



THE LOTUS BUD

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Sangha building

Ananda, Lord Buddha's long-time personal attendant and monk-disciple, asks Buddha: Lord, is it true what has been said, that good spiritual friends are fully half of the holy life?" The Master replied, "No, Ananda, good spiritual friends are the whole of the holy life. Find refuge in the sangha community."

Sangha building is an art that every one of us has to learn, and the family is also a Sangha. A school is also a Sangha. We cannot live without a Sangha. The city is a Sangha, the nation is a Sangha.

Sangha building is an art that everyone has to learn. The bees are doing very well, and other kinds of living beings like the ants organize their Sanghas quite well. They don't seem to have classes and books and things like that to learn the art of Sangha building, but the bees and ants do quite well at what we call Sangha building. Humans cannot live without the Sangha, and that is why everyone has to learn how to build our family, to build our school, to build our city, to build our monastery.

It is stated very clearly that you have to take refuge in your Sangha, because without your Sangha you cannot continue the practice. 🙏

In building a Sangha you have to be very patient, and you have to take care of every member of the Sangha. Every member of the Sangha has his or her weakness, his or her strengths, and you have to recognize them in order to make good use of the positive elements for the sake of the whole Sangha, for the happiness of the whole Sangha, and you have to recognize the negative elements so that you and the whole Sangha can help embrace them. You don't leave that negative element to the person alone, because she may not be able to hold and transform it by herself alone. You have to bring your mind-fulness, your love, and your compassion, and coordinate with her so you can help embrace that negative energy in her.


So on one hand, as a Sangha we support the positive, we help to develop the positive element in that person, so that all the Sangha will benefit from that.

On the other hand, we have to come and help to embrace and understand that weakness in him or in her, so that she will have energy in order to transform it. The transformation of that weakness is also for the joy of the whole Sangha, and that is why Sangha building has to be done as a collective thing. 🙏

Extract form Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on May 7, 1998 in Plum Village, France.




Sangha Building: a lesson in love

Our practice is about expanding our capacity for love and compassion. We use the practice to transform our unskillful states of mind and develop fearlessness so we can go through the world loving freely with an open heart. 

In my experience, this is the basis of Sangha building. It is a very deep practice of expanding our capacity to love. The Sangha, committed to practicing the Five Mindfulness Trainings, ideally provides a safe container in which we can water the wholesome seeds in ourselves and each other. It is a community with which we can practice deep listening and mindful speech and share our aspirations, our joys and concerns, and support each other in our practice.


It also gives us opportunities to be more aware of the unwholesome seeds in us and to use all of our practices so that we can transform them. We can observe our habits of mind and our attachment to views.

Because our Sanghas are open to everyone, we come in contact with some people who are difficult for us. We can feel our hearts close. It requires that we invoke Sadaparibhuta Bodhisattva, whom I see as a sort of patron saint of Sangha building. S/he is the bodhisattva of deep respect who sees the Buddha nature in everyone. We need to be able to do that for each one of our brothers and sisters. When we find our heart closing, we can look at what arises in us regarding the person we find to be

difficult. We embrace those difficult feelings, look deeply in order to understand, and with understanding, we arrive at compassion and love for ourselves and the one we thought to be difficult. Then our heart can open again. 

The Sangha gives us many opportunities to put into practice the teachings of the Discourses. We might use the Discourse on the Five Ways of Putting an End to Anger.

If a person's actions are not kind, we focus on their words. If their words are not kind, we focus on their actions, and so on. In the Sangha, we have a responsibility to resolve all conflicts however small in a safe way. We can touch those things, like conflict, that scare us, and develop skillful means to transform them. This enables us to become more fearless and more honest with ourselves and each other about conflicts when they arise. Once again, we can allow our hearts to open instead of to harden and close.


These are just a few examples of the transformative power of Sangha building. If we want to build a healthy and happy Sangha, we need to discover and transform the barriers to love in our own hearts, so we can truly love every one of our brothers and sisters. We are so blessed to have a practice to help us to be truly joyfully together. 

Joanne Friday, True Joy of Giving, practices with the Clear Heart Sangha, the Radiant Bell Sangha, and the Mind Tamers Sangha in Rhode Island. The Mindfulness Bell Summer 2009. Issue 51

Building in Action: The Practice of Second Body

In a large sangha, it isn't possible to be close to everyone, so we are each given a 'second body' to take special care of. Your own body is your 'first body' and a dharma sister may be your second body. Her second body may be another sister and so on. In this way everyone is looked after and everyone has someone to look after.

From Joyfully Together: The Art of Building a Harmonious Community by Thich Nhat Hanh

In May the mothers of two members of Dharma Boat Sangha passed away within a few weeks of each other. Following the first death, a ceremony was arranged to support the friend whose mother had died. Within two weeks it was the practitioner who had arranged the ceremony who was being supported when her mother suddenly died. By coincidence, around the same time, another sangha member lost his father. Like many faced with the death of a parent, this friend dealt with his loss alone. No one in the sangha was aware of the situation, and although his lengthy absence from the sangha was noticed, no one contacted him. These incidents prompt us to think more about how sangha members might support each other. 

At the July Mindfulness Day the sangha broke into small groups to share with each other what they saw as the benefits of having a second body.

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They also looked deeply into the conditions that might be obstacles to them engaging in the practice of second body; what would prevent them from making contact with their second body. Here is some of the sharing that was recorded.

Ways to be in contact

There is no one way or right combination of ways to be in contact as a second body. We can use Email, the telephone or organise to meet for a cup of tea, a meal, picnic or bushwalks together. Looking deeply into our presence for the other we will know what is right. 🍵

What I would like from a second body?

Sangha members hoped a second body would be someone with whom they could share their joys and sorrows. They wanted to be heard without interruption when sharing joys or difficulties by a non-judgmental listener. In addition, honest feedback at the right time by a person whom remained fully present was seen as a benefit of second body practice, along with reassurance when needed. The group also suggested that the practice could help them develop trust in the support from others and remind them of the practice (watering my good seeds) when they lose their way. The second body could also provide an outside perspective of their own (or families) views along with the opportunity to experience the joy of sharing, love and supporting others.

As a Second Body, what I can give to the other person?

Practitioners did not want to feel that they needed to save the other person or solve their problem for them, but they did want to be able to fully support the person within the time available. They wanted to let the other person know the extent of time available while showing compassion and respect for their situation. The sangha expressed a wish to try their best not to judge the other person and be open to deeper understanding. 🍵

What obstacles might prevent me from the practice of Second Body?

Practitioners saw the perceived burden of making and maintaining a formal commitment as a possible obstacle to the practice. 'My life is so busy now, how can I possibly fit another thing in?' they wondered. Difficult feelings were also identified as potential obstacles to acting as a second body, including feelings that: it may be taking on the suffering of others; reluctance or shyness to make contact; guilt about not always being available; the fear that the other person may become overly dependent or dump their problems on me; fear about taking on such an obligation and a lack of confidence in one's capacity to be a second body. Time was also raised as a possible obstacle, in particular the difficulty in setting aside

time for second body practice and the need to set realistic boundaries in order to balance the second body practice with family commitments. These answers are by no means exhaustive and may trigger other benefits or difficulties we can look into in our own practice. We can talk and write a lot about this practice however simply making contact to say 'Hi!' can say so much that is not spoken. Ultimately, the practice of second body belongs firmly in the action dimension. 🍵


John, True Path of Light.



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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Notices...

Wednesday night Lotus Bud Sangha at the Buddhist library in Camperdown All welcome.

Health and Happiness Retreat
1-3 October 2011 at Camp Coutts, Waterfall NSW with Thay Phap Lieu and Thay Phap Lu. Also accompanied by visiting nuns from Thich Nhat Hanh's tradition. This holistic retreat aims to revitalise the body and mind, and assist in the cultivation of the Buddha within. For more information visit our website www.lotusbudsangha.org.

Online enquiries: Faye Nguyen,
retreat@lotusbudsangha.org


Public talk by Thay Phap Lieu

Less stress, more happiness: Cultivating mindfulness in daily life

Tuesday 27th September, 6:30pm - 8pm
Drysdale Room, Campus Hub building
C10A level 3, Macquarie University.

\$10; free for full-time students.
Brother Phap Lieu (Leo), Dharma Teacher at Plum Village in the tradition of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh.
To register email info@macbuddhi.mitra.org.au
or call Faye on 0466 270 203.

Reading bell

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.

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.

Mindfulness Days at Nhap Luu (Entering the Stream) Meditation Centre
221 Maria's Lane
Beaufort VIC 3733
streammpc@gmail.com www.plumvillageasia.org

Ian Roberts is a neighbour of Nhap Luu and a member of the Present Moment Sangha
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