



THE LOTUS BUD

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Thoughts on beginning anew...

Image by Xavier Fargas

By Chris Barker

Dear Sangha

Welcome to 2010 and a New Year of practice. The start of a New Year turns our thoughts to new directions, or the renewal of old ones. We might take this opportunity rejuvenate our practices of mindfulness- sitting, walking, eating- and compassion. I have recently returned from a busy month overseas visiting family. It was a wonderful time. I did not however practice as diligently as I might have wished. My return to the Wednesday night group was a refreshing reminder of the benefits of practice and the occasion for a little promise to myself to make the time for meditation once again. Indeed, the start of a new year led me to reflect on what our tradition calls 'Beginning Anew' 

In the following pages you can read some of Thich Naht Hahn's thoughts on the practice of Beginning Anew. Here I want to

think more broadly about what the very idea of beginning anew might mean.

A fresh start: the idea of beginning anew suggests, renewal, something pure, clean and refreshing. It reminds us of springtime and a sense of new life bursting forth. With new life comes both the possibility of joy in the present moment and the conditions for a future to be possible.

Putting things right: beginning anew connects us with notions of repair, enabling a new start. The practice of Beginning Anew in our tradition focuses upon restoring relationships. There is nothing more precious in human life and more necessary to our happiness than our relationships with others. And yet don't we all know just how difficult relationships and the tangle of our emotions can be. If we are to maintain our relationships and our happiness it helps to say sorry and begin again.

Forgiveness: Refreshing and rejuvenating relationships comes not only through saying sorry but through developing the art of forgiveness. This means giving up our hurt and pardoning others for what we think of as their wrong-doing. We can learn to ask others to forgive us our mistakes and most importantly, but less discussed, learn to forgive ourselves. Hanging on to ill-will towards our self in the form of guilt and shame does no one any good in the long run. 

Letting-go: The theme of forgiveness highlights 'letting go' or non-attachment in Buddhist practice and with it the notion of acceptance. Beginning anew involves accepting what has been and letting-go of our fixed ideas about the past, particularly when we try to make it other than what it was. Accepting ourselves and others as being what we are is part of beginning anew.

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Interbeing: The practice of beginning anew is vital to 'my' happiness because we all inter-are. Harboring anger and hatred towards 'you' causes me to suffer. Thus the practice of beginning anew is vitally connected to the ideas and practice of Interbeing or co-dependent arising.

Love: The insights of Interbeing and the practices of letting-go and forgiveness are at the heart of the way love. Love requires both understanding and the capacity, the skillful means, to reduce the suffering of ourselves and others. There is nothing more refreshing and renewing than the giving and receiving of love. 🧘

Impermanence: The insight of impermanence, that all things must pass, is central to Buddhist teachings. It is often associated with suffering in that it is our desire to attach and hold on to things as if they were permanent instead of ever changing that causes us to suffer. The concept of beginning anew shows us the positive and necessary dimension of impermanence. If change were not possible, indeed if it were not inherent to living, then we would not be able to start over, to replenish and refresh our lives and relationships. Asking ourselves the question; 'where will I be in 100 years?' may encourage us to begin anew today.

So in thinking about the idea of beginning anew we can see that it is intimately connected to the very heart of the Buddha's teachings about impermanence, Interbeing, love, forgiveness and the possibilities for human happiness. 🧘

Chris - True Dwelling of the Mind.

Beginning Anew

How to breathe new life and compassion into your relationships.

By Thich Nhat Hanh

As human beings, we all make mistakes. Our unskillful thoughts, words, and actions cause harm to ourselves and those around us. Often, when we hurt others or are hurt by them, because of our pride we make no effort to reconcile or renew our relationships. Without reconciliation, we cannot deepen our understanding and we only cause more suffering. 🧘

Our practice is to renew our relationships on a regular basis. Every week we have time to go to concerts, cinema, shopping, and many other activities, but we rarely find the time to renew our relationships with the people who are close to us, our family members, friends, and colleagues.

*To begin anew is to look deeply and honestly at ourselves, our past actions, speech and thoughts and to create a fresh beginning within ourselves and in our relationships with others. At the practice center we practice beginning anew as a community every two weeks and individually as often as we like. We practice beginning anew to clear our mind and keep our practice fresh. When a difficulty arises in our relationships with fellow practitioners and one of us feels resentment or hurt, we know it is time to begin anew.**



Image by Jasmic

The practice of beginning anew is a practice of reconciliation. Beginning anew can be practiced between two people or as a group. As one person speaks, the other person practices deep listening without interrupting, allowing the first person to speak from the depths of her heart.

In beginning anew we have three steps: sharing appreciation, expressing regret, and expressing hurt and difficulties. In the first step, sharing appreciation, we practice to recognize and acknowledge the positive attributes of the other person. Every one of us has both wholesome and unwholesome seeds. When we express our appreciation

for the other person's positive qualities, we give him the opportunity to recognize the positive qualities in our own consciousness. 🧘

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For instance, perhaps our son is very kind and hardworking. He studies well and often helps us out. But once in a while he makes a mistake, and we correct him strongly right away. Yet because we have not told him how much we appreciate him, when we correct him, he hears only our criticism and blame. In this situation our relationship will be difficult. To improve the situation, we practice sharing our appreciation. If our son is doing well in school, we compliment him. We practice in the same way with our partner, husband, wife, friends, and other people in our life. We can share our appreciation with each other at any time. 🙏

*The practice of beginning anew helps us develop our kind speech and compassionate listening. Beginning anew is a practice of recognition and appreciation of the positive elements within our Sangha. For instance, we may notice that our roommate is generous in sharing her insights, and another friend is caring towards plants. Recognizing others positive traits allows us to see our own good qualities as well.**

The second step of beginning anew is expressing regret. We take this opportunity to share with the other person our regrets for the things we have done or said that might have caused him pain. This requires humility and the willingness to let go of our own pain and pride.

In the third step of beginning anew, we express our own hurt with mindful, loving speech, without blaming or criticizing. 🙏

*Along with these good traits, we each have areas of weakness, such as talking out of our anger or being caught in our misperceptions. When we practice "flower watering" we support the development of good qualities in each other and at the same time we help to weaken the difficulties in the other person. As in a garden, when we "water the flowers" of loving kindness and compassion in each other, we also take energy away from the weeds of anger, jealousy and misperception.** 🙏

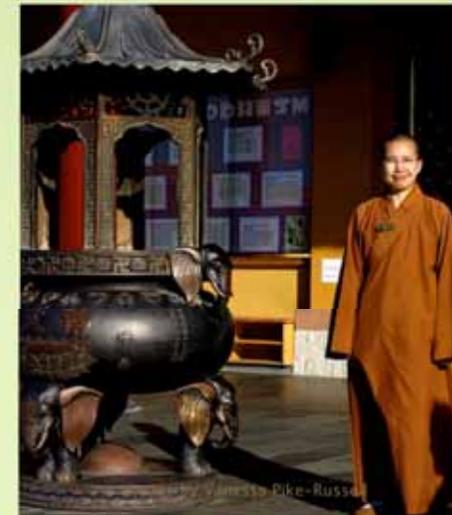
We speak in such a way that the other person can listen and receive our words. If we blame and condemn the other person, his heart will close and he will not be able to hear us. We ask the other person to help us to understand why he has spoken as he has, acted as he has to cause us so much pain. Perhaps at a later time he can share with us so that we can understand more deeply. If a strong emotion arises in us while we are expressing our suffering, we should simply stop and come back to our breathing until the emotion subsides. The other person can support us by following his breathing until we are ready to continue.

We can enjoy practicing beginning anew with our partner, our family, or our colleagues regularly. By doing this practice we will prevent small misunderstandings from accumulating.

Rather, we will take care of them as they arise. At the same time, we cultivate our awareness and appreciation for the positive qualities our loved ones bring to our life. With understanding, all things become possible.

We can practice beginning anew everyday by expressing our appreciation for our fellow practitioners and apologizing right away when we do or say something that hurts them. We can politely let others know when we have been hurt as well. The health and happiness of the whole community depends on the harmony, peace and joy that exists between every member.

*www.deerparkmonastery.org 🙏



WHO WE ARE

The Communities of Mindful Living are inspired by the Buddhist teachings of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (pictured).



We aspire to live fully in each moment for the peace and happiness of ourselves and all beings. We meet regularly to observe the art of mindful living and to foster a supportive community of practitioners. 🙏

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Our main activities

Wednesday Mindfulness Meditation at Camperdown

We welcome all to come join us for meditation practice - We meet at 7:30 pm each Wednesday at the Buddhist Library, Church St, Camperdown, Sydney.

Mindfulness Days - monthly

Once a month we offer a day of mindful practice and contemplation. The day normally consists of chanting sitting meditation, outdoor walking meditation (if weather permits), a dharma talk and lunch.

How to contribute to *The Lotus Bud*

In person at the Wednesday night group

- By e-mail to: cbarker@uow.edu.au
 - By post to: Chris Barker, Faculty of Arts, Uni of Wollongong, 2500
- Contributions can be short or long but need to be under 600 words.

Reading bell

As you read this magazine you have an opportunity to go back to the present moment.

You will notice a bell: 🙏 throughout the magazine.

When you come to each bell, you may like to stop reading, clear your mind and return to your breath before continuing.

Coming events...

Wed night Sangha

Welcome back to Wednesday Evenings where we are *Beginning Anew* in 2010.