspired by the content and the wording of a sutra.

His favorite thing to do is to enjoy his tea at dawn before going to sitting meditation.

He avoids retreat outside of EIAB, because through the different routine one can lose a lot of energy.

He is very good at chanting and has began to discover cooking as a new passion. Because of the cooking class at EIAB, he has been inspired to learn German so as to better communicate with the other participants.



Brother Troi Tue Minh was born in 1992 as the first son. He has 2 other siblings. At the age of 21 Br. Troi Tue Minh was ordained. His grandfather was a Chinese healer who supplied Buddhist monasteries with medicinal herbs. When he was a child his grandfather would often take Br. Tue Minh with him on his many monastery visits. The frequent contact with the monks watered his spiritual seeds: he felt drawn to Buddhist teachings. When, together with a friend (later ordained as Br. Troi Dinh Luc), he watched a DVD of Thay and the Plum Village Sangha, the two friends decided to become monks. They both went to the Tu Duc Pagoda – the only pagoda that accepted people in order to later send them to the Plum Village Sangha. After a three-month trial period he was ordained as a monk in Thailand and practiced there for two-and-a-half years before he was sent to the EIAB. He regards living in Germany and at the EIAB as an opportunity to learn and to grow. The EIAB contains many challenges for him: difficulties that arise due to cultural differences, problems with the language, and the weather in Waldbröl. They are all things that Br. Troi Tue Minh faces on a daily basis. Br. Troi Tue Minh has nevertheless learnt to be happy. Every day he practices being full of self-confidence, stable and independent. Now he can see his spiritual path much more clearly, has defined his direction and doesn't allow himself to be distracted or confused by outside influences. He loves the Sangha greatly and wants to use all his abilities to support it. His practice is to be mindful with every breath and every step in order to generate happiness and joy. The quality of his sitting meditation has also improved. At the moment he is part of the EIAB's CTC (Care Taking Council) and as a result he has been able to improve his communication with his brothers and sisters.



Brother Troi Xa Ve was born in 1996 and ordained at the age of 15. Since childhood he has been eating exclusively vegetarian. He especially appreciates bananas and vegetarian desserts. He started his life in the monastery in the Tu Duc Pagoda. There he spent a four-month probationary period. He then moved to Plum Village, Thailand. And after only four months in Thailand, he volunteered for the EIAB from there.

What he really values about Germany is the beautiful landscape, the discipline and sense of order as well as the friendliness of the people here.

He is delighted that the EIAB is a haven for many people. He would like to serve the EIAB and its guests with all his might and hopes to help more people get the opportunity to come here and find peace. He has learned German very well in the meantime and can already understand more than 80% of the language. Therefore, he can also help the guests well.



10th Anniversary Happy Continuation

A commemorative
couplet offered by
Thầy Pháp Ân

In the realm of time,
EIAB at 10 is a bud
in formation from
which a beautiful
flower shall one day
bloom

In the timeless realm
of the Zen forest,
pine trees rooted
in eternity
are forever green



Học Viện mười năm
hoa kết nụ

Rừng Thiền muôn
thuở cội tùng xanh