



Chapter 2: Teachings

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
 - ◆ The Buddhist Path
- 2.2 Interbeing
 - ◆ Interbeing: wisdom, prajna
 - ◆ Experiencing interbeing
 - ◆ The wave of birth and death
 - ◆ No birth no death
 - ◆ Non-discriminating wisdom
 - ◆ Ancestors
 - ◆ Historical and ultimate dimensions
 - ◆ Nirvana
- 2.3 Practising interbeing
 - ◆ Three Touchings of the Earth
 - ◆ Five Touchings of the Earth
 - ◆ The benefits of Earth Touching
- 2.4 Mindfulness and its practice
 - ◆ What is mindfulness?
 - ◆ How the mind works
 - ◆ Store consciousness (Alaya vijnana)
 - ◆ Seeds
 - ◆ Habit energies
 - ◆ The Five Skandhas
 - ◆ Samatha: stopping, “calm abiding”
 - ◆ Vipassana: looking deeply, insight
 - ◆ Mindful speaking and listening
 - ◆ The Buddha within
 - ◆ Present moment, wonderful moment
 - ◆ No attainment
 - ◆ Breathe, you are alive
 - ◆ The Buddha’s smile
 - ◆ Joy in the practice
 - ◆ Bells of mindfulness
 - ◆ Informal unostentatious practice
- 2.5 Ethics and their practice
 - ◆ Natural ethics



-
- ◆ The Five Mindfulness Trainings
 - ◆ The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings
 - ◆ Reciting the Mindfulness Trainings
 - ◆ Practising ethics
 - ◆ Right livelihood
 - ◆ The Two Promises

2.6 Putting it all into practice

Personal

- ◆ Handling personal feelings
- ◆ The Island of Self
- ◆ Relationships
- ◆ Happiness is not an individual matter
- ◆ The mind of love
- ◆ Understanding
- ◆ Acceptance
- ◆ Causes of conflict
- ◆ My responsibility in the conflict
- ◆ Unilateral disarmament
- ◆ The Five Awarenesses
- ◆ Right (loving) speech, watering positive seeds
- ◆ Listening deeply
- ◆ Non-dependence
- ◆ The solidity of the tree
- ◆ Beginning Anew and The Peace Treaty

Social Action

- ◆ Engaged Buddhism
- ◆ Guidelines in the Mindfulness Trainings
- ◆ Being peace

2.7 Glossary



2.1 Introduction

“It is not a matter of faith; it is a matter of practice.”

Thây teaches orthodox Buddhism in a way which is refreshingly clear and accessible. The objective of this section is briefly to summarise those teachings which you might hear at public talks and retreats or read in his popular books, giving references for further study. However, going on retreat, reading his books, discussing with others, and our own practice are the best means of understanding his work clearly and in depth. Our own direct experience is our best teacher. This outline of the core of Thây’s teachings is simply a prompt for our own practice.

Buddhism can give the impression that only after years of difficult practice with hours of sitting and weeks on retreat can you make progress, and that awakening may take many lifetimes. Thây’s approach is that awakening is available now, in this present moment, that everyone can receive some benefit today. He teaches in simple, straightforward language how to experience life as it is, avoiding mental commentary, and then relates that teaching to traditional Buddhism. The essence of his teaching is the joy and ease that come from being completely present in the Here and Now, and the simplicity of just being, from which peace and happiness arise. He speaks of mindfulness as a resurrection from forgetfulness into the fullness of the present moment.

Many of us believe that happiness is only possible when we have achieved certain objectives: a partner, a job, status, a new car, a holiday. Thây teaches that this is not the way to happiness. Happiness, he says, can be achieved directly, in any circumstances, right now. It is not an objective that you reach after long endurance, but rather a process that you participate in here and now. It is under your nose. *Peace is every step: it turns the endless path to joy* is at the core of his teaching. True happiness is a peaceful state which arises when the anxieties of everyday life are quietened. Thus, a happy mind is naturally a peaceful mind. The practices which we learn are designed for this purpose, and Thây’s approach focuses on those which closely relate to our everyday experience.

Thây emphasises smiling, friendship, the beauty of nature, warmth, hugging, and identifying the positive qualities in ourselves, our friends and our lives. The mind is full of habits: sometimes we are unhappy because our mind is focused on unhappy experiences or fears about the future. We fail to see that suffering is often the result of wrong perception. By focusing on and practising positive states of mind, we encourage our own mind to make new habits and transform our lives. Buddhist practice provides a form of fitness for the mind: if, when you are running to catch the post, you find yourself out of breath, you might decide to undertake a programme of exercises to give yourself the sort of body you want to have. This *fitness programme* teaches us the skills to limit the damage of negative energies, and to have the sort of mind that we want to have. In short, to free ourselves from the prison of negative habits. Thây teaches us to regard words merely as useful conventions rather than getting caught up in the dogma of concepts and notions, and rather than generalising and abstracting, it is better to speak from our own direct experience.

These teachings do not imply that it is possible to be happy all the time. Thây gives the analogy of a flowerbed: even the most skilled gardener cannot keep flowers blooming all the time. At some stage we have to go through a composting period. This understanding



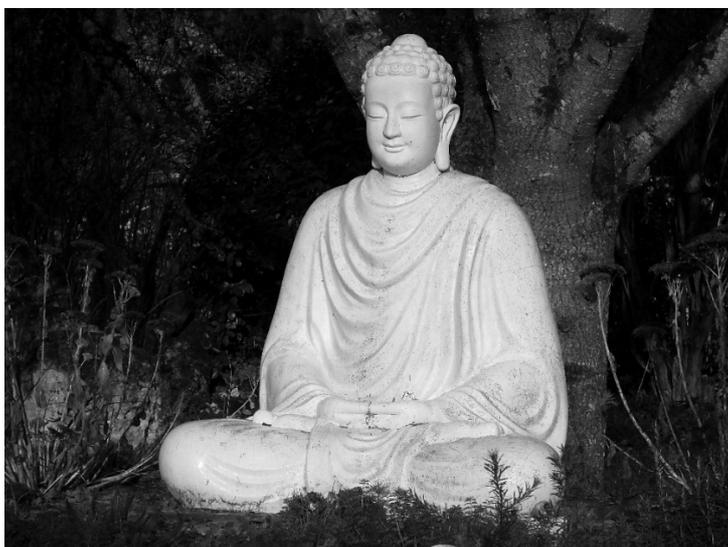
allows us to accept periods of dullness and depression and not give any other significance to them other than that they are our composting periods. The *winter of our discontent* is a natural part of the cycle.

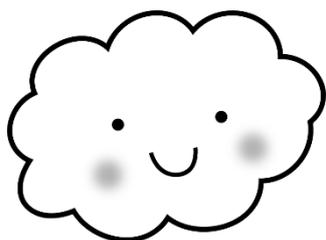
The Buddhist Path

The most commonly known formulation of the Buddhist way is the Eightfold Path. Thây also often refers to a threefold path of prajna (wisdom), samadhi (meditation or mindfulness) and sila (ethics). The relationship between this and the Eightfold Path is laid out in the table below.

This does not imply that the three sections are separate from each other: rather, they are mutually dependent and accessible. A practice which does not embrace all three components is not a complete practice. To gain deep understanding of the teachings it is necessary to practise both mindfulness and ethics, and to have insight into the meaning of wisdom in Buddhism. Thây has even renamed the Precepts as Mindfulness Trainings to illustrate this inter-dependence.

SANSKRIT	TRANSLATION	USED HERE	EIGHTFOLD PATH
<i>Prajna</i>	Wisdom Insight Understanding	Interbeing	Right View Right Thought
<i>Samadhi</i>	Meditation Concentration	Mindfulness	Right Effort Right Mindfulness Right Concentration
<i>Sila</i>	Mindfulness Trainings	Ethics	Right Speech Right Action Right Livelihood





2.2 Interbeing

“If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this piece of paper. Without a cloud there will be no water; without water, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, you cannot make paper. So the cloud is in here. The existence of this page is dependent on the existence of a cloud. Paper and cloud are so close.....”

Interbeing: wisdom, prajna

Interbeing is a relatively new term coined by Thây to describe the essential interconnectedness of the universe. It challenges us to look beyond the world of concepts and opposites. If we look deeply into the nature of our universe, we can see all things as profoundly interdependent. In traditional Buddhism this was originally called *dependent co-arising*. At the heart of this understanding is the realisation that we have no separate self, that everything is empty of a separate self in a universe which is in a constant state of flux and change. The interdependent nature of all phenomena is central to many Buddhist teachings.

If we use *wisdom* as a translation for prajna, it does not mean the same as the everyday idea of wisdom as in *wise person*. The Prajñāparamita Heart Sutra (see Chapter 4.3) means *perfection of wisdom* and deals with the element of Buddhist wisdom sunyata, often translated as *emptiness*. Thây teaches that this *emptiness* is always emptiness of something, it is *empty of a separate self*. His insight is to turn this around from a negative to a positive, so instead of *no separate self*, he uses the term *interbeing*, meaning connected to everything.



The Heart of Understanding and Interbeing, both by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Experiencing interbeing

If the above sounds theoretical and abstract, just look out of the window and gaze at the view. Breathe, and bring yourself wholly into the present moment. It is possible that you may experience yourself as part of a continuum, part of the natural world. You may lose your usual sense of any separate self. It is this experience which is wisdom. This is not philosophy: you do not need a degree to understand it! It is a wisdom grounded in everyday experience.

The wave of birth and death

Thây often uses the image of waves and water to illustrate interbeing. Imagine waves on the sea. If the waves had consciousness they might look at themselves and compare themselves with other waves, saying: “I am more (or less) beautiful than that wave”, or, “I am higher (or lower) than that other wave,” and develop a sense of importance or of low self-esteem. As the waves approach the shore the self-important wave might see the waves ahead dashing themselves against the shore and become filled with fear. This is because it considers itself to have a separate existence. It does not realise that it is only a manifestation



of the water and in a process of continual metamorphosis or transformation. Once it realises this, liberation occurs and it is freed from fear, particularly the fear of death. It has realised that its ultimate nature is water.

We can apply this teaching to ourselves once we realise that there is nothing identifiable in us which is separate. When we look deeply at a wave we see the water, and when we look deeply at the water we see the possibility of the wave. When physicists discovered that waves and particles are not separate entities but that waves are particles and particles are waves, they were highlighting a truth about the material world familiar to the spiritual view of mystics and Zen masters in many cultures throughout the ages. Just as water does not differ from wave, in the wave of life that comes and goes eternally, so human beings are not separate from the universe in which they find themselves, but deeply and intrinsically connected throughout space and time. When we realise our interbeing nature, we see that we are the continuation of our ancestors and all that supported their existence, and that we will continue through our children and everyone who has known us. Realising this we can be freed from the fear of death, and can live in peace.



The Heart of Understanding and The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching, both by Thich Nhat Hanh.

The poetic metaphor of Indra's Net describes a network of jewels. At each intersection or knot is found a jewel which only exists as a reflection of the light cast by each and every other jewel in the net (which themselves only exist as reflections). Looking deeply at any one jewel therefore offers the potential to reveal the whole universe. William Blake's lines capture much of this sense of interbeing:

*To see a World in a grain of sand
and Heaven in a wildflower,
hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
and Eternity in an hour.*





No birth no death

A powerful image which Thây uses is that of flowers and compost. If we plant a seed in a pot of compost, so long as we keep the pot watered and, when the shoot emerges, it has warmth and light, eventually a flower will bloom. When we look at this flower with unawakened eyes, we may believe that this flower has a separate existence, that it has a separate self. But if we look deeply and look at the flower with the eyes of wisdom, we see that it is not separate from the compost, the sunlight, the water and the air. Take away any one of these components and the flower could never have existed. The flower, and the compost, and everything else 'inter-are'. Wait a few weeks and the flower withers and returns to compost. And so the cycle continues. There is no end and no beginning. No birth, no death.

Our liberation is dependent simply on realising our interbeing-nature. If we continue to see ourselves as separate, we are not awake. Peace will elude us. Once we perceive the interconnected nature of our existence we rest in the heart of understanding.



Being Peace, by Thich Nhat Hanh

Non-discriminating wisdom

Thây uses the analogy of the right and left hands: we have a right hand and a left hand. The right hand is different to the left hand: it serves a different purpose. But the right hand is not better than the left hand. Neither hand is superior to the other. If the right hand is injured, the left hand naturally and instinctively moves to protect and comfort and support it. Each is dependent on the other for certain functions like clapping or carrying heavy objects.

In this example, the left hand has non-discriminating wisdom: it does not say: "Aha, I see you are hurt. I will help you, but you must be grateful! I will feel fulfilled! I will do it as a favour!" It knows that the other hand's pain is its own pain and acts instinctively to help, just as a parent responds to the pain of a child.

Non-discriminating wisdom is a natural outcome of realising the truth of interbeing, perceiving that everything is part of everything else, that nothing is separate. It is the insight that comes from directly experiencing reality without passing through concepts and is the fruit of meditation. There is no judgement in this wisdom: things are as they are.

Ancestors

Thây often uses the term 'ancestors' to describe those who have gone before us. Some of us may attach negative connotations to the word because we associate it with primitive ancestor-worship. However, once we come to see ourselves as a continuation of those who have gone before (our ancestors) and those who will come in the future (our descendants), this can replace a primitive belief with a useful insight.

Our ancestors and descendants are not restricted to our *blood* family, but may include our spiritual and other teachers, our students, and any adopted parents or children.



Meditation halls in Plum Village and at many retreats have Ancestors' Shrines to the left of the altar where people may place photographs and other memorabilia, which link them to their ancestors and descendants. We do not put pictures of anyone who is still alive on the Ancestors' shrine.

Historical and ultimate dimensions

These terms appear quite regularly in Thây's teachings and are associated with samsara and nirvana. In the allegory of the waves and the water (see earlier section in this chapter – *The wave of birth and death*), the wave which sees itself as separate is in samsara, in the historical dimension, but the wave which sees itself as water is liberated, is in the ultimate dimension and has entered nirvana. The wave exists in both the historical and the ultimate dimensions. And we also exist in both historical and ultimate dimensions.

Nirvana

By definition, nirvana defies any attempt at description because it is the direct experience of the ultimate dimension of reality, where everything has interbeing with everything else. When we understand that nothing is born, nothing dies, there is no birth and no death, that nothing is created and nothing destroyed, that nothing is immaculate and nothing defiled, this brings the peace that nirvana attempts to describe.

Thây discourages direct talk of nirvana and tells a tale of a Buddhist master who had to wash his mouth out every time he mentioned the word, and the student who had to wash his ears out when he heard his master say it! Nirvana literally means *extinction* but, Thây explains, this does not mean that we cease to exist: it refers to the extinction or absence of notions and concepts.





2.3 Practising Interbeing

As with all aspects of Buddhism, *learning about* interbeing is no substitute for *practice*, and Thây offers the practice of *Touching the Earth* – or prostrations – as a way to connect with our interbeing-nature. *The Three Touchings of the Earth* is found in *Chapter 3.3*, with a commentary in *Chapter 1.14*. An outline of *the Five Touchings of the Earth* is given in *Chapter 3.3*.

An image which some people find helpful is to visualise yourself as a tree. When troubles and worries occur in life, these can be seen as the wind which threatens to blow the tree over: we feel insecure. But if the tree has at least three deep roots, we feel stable and the troubles of everyday life cannot harm us.



Three Touchings of the Earth

During the First Touching we connect with our spiritual and blood ancestors and descendants, of all types. We can think of this in terms of a timeline from the past to the future, with us somewhere along that continuum. It helps us see ourselves as part of a continuum from the past into the future. This is interbeing at the level of time.

The Second Touching helps us connect with all people and other species alive at this present moment. We become aware of all the things necessary for our own existence at the present moment: that the sun is shining; that water is available; that other people have maintained the roads; that a hospital is there should we need one. This is interbeing at the level of space.

In the Third Touching of the Earth we use our new-found awakening to let go of the idea that we have a separate body and that our lifespan is limited.



Five Touchings of the Earth

This is a longer alternative to the Three Touchings, in which we prostrate first to connect with our blood family and recognise the positive and negative energies which we have received from them. In the Second Touching we make similar connections with our spiritual roots. In the Third we connect with our land or our cultural roots.

Equipped with this new stability, gained from recognising and acknowledging who we really are and where we have come from, we transmit this energy in the Fourth Touching to those we love, and lastly we transmit it to those who have caused us pain or suffering.

The benefits of Earth Touching

Many people find these practices deeply moving. The connection with our spiritual roots is something which is strongly emphasised in Thây's practice: reconnecting with them, and with our family roots, can be helpful to our spiritual awakening. We simply need to recognise what our spiritual roots truly are. This process is not only personally healing but may also heal divisions in the family over traditional religious issues. It helps us to identify the positive aspects of our spiritual roots and to distinguish between the parts we still value and the parts we no longer accept. We don't have to throw out the baby with the bath water.





2.4 Mindfulness and its practice

“Mindfulness is the miracle by which we master and restore ourselves.”

Much of *Chapter 1* of this manual is concerned with Mindfulness Practices and Thây’s book, ***The Miracle of Mindfulness***, is an excellent introduction to this subject. Here are a few key points of Thây’s teachings.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is always mindfulness of something: mindfulness of breathing means paying attention to and being aware of the rise and fall of the breath. Mindfulness of eating is paying full attention to the texture, taste and origin of what we are eating at that moment. The practice offers us a wide range of formal and informal exercises to develop and maintain our mindfulness. Many of these are described in *Chapter 1*, and some examples of informal practice are given at the end of this chapter.



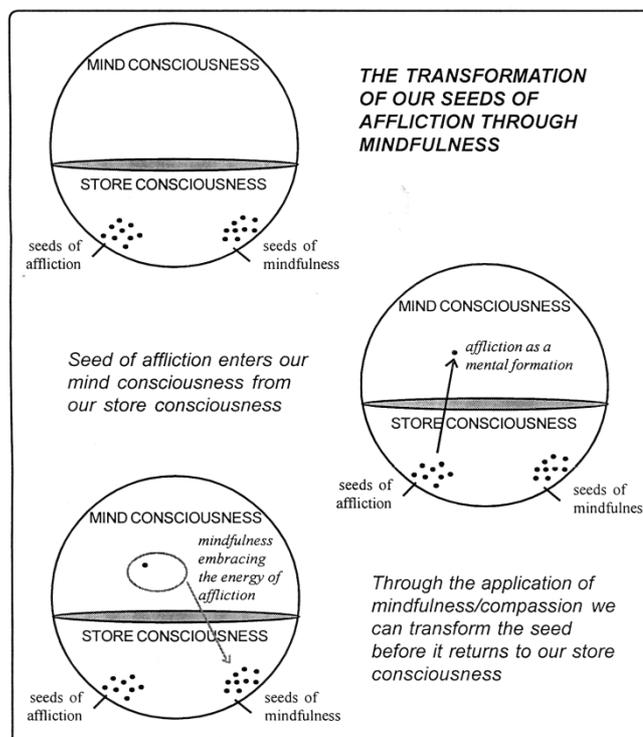
The Miracle of Mindfulness, Transformation and Healing and Touching Peace, all written by Thich Nhat Hanh.

How the mind works

Thây’s way of teaching is practical rather than theoretical, and the models which he offers help us to communicate and understand. He uses several quite simple images of the mind, drawn from traditional Buddhist teaching, to help us clarify and understand ourselves and other people.

Store consciousness (Alaya vijnana)

The mind can be thought of as having two sections: an upper, or mind-consciousness, which is equivalent to the Western conscious mind and which contains those things of which we are aware; and a lower, store-consciousness which contains those things of which we are unaware.





Seeds

Within the store consciousness are the seeds of every state of mind that we can imagine: seeds of happiness, anxiety, joy, anger, love, compassion, fear etc. We are born with all of these seeds, some stronger than others. Their growth, and how often they manifest in the conscious mind, create habit energies which depend on how often they have been watered – some by our family and culture, and some by our own experience.

Another way of looking at this is to imagine the conscious mind as your living room, and the store consciousness as a dark cellar. In the floor of your living room is a trap-door which allows the seeds to come up from the cellar. One of the aims of the practice is to become aware of what is going on in your living room, because what happens there, waters the seeds in the store consciousness.

This allows you to recognise which seeds are manifesting, and gives you the tools to help to transform the energy of negative seeds down in the store consciousness, and not allowing them to surface unwanted.



Touching Peace and Peace is Every Step, both by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Habit energies

For example, every time we are angry, a seed of anger is watered, and sprouts upwards into the mind-consciousness. When that seed returns to the store consciousness (that is, when we stop being angry), it is stronger than it was before. In the future, a quite trivial event might trigger that seed of anger. We begin to lose autonomy: anger is more in control than we are and begins to become habitual. These habits are sometimes referred to as internal knots or internal formations.

Modern scientific research has confirmed these teachings: repeated habits lay down identifiable pathways in the brain, which can be seen as clear traces by magnetic resonance scanning. Serious practice can change those traces or pathways, and new traces replace the old ones which then die away from lack of use. We can transform our mental formations, or internal formations, by practice.

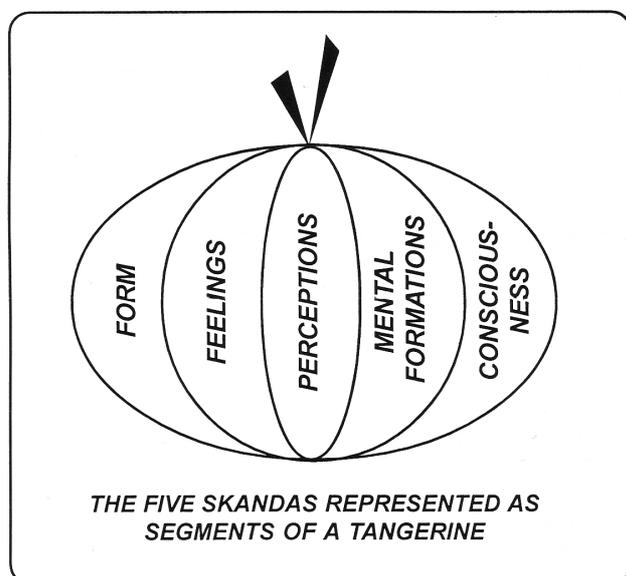


Touching Peace and The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh.



The Five Skandhas

The Five Skandhas describe the human being as divided into five aspects:



- ◆ form
- ◆ feelings
- ◆ perceptions
- ◆ mental formations
- ◆ consciousness.

The Heart Sutra reminds us that these aspects do not exist as separate entities, but the image of them as segments can help us with our understanding. Western science tends to approach the individual with different divisions, such as anatomy, physiology and psychology. As with the skandhas, these are simply conventional designations.

Form refers to the physical aspects of the body. The word *feelings* here has a slightly different meaning to the one we regularly give to the word. In Buddhism, feelings are of three types: positive/pleasant, neutral, and negative/unpleasant. Thây teaches that of all our feelings, 20% are pleasant, 50% are neutral and 30% are unpleasant. Latterly he has also added the term *mixed feelings*.

Part of the skill of the practice is to use understanding to transform our unpleasant feelings. The words *perceptions* and *consciousness* are used in much the same way as in common parlance in the UK or the US, meaning the thoughts that we have about things. Mental formations are close to what we commonly call feelings or emotions, such as anger, joy, jealousy etc.



The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh.



Samatha: stopping, “calm abiding”

The primary purpose of mindfulness practice is to stop the chatter of the mind. Once stopping has been achieved, peacefulness and joy arise spontaneously.

An image that Thây gives is that of freshly pressed apple juice. Our busy mind is rather like the cloudiness of apple juice when it is first poured into the glass. After a few minutes the cloudiness settles and the apple juice and the mind become clear. For the mind to become clear we don't have to *do* anything. We only have to allow what is already happening to stop.



The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Vipassana: looking deeply, insight

Once the chatter of the mind is quietened we have achieved samatha. It is then possible for us to bring the mind's focus on to a problem or issue with which we need to deal. With the conscious mind stilled, we can see and understand more clearly and insight can arise.

The term *looking deeply* is used more generally by Thây to mean bringing your whole attention to whatever you are observing to see what lies behind it. For instance, looking deeply into a flower you will see elements of earth, sunshine, air and water; looking deeply into our partner's actions we may understand their origin; looking deeply into our own pain we may gain insight into its source, or into our wrong perceptions.



The Sun My Heart and *Being Peace*, both by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Mindful speaking and listening

Mindful speech is a variation on samatha, stopping: we often speak in reaction, without pausing to think. If you are in the habit of being sarcastic, you can make your speech mindful by changing your habitual reaction: pause and reflect before you speak. For example, mindful listening similarly involves changing our habitual responses such as judgements, allowing ourselves to truly hear what the other person is saying, and giving them the space to finish without interruption.



Teachings on Love and *For a Future to be Possible*, both by Thich Nhat Hanh. See also, the *Fourth of the Five Mindfulness Trainings* (Chapter 4.2) and *evoking Avalokiteshvara's Name* (*Invoking the Bodhisattvas' Names* – Chapter 4.1)



The Buddha within

A central feature of Thây's teachings is that the potential for awakening is already within each of us. The famous Tibetan mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* is translated by Thây as: *Aha! the Jewel is in the Lotus*. This means that the jewel of enlightenment is hidden within the lotus flower of our heart.

We need only to strip away the layers which cover our enlightened mind, and the Buddha within will reveal itself. Buddha-nature, Thây says, is the capacity for understanding and loving. When these qualities are present, the Buddha is revealed. This knowledge gives us the confidence that we already have, within us, the person we wish to be.



The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Present moment, wonderful moment

When can we find the Buddha within? Here and now, in the present moment. Once the chatter of the mind is quietened, the beauty of the present moment and the positive energy of the Buddha within are revealed at the same time. *The mindfulness practices which are outlined in Chapter 1 are designed specifically for this purpose.*

Whenever we are unhappy, we will see that our mind is either focused on regrets about the past (if-onlys), or in worries about the future (what-ifs). The mind is often caught up in cycles of these negatives. By practising arriving in the present moment, we are released from these negative cycles.



Our Appointment with Life and Present Moment, Wonderful Moment by Thich Nhat Hanh.

No attainment

"To meditate is not to achieve, but to be. Just smile, and be yourself," says Thây. It is important that we do not become goal-oriented in meditation. "We walk in order to walk." Although peace and happiness are consequences of the practice, if we strive for happiness, it eludes us. "Peace is every step": the practice itself leads to happiness. It is not something we attain, not a goal to strive towards, it is inherent in the practice, and also something we are, here and now. The practice is unlike so much of our lives, which is about getting somewhere, doing something. The practice is about stopping; about being rather than doing. We discover that we already are what we want to become.



Zen Keys by Thich Nhat Hanh.



Breathe, you are alive

Breath is life. If we stop breathing, we die. Mostly we are unaware that we are even breathing, so we are unaware that we are fully alive. Body and mind are united through mindfulness of breathing. Focusing on our breath, we bring to consciousness the wonder and joy of life, its mysteries and beauty. We engage in the present moment.



Breathe, You Are Alive and Transformation and Healing, both by Thich Nhat Hanh.

The Buddha's smile

The Buddha is often shown in images with a *half smile*. When you try this for yourself you find that the face and the jaw relax when you smile. Both frowning and grinning use (and often tense up) hundreds of little facial muscles whereas a relaxed smile releases them. Smiling helps to generate the mental states of peace and happiness.



The Sun My Heart by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Joy in the practice

If you are not enjoying the practice then you are not practising, says Thây. Many of us believe that we have to endure painful experiences to get benefit. An inner voice goes: "No pain no gain" but Thây teaches that there is no way to happiness: happiness is the way. Every present moment is full of joy – if you are there! It is a practice which brings joy and is to be enjoyed, not to be solemnly executed in gloom and heavy seriousness. It offers relief from the negativity in our lives like an oasis in the desert: the thirsty person is happy and smiles when they reach the oasis!

Cultivating the positive is central to the practice, and there are various ways of doing this. If you have toothache, you may think to yourself: "Once this toothache has gone I will be in Paradise." But a few days later when you have seen the dentist and the pain has gone, you forget that you are indeed in Paradise. The trick is to remember that every day we can benefit from non-toothache, non-war, a non-heroin addicted child, a not-infected water supply. This and other mindful practices bring Thây's teachings into our daily life and so give us the opportunity to practise for many hours a day in unostentatious ways. You can meditate, he says, for twenty-four hours a day just by being mindful, being wholly present in everything you do. This positive approach builds joy and self-confidence.

Everyone encounters difficulties in their lives, but the practice can give us the perspective and stability to minimise the suffering that difficulties can cause. Transcending difficulties in this way increases our resilience and deepens our practice. No Mud, No Lotus!



Being Peace and A Joyful Path by Thich Nhat Hanh.



Bells of mindfulness

In Buddhism the term *forgetfulness* refers to the fact that we constantly forget that the jewel of awakening is within us, and that we live in the world of opposites, a world of worry and stress. Thây's practice uses sounds as reminders to bring our minds back to the present. We are encouraged to use any sound, for instance the telephone ringing or the clock chiming or the buzzer of the microwave, to stop and return to the present moment and our breathing.

We can even use irritating things as bells of mindfulness and transform the annoyance in the process. If you find red traffic lights frustrating, it is possible to use that red light as a bell of mindfulness, reminding you to come back to the present moment. Once you become familiar with this practice, try doing the same thing with other annoyances such as a neighbour's barking dog, or the sound of overhead aeroplanes. Sometime your annoyance can be transformed into a feeling of gratitude to the disturbance for reminding us to come back into the here and now.



Peace is Every Step and Being Peace by Thich Nhat Hanh.

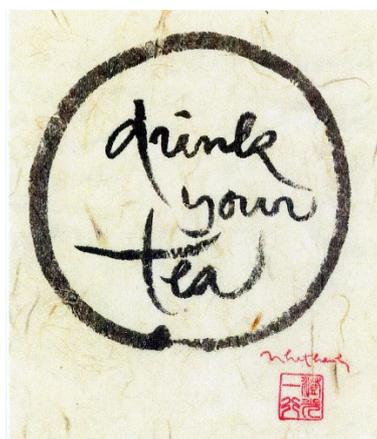
Informal unostentatious practice

We are encouraged to bring the practice into ordinary everyday activities: drinking a cup of tea, eating a tangerine, walking in the park. When drinking tea, pay full attention to the sensation, to its aroma and taste, and consider how it is that this tea arrived in our home, the people involved in its production, its growth in the soil with sunlight and rain, in a land far away. We can apply the same mindfulness to all that we eat and drink.

While walking along – at any speed – if we breathe in and out consciously, connecting our breath to the rhythm of the steps, we observe the world around us more clearly in the full consciousness of what we are doing in the present moment.



The Miracle of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh.





2.5 Ethics and their practice

“The service of peace; the service of any people in need; the word service is so immense.”

Insight (prajna), concentration (samadhi) and the precepts (sila) are the threefold trainings that the Buddha passed on to his lay students. The practice of each of these trainings is equally important, and as Thây writes: “Precepts, concentration and insight *inter-are*. Practising the precepts brings about concentration, and concentration is needed for insight.” (The precepts are now called *Mindfulness Trainings*.)

Natural ethics

Ethics can be seen as arising naturally from a number of perspectives. We could say that an awakened person would naturally lead their life in keeping with the Mindfulness Trainings. If you develop mindfulness, you become aware that certain kinds of action lead to suffering, often in other people, or in nature. Consequently, you naturally want to train yourself to develop the kind of behaviour that does not cause suffering. Conversely, practising ethical behaviour can help us to arrive at quietness of mind, which in turn leads to stopping, samatha, a prerequisite for understanding and compassion.

Alternatively, we can ask the question: “How do we want other people to act in order that we can be happy; what rules do we want other people to stick to?” There is a story of a schoolteacher who asked the class to write down what behaviour in the others at school they particularly disliked. When the lists were compiled he found that people did not like violence in the playground and being beaten up; people stealing their possessions; people two-timing on their girlfriend or boyfriend; people telling lies about them or humiliating them; and people bringing drugs or alcohol to school. In other words, the children reflected the Five Mindfulness Trainings spontaneously – *see below*.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings

Thây’s new version of the original Five Precepts – The Five Mindfulness Trainings – has attracted many who have been disaffected by more prescriptive ethical guidelines. *See Chapter 4.2 for the full text.*

The Trainings encourage our awareness and mindfulness, rather than presenting us with a simple list of *thou shalt not*s. Thây turns the emphasis around and urges us to be *Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life and to cultivate compassion to protect people, animals, plants and our Earth*. Likewise, all the other Trainings firstly make us aware of the suffering caused by mindless thoughts and actions, then offers us signposts to help us find our way. The Trainings are actually impossible to keep to the letter! No one can practise these teachings perfectly – even the Buddha could not eat his dinner without killing a single microbe! Instead, they can be embraced as deep aspirations which help us to grow in mindfulness.



Many people who have received the Trainings have found them to be a liberating factor in their lives, helping them move to a new, more positive way of being, as they develop a deeper and more meaningful relationship with people, animals, plants and minerals. As we create less suffering in our own lives and the lives of others around us, life becomes freer and more joyful.

The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings

The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings were originally developed by Thây in the 1960s in the midst of the Vietnamese war – see *Chapter 4.2 for the full text*. They form the moral guidelines and are at the heart of the Core Community – The Order of Interbeing. However, we do not need to be a member of the Order to practise and recite these wonderful trainings. One of the essential elements of the Fourteen Trainings is that they are directly applied in our daily lives. Thus the realisation of the trainings is in our everyday actions. Every moment of our lives gives us the chance to put them into practice.

The Fourteen Trainings and the Charter of Interbeing – which sets out the constitution of the Core Community – are based on four basic principles: non-attachment to views, direct practice/realisation through experience, appropriateness and skilful means.

Reciting the Mindfulness Trainings

The recitation ceremony says that: *The Five Mindfulness Trainings are the basis for a happy life. They have the capacity to protect life and to make it beautiful and worth living.* At the end of the ceremony, the Mindfulness Trainings are described as: *the foundation of happiness for the individual, the family and society.*

We recite the Mindfulness Trainings regularly so that we can review our behaviour and observe where we have not lived up to our aspirations. The Mindfulness Trainings are not meant to be recited or practised mechanically, giving ourselves and others the impression of transformation, since this delusion may develop into a sense of superiority and pride.

It is important that we observe rather than judge and chastise ourselves, so that gradually, without resistance, our lives become imbued with the qualities they represent. If we have not recited them for three months, the transmission is said to have lapsed, but can be refreshed in the formal Beginning Anew Ceremony (see *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book*).



Interbeing and Learning True Love by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Mindfulness Trainings Recitation Booklet by Col UK.



Practising ethics

The Trainings come together subtly yet clearly when we make mundane choices such as doing our shopping. These may all seem, at first sight, innocent and undemanding. Surely the purchasing of a tin of baked beans isn't going to ruin our chances of becoming a bodhisattva? Well, there is one manufacturer of baked beans whose subsidiary is an armament maker and another whose subsidiary is the UK's largest intensive battery egg producer. Does the supermarket we use have a record of pollution incidents, or have they made a financial donation to a political party whose policies we find unacceptable? Such issues can inform our choices.

At the checkout do we pay with a plastic card from a bank that may have large financial dealings with oppressive regimes, or maybe the bank has financed a project that displaces indigenous people? The Buddha has taught us that all actions have consequences, so the practice of the Trainings can run deep and penetrate every thought and action.

There is a Zen story that tells of a meeting between a great dharma teacher and an important politician. The politician asked the teacher what were the important teachings of the Buddha. The teacher replied: "Never do evil; always do good; keep your mind pure." The politician laughed and said: "But I knew that when I was aged three!" The teacher responded: "A three-year-old child may know this, but not even an eighty-year-old man can put it into practice."



For a Future to be Possible and The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh.





Right livelihood

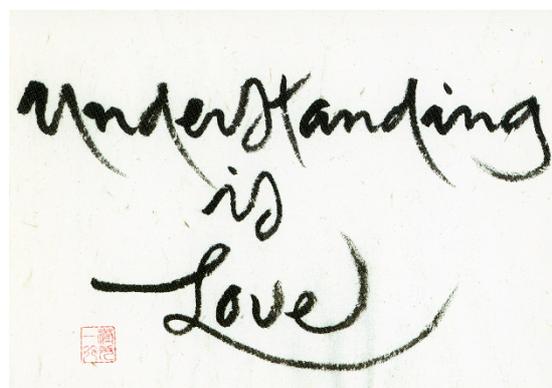
Right livelihood refers to the aim of making one's living at a trade or profession which is in keeping with the Mindfulness Trainings. These are personal decisions. However, this does not mean that we shy away from, for instance, being a member of the armed forces, or a vet who has to deal with difficult issues like putting down unwanted pets or treating animals farmed for meat. Thây teaches that it is important that people who are conversant with the practice continue in these ethically difficult environments, otherwise they would be occupied only by people who are ignorant of the transforming effects of the practice.

Some people find that as their practice develops, they naturally want to change their livelihood to one which is closer to their aspirations. Engaged Buddhism implies remaining engaged with aspects of life or society even if we find them distasteful so that we can confront ethical issues creatively on a day-to-day basis.

The Two Promises

The Two Promises (see Chapter 3.2) are often recited at the same time as the Five Mindfulness Trainings. They are very simple and accessible and are particularly suitable for children and young practitioners. They remind us of our basic responsibility to other beings and the need for compassion and understanding as the key elements of our practice. The recitation ceremony includes the following passage:

Understanding and love are the two most important teachings of the Buddha. If we do not try to be open, to understand the suffering of other people, we will not be able to love them and to live in harmony with them. We should also try to understand and protect the lives of animals, plants and minerals and live in harmony with them. If we cannot understand, we cannot love. The Buddha teaches us to look at living beings with the eyes of Love and Understanding. Please learn to practise this teaching.





2.6 Putting it all into practice

Personal

Handling personal feelings

For the practice of Buddhism to make life happier and more joyful we need to know how to respond to negative feelings. How do we handle negative states such as anxiety, anger, loneliness and fear etc. which can sometimes seem overwhelming? Using the image of the living room and the basement again (see *Mindfulness, this Chapter 2.4*), if we are feeling really miserable, it means that the energy of misery – the seed – has come up from the basement and is occupying the whole of the living room. In this state we are unable to handle the feeling skilfully. We need to create some space in the living room so that we are at least separated from the feeling of misery. Not “I am a miserable person” – a case of mistaken identity – but “I have feelings of misery”. To achieve this we practise mindfulness, stopping (*samatha* – see *this Chapter 2.4*).

When your mind is full of misery, it may be that sitting meditation is just too difficult. You may find that, however hard you try to focus on your breathing, negative thoughts constantly intrude. You might need to find a more active meditation, a stronger focus for your mind. Some people find walking meditation helpful; others may turn to washing-up or vegetable-cutting meditation. Some may use another approach and listen to music which calms their mind, or use yoga or tai chi or go for a swim. Many kinds of everyday activities can be transformed into meditation practice and used to help us handle our feelings. Sometimes there may be a need to avoid acting negatively in response to a negative emotion (but not to repress the emotion) if it is extremely powerful and to work on our positive seeds until such time as we feel strong enough to deal with it mindfully.

After a period of practice, return to stillness and silence, and re-observe the negative state of mind. Do you get any sense of separation in the living room of your mind? Is there a sense of observing the feeling? Can you say: “I am aware of the energy of misery in me”? If the answer is yes, you now have the opportunity to work on the misery. *Thây* gives us the image of cradling a baby who is crying. If we are known to the baby, we naturally pick up the child and cradle him or her in our arms. By extending our warmth and love to the baby, he or she may soon be comforted and stop crying. We need to learn to do the same for our negative states of mind, to embrace and cradle our loneliness or our despair.

Speak to the feeling as though it were a separate person. Say: “Hello my loneliness, I know you are there. We have often met before. It’s fine for you to be here.” Metaphorically, put your arm around it, offer a cup of tea or a comfortable chair. Accept your miserable feeling and care for it, offering it the same love and warmth that you would extend to the crying child. The effect of this practice is quite often far-reaching. The feeling of misery subsides, and although still present, it seems less important. A little while later the seed of that feeling will go back down to the basement.

Sometimes we need to deal with issues which are not manifesting at that very moment. For instance, we may get upset whenever we meet our mother-in-law but be unable to deal with that feeling while she is present. It may be easier to deal with it when she is not there.



To create an opportunity to do so in our own space, actively invite the seed to manifest by remembering a painful incident and then deal with that negative energy in the same way as described above. If you simply remember the incident and re-live the painful experience, the seed will go back stronger than it arrived. However, if you summon up a powerful seed and embrace it, acknowledge it and recognise it, it will go back to the store conscious weaker, and create less of a problem in the future.

Thây has expressed concern at the types of therapy or counselling which involve evoking negative memories or mental states, and then expressing anger or frustration in order to deal with them. According to Buddhist psychology, each time a seed is watered, it returns to the store consciousness stronger. The practice of ‘cradling’ and accepting is the one effective way of ensuring that the seed returns to the store consciousness weaker than it was when it arrived. However, therapeutic techniques which bring up painful memories can be valuable if they put us in touch with feelings which we then work on in order to diminish them.



Peace is Every Step and Guided meditations in The Blooming of the Lotus by Thich Nhat Hanh.

The Island of Self

Thây’s teachings often return to this theme, sometimes referring to *the island of self*, sometimes to *coming home to yourself*. This image describes the developing realisation that we can find all the resources we need right here in the present moment. As we practise mindful breathing, and observe the rise and fall of the abdomen, we get a sense of there being a place inside us from which that feeling of autonomy and joy arises. This is *our true home*. This is the place we return to when we *come back to ourselves*. We can imagine this to be an island and continue to develop the vision of self-sufficiency.

Relationships

“Without understanding, your love is not true love. You must look deeply in order to see and understand the needs, aspirations, and suffering of the one you love.”

The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching, p 159.

Many people have found Thây’s teachings on relationships difficult to put into practice, since they are based on his monastic experience where the individuals involved are all committed to the practice. In our own relationships we often encounter intense difficulties. There are no simple guidelines that will give any of us an instantly successful relationship, but certainly our relationships are to some extent the fruits of our practice and reflect both our mindfulness and our understanding. The Five and the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings contain many guidelines to help us in our relationships (*see Chapter 4.2 for text*). What follow are some suggestions about relationships, based on Thây’s teachings and drawn from the experiences of Sangha members in the UK.



Teachings on Love by Thich Nhat Hanh.



Happiness is not an individual matter

Our own happiness cannot be pursued in isolation: it is dependent on the happiness of those around us. To nurture the happiness of others creates the conditions for our own happiness.

Conflicts which arise in relationships are among the most common forms of unhappiness: learning how to deal with these is a precondition for happiness. Monks and nuns at Plum Village live in community; they do not have much private space. This is a deliberate policy, because it is when we are in contact with others that our own negative energies often arise. The other person acts as a mirror, showing us our habit-energies. This is one important aspect of Sangha: it can be a safe place to become aware of our negative habit energies and to look deeply into these. It provides a context in which conflict resolution becomes easier. We are forced to face up to our problems but are given support in doing so.

The mind of love

Much unhappiness in modern Western society is generated because of our views on love: books, films and soap operas have elevated *falling in love* to the highest form of human experience. In his book *Cultivating the Mind of Love*, Thây speaks openly about falling in love with a nun in Vietnam when he was younger. He describes those emotions with which we are all familiar: the wonderful feeling when in the presence of the other; the way the mind devises plans to create contact; the preoccupation with seeing and being with the other person when apart. The sense is that this is *the real thing*, that this is the route to happiness. Yet we know from society and from our experience the suffering that this illusion, this belief, can bring.

The *grande illusion* here is the belief that our loved one gives us something that we ourselves lack. Thây reminds us that our feeling comes from inside ourselves, therefore the seed of it is already there in our store consciousness. The loved one has watered the seed and opened the door to our feeling of happiness. If we think that only this person can give us access to this feeling, we become attached to that person, and say that we have 'fallen in love'.

Our happiness is now dependent on the other's actions. When we get to know him or her more deeply, we may realise that our view of this person has been an illusion and our access to the feeling of love may be lost. Thây teaches that, since the feeling of love is already within us, we can access it without the need for the loved one as a go-between. This can widen the range of people or events which give us this feeling. In short, we can cultivate the mind of love and develop the capacity to contact the feeling of love more readily, making it less dependent on a person or a circumstance.

Thây has given an illustration of this, talking about homesickness to Vietnamese monks and nuns: they may have memories of a place in Vietnam where they felt at home. While living in France, unable to visit that place, they may feel homesick for it. But the place they are longing for is in their hearts, right here, not out there. The feeling of home is within us, we can learn the skill to feel at home wherever we are, freeing our minds from dependence on one place or another.



But where is this mind of love? How can we access it? We can do so by waking up to our own Buddha nature, removing the layers of ignorance to reveal the jewel within. When we practise stopping, we can empty the mind of discriminating thoughts and see the person who is with us just as they are. We do not judge them as fat or thin, ugly or beautiful, we just accept them as they are. When we practise this mind-set with others, we are practising the mind of love. The feeling, which in the past we have associated with one or just a few people, we can now feel for a widening circle.



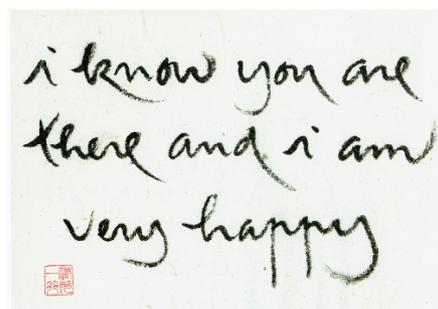
Cultivating the Mind of Love and Learning True Love by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Understanding

“Understanding is the very foundation of love,” says Thây and, of course, the word *love* is used in many different ways. Once we have understood the true nature of the other person, it is then that we are able to accept them, and to see the reason why they act the way they do. Although we may still want them to change, it is no longer a requirement, simply a preference. We would like the other person to act a different way, but we don’t need them to. We don’t love our children any the less simply because their behaviour doesn’t fit in with our preconceptions. When a baby cries in the night we may not like it, but we don’t love the baby any the less because we understand that it is in its nature to wake up and cry in the night. When we truly understand our partner or friend, we can see that it is for the time being in their nature to act in this way, and we may truly love them. We may no longer have the passionate or erotic feelings that we had for the other, but Thây says that real love is always based on understanding.

Acceptance

This means accepting the other person exactly as they are and not expecting them to be different. Western psychology also agrees that we project our preconceptions of what the other person should be like, or how they should act, and this is a common cause of relationship breakdown. This is elaborated on the previous page under the heading: The mind of love. Listening deeply (*see below*) is one practice offered to help us to meet the challenge of acceptance.





Causes of conflict

Conflicts in relationships arise from two main sources: expectations – preconceptions that we have about what the other person will or will not do (or be) – and wrong perceptions, simple mistakes in our thinking due more to our own internal formations than to real evidence. These are conflicts which derive from our own failings, but conflicts clearly also arise from the other person's similar failings.

My responsibility in the conflict

A central point of Thây's approach is that whenever a conflict arises, our mind naturally looks for the opportunity to blame the other person, so that our explanation usually has us as victim, as innocent. Thây is often quite tough on this, telling us for instance, even in the case of violence, to ask ourselves what we have done which has watered the seed of violence in the other person. Although this is difficult to accept, it is the starting point of liberation, because in most circumstances of conflict, the only person we can change is ourselves.

Unilateral disarmament

Once we recognise our part in the conflict, and also that it takes two to tango, we can unilaterally disarm; we can stop taking the action which is our part of the conflict.



Love in Action by Thich Nhat Hanh.

The Five Awarenesses

The Five Awarenesses are the central text of the marriage ceremony in Plum Village, and the married couple is invited to recite them every month. The first three awarenesses concern our line of continuity, as individuals, with our ancestors and children; the fourth deals with understanding as the centre-point of a loving relationship; and the fifth is a declaration that blaming and arguing can never help. *See Chapter 4.1 for the full text and the Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book for the marriage ceremony.*

Right (loving) speech, watering positive seeds

The Fourth Mindfulness Training warns about the damage that can be done through thoughtless speech. As many schoolteachers know, praising the positive rather than pointing out the negative is often a more powerful means to constructive interaction. If we accept that there are negative seeds in the other person, we know that if we water them, they will simply grow. A more constructive approach is to identify the positive seeds in the other person and to water those, thereby recognising and acknowledging qualities from which both they and we may benefit.



The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh



Listening deeply

This involves allowing the other person to speak without interruption and without judgement. We make every effort to really hear what the person is saying and to understand their point of view. We try not to allow our own reactions or assumptions to swamp the listening. If there has been some conflict or anger between you and the other person, and to enable the other person to be truly heard, we may choose not to respond straight away, but simply ask for clarification, and respond at a later time.



Touching Peace by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Non-dependence

In a dependent relationship we need the other person to behave in a way that compensates for the areas of our lives in which we are not taking responsibility. We do not feel complete without them. We may even manipulate them to fulfil our needs. We cannot allow the other person to be free for fear that they will abandon us, leaving us only with our unsatisfactory self. This is not love (see *The Mind of Love above*). If we love someone, we want to set them free, and to be with them because they choose in that moment to be with us.

The solidity of the tree

If we are stable in our own being, we can be likened to a tree with at least three deep roots: we can stand solidly alone; we can contribute to a relationship without being dependent on it. “Let there be spaces in your togetherness for the pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other’s shadow,” writes Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet*.





Beginning Anew and The Peace Treaty

Beginning Anew and The Peace Treaty (see Chapter 1.12 & 1.13) are mindfulness practices designed by Thây as means to ease and resolve difficulties in the community or family, especially when quarrels arise between individuals. The teaching of interbeing shows us that the harmony of the Sangha is essential to the wellbeing of all within it. Also, in the Fourth of the Five Mindfulness Trainings (see Chapter 4.2) we are exhorted to: *resolve all conflicts, however small*. Thus Beginning Anew and The Peace Treaty are valuable practices which can help to heal difficulties between practitioners and to relieve suffering.

Social Action

When our understanding reaches out beyond the other person to include our relationships with the wider community – with other ethnic groups, cultures and species – we can help break down within us our seeds of racism, our need to dominate and exploit, and our fears of the unfamiliar.

Engaged Buddhism

Historically, there has been a tendency for Buddhist practitioners to withdraw from the world, to disengage from politics and from the everyday workings of the world. Practitioners may feel that they need to develop themselves before they can offer anything to anyone else, even to the extreme of going off to meditate in a remote cave for years or indefinitely. Thây's teaching is that "Buddhism isn't Buddhism unless it is engaged," and that helping other people is a natural consequence of developing our sense of interbeing. If we have no separate self, then others' pain is our pain.



Learning True Love and For a Future to be Possible by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Guidelines in the Mindfulness Trainings

There are several ways in which the Five and The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings (see Chapter 4.2) prompt us to social action. In the Second Mindfulness Training (of the Five) we find: *I am committed to practising generosity.... I will share my time, energy and material resources with those who are in need*. In the Third Mindfulness Training (of the Five) we agree to: *do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse, and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct*. In the eighth of the fourteen, we agree to: *be active in finding ways to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small*.

The Fourth of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings is even more specific: *Aware that looking deeply at our own suffering can help us cultivate understanding and compassion... We will do our best not to run away from our suffering... We are committed to finding ways, including personal contact, and other means, to be with those who suffer, so we can help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace and joy*.



From this it is clear that Thầy sees social action as an integral part of our practice. It is not something that we only do once we have become enlightened! Action is an integral part of the path.

Being peace

Thầy teaches a different approach to peace campaigning. He says that the Peace Movement has learned how to write protest letters but is not yet able to write a love letter. By this he means our ability to make our point to politicians, and to others, in such a way that they are likely to read and receive our message, rather than throwing it in the bin. He asks: “Can the Peace Movement talk in loving speech, showing the way for peace? This depends on whether people in the Peace Movement can Be Peace. If you are not peaceful, then you cannot contribute to the peace movement.”

In Thầy’s words: “There is no way to peace, peace is the way.”



Being Peace and Peace is Every Step by Thich Nhat Hanh.





2.7 Glossary

Note: The origin of Sanskrit words is indicated by Skt; Pali origins are also indicated.

abhidharma (Skt): Buddhist systematic philosophy and psychology as presented in the *Abhidharmapitaka* of the Pali canon; the first of the Three Baskets of the Buddhist Scriptures or *Tripitaka*

aggregates : the five elements that comprise a human being according to the Buddha; see skandhas

anapanasati (Pali): meaning “mindfulness of breathing in and breathing out”

anatman (Skt): non-self or not-self; means there is no independent existence separable from everything else

anitya (Skt): impermanence; according to the Buddha, everything is impermanent

Arhat (Skt): a Buddhist adept who has overcome all afflictions; meaning “one who is worthy of our respect and support”

atman (Skt): self; basic teaching of Indian Brahman priests to which the Buddha reacted

Avalokiteshvara: also written as Avalokita; Bodhisattva of Compassion, Bodhisattva of Deep Listening; Quan The (“tai”) Am in Vietnam, Kwan Yin in China, and Kwannon in Japan

avidya (Skt): ignorance, meaning “the lack of light”

bodhicitta (Skt): meaning “mind of enlightenment”, mind of love; deepest, innermost longing to realise oneself and work for the wellbeing of all

bodhisattva (Skt): meaning “enlightenment-being”; one on the path to awakening who vows to forego complete enlightenment until he or she helps all other beings attain enlightenment

brahmaviharas (Skt : meaning “abodes of the gods”; the four sublime states of mind associated with the path of practice; also known as The Four Immeasurable Minds (see *maitri, karuna, mudita* and *upeksa*)

Buddha (Skt): fully enlightened one, from Sanskrit root *buddh*, “to wake up”

Buddha nature (Skt: Buddhata): the seed of mindfulness and enlightenment in every person, representing our potential to become fully awake

Buddhanusmrti (Skt): recollection of the Buddha; reflecting on the ten qualities of the Buddha; visualising his marks of beauty, calm, and happiness, or evoking his name

Buddhology: study of the life of the Buddha

dana (Skt): generosity, giving

Dharma (Skt): the way of understanding and love taught by the Buddha; meaning “the law”

Dharma doors: 84,000 entries into the stream of the Buddha’s teaching and realisation



Dharmakaya (Skt): meaning the “body of the Dharma”; the body of the Buddha’s teachings; later it came to mean the glorious, eternal Buddha, who is always expounding the Dharma

dhyana (Skt.): meditation or practice

dukha (Skt): illbeing or suffering; the first of The Four Noble Truths

engaged Buddhism: term coined in Vietnam emphasising action based on awareness

enlightenment (Skt: *bodhi*): awakening; enlightenment is always enlightenment about something

gatha: mindfulness verse or poem; used in practice to foster awareness

Hinayana: meaning “the lesser vehicle”; southern schools of Buddhism, including the Theravada school based on the Arahant ideal, which emphasise personal liberation

interbeing: Buddhist teaching that nothing can be by itself alone, that everything in the cosmos must “inter-be” with everything else

karuna (Skt): compassion, helping to relieve suffering; the second of The Four Brahmaviharas

Kinh Hanh: indoor walking meditation following the breath; generally takes place in the place of worship during morning or evening formal practice

Ksitigarbha: The Earth Store Bodhisattva, patron of travellers, the newborn and unborn (known in Japan as *Jizo*)

lakshana (Skt): marks, appearances, phenomenal aspects of reality

Mahayana: meaning the “great vehicle”; northern schools of Buddhism based on the bodhisattva ideal, which emphasises liberation of all sentient beings

Maitreya: the future Buddha, the Buddha of love

maitri (Skt): love, bringing joy; the first of The Four Immeasurable Minds (or Brahmaviharas)

manifestation (Skt: *vijnapti*): when conditions are sufficient for the constituents of something to come together in a particular form that we can perceive

Manjushri: the Bodhisattva of Understanding; usually depicted wielding a flaming sword which cuts through dualism and conceptual thinking

mantra: a formulaic spiritual utterance; in Buddhism usually associated with tantric practice and often connected with a specific deity

mindfulness (Skt: *smṛti*): the energy to be here and to witness deeply everything that happens in the present moment, aware of what is going on within and without

mudita: joy, the third of The Four Immeasurable Minds (or Brahmaviharas)

mudra (Skt): literally “seal”; the seal of approval of a deity with whom a practitioner is identifying, made visible in a hand gesture

Nirmanakaya: the transformation body of Shakyamuni Buddha



Nirvana: extinction of ideas and concepts and of suffering based on ideas and concepts; the ultimate dimension of reality

Non-duality: the non- separate (“emptiness”) nature of all phenomena



Order of Interbeing: a socially engaged Buddhist order founded by Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam in 1964 (also named the *Tiep Hien Order* and called the *Core Community* – see Chapter 5.3)

practice (Skt: *citta bhavana*): cultivating the mind and heart

prajna (Skt): understanding, wisdom

Prajñāparamita (Skt): meaning “understanding gone beyond”; Mahayana Buddhist literature developed in early years of Christian era, called Mother of All Buddhas

precepts (Skt: *sila*): 1: rules or principles prescribing a particular course of action or conduct;

2: guidelines offered by the Buddha to protect us and help us live in mindfulness

Pure Land: an ideal place to practise understanding and loving-kindness under the guidance of a Buddha

Quan The Am: Vietnamese for Avalokiteshvara (pronounced *Quan Tai Am*)

Reincarnation: 1: rebirth of the soul in another body; 2: a rebirth in another form, a new embodiment

Rinzai: a branch of Zen Buddhism tracing its origin to the 9th century Chinese Master Linchi

samadhi (Skt): concentration; an important component and also result of meditation practice

Samantabhadra (Skt): the “always-good” Bodhisattva; the Bodhisattva of Great Action

samatha (Skt): stopping, calming, tranquillity; the first aspect of Buddhist meditation

Sambhogakaya: one of the three bodies of the Buddha according to Mahayana Buddhism; the body of bliss, or enjoyment

samsara (Skt): cycle of birth and death

Sangha (Skt): Buddhist community of practice comprising monks, nuns, and laypersons (see *Three Jewels*)

Sanskrit: Indian language in which most Mahayana Buddhist sutras were recorded

Shakyamuni (Skt): name given to the Buddha after his enlightenment; meaning “sage of the Shakya clan”

Siddhartha Gautama (Skt): birth name of the Buddha, who lived in the 6th and 5th centuries b.c.e.

sila: morality or precepts; the ethical guidelines associated with the practice

skandhas (Skt): the five elements that comprise a human being according to the Buddha: form, feelings, perceptions, mental states, and consciousness; also known as aggregates

Soto: a branch of Zen Buddhism brought to Japan by Dogen around 1244

suchness (Skt: *tathata*): the true nature of things, or ultimate reality

sunyata (Skt): emptiness, empty of a separate self (see *anatman* and *interbeing*)



sutra: a scriptural narrative, especially a text traditionally regarded as a discourse of the Buddha or one of his disciples; meaning “thread”

Suttapitaka: discourses; the second of the Three Baskets of the Buddhist Scriptures or *Tripitaka*

tathata (Skt): thusness or suchness

Tathagata (Skt): meaning “one who comes from suchness” or “one who will return to suchness”; an epithet of the Buddha

tathagatagarbha (Skt): meaning “womb of the *Tathagata*”; the seed of mindfulness, enlightenment, and compassion that is in each of us

Thây: Vietnamese word for “teacher” used to address Buddhist monks in Vietnam; generally refers to Thich Nhat Hanh when used within the Sangha, the Community of Interbeing

Theravada: meaning ‘way of the elders’; one of eighteen schools of early Buddhism, strongest today in South and Southeast Asia

Three Jewels: *Buddha, Dharma, Sangha*; also known as Three Gems or Three Refuges

Tiep Hien (Vtm): the name of the Order founded by Thich Nhat Hanh in 1964 (also known as the Order of Interbeing); *Tiep* means to be in touch with and *Hien* means to realise and make present here and now

Tripitaka: the *Three Baskets* of the Buddhist scriptures, divided into the *Suttapitaka* (discourses), the *Abhidharmapitaka* (analysis and Buddhist psychology) and the *Vinaya* (rules governing monastic practice)

upeksa (Skt): equanimity; the fourth of The Four Immeasurable Minds (or *Brahmaviharas*)

Vairochana: name of the Dharmakaya Buddha

Vajrayana: the *Diamond* or *Thunderbolt way*. A variant of the Mahayana path associated especially with Tibetan and tantric forms of Buddhist practice.

Vedic: of or relating to the Vedas, the sacred writings of the Aryans, deemed canonical by later Hinduism

Vinaya: rules governing monastic practice; the third of the Three Baskets of the Buddhist Scriptures or *Tripitaka*

vipassana (Pali: insight): looking deeply; the second aspect of Buddhist meditation

walking meditation: walking mindfully, aware of each step and each breath, the way the Buddha walked

Zen: school of Mahayana Buddhism that emphasises meditation as its primary practice; *Zen* derived from the Chinese *Ch’an*, in turn from the Sanskrit *Dhyana* meaning meditation

