



THE LOTUS BUD

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Dear Friends,

In this edition of *The Lotus Bud* we reflect on the value and practice of Sangha which is always to the forefront of our tradition and training. We begin with extracts from Thay on the subject of Sangha and conclude with the thoughts of our own brother John Barclay. 🙏

A lotus to you
from *The Lotus Bud* team

Why we need a Sangha

In my tradition we learn that as individuals we cannot do much. That is why taking refuge in the Sangha, taking refuge in the community, is a very strong and important practice. When I say, "I take refuge in the Sangha," it does not mean that I want to express my devotion. No. It's not a question of devotion; it's a question of practice. Without being in a Sangha, without being supported by a group of friends who are motivated by the same ideal and practice, we cannot go far. 🙏

If we do not have a supportive Sangha, we may not be getting the kind of support we need for our practice, that we need to nourish our bodhicitta (the strong desire to cultivate love and understanding in ourselves). Sometimes we call it "beginner's mind." The mind of a beginner is always very beautiful, very strong. In a good and healthy Sangha, there is encouragement for our beginner's mind, for our bodhicitta.

So the Sangha is the soil, and we are the seed. No matter how beautiful, how vigorous our seed is, if the soil does not provide us with vitality, our seed will die. 🙏

"...right mindfulness for someone who has only just started the practice is still weak, and the forgetfulness of the people around us is very great and capable of dragging us away in the direction of the five cravings. Because most people around us are being drowned in the five cravings, it is this environment that drags us away and stops us from practicing right mindfulness.

To practice right mindfulness we need the right environment, and that environment is our Sangha. Without a Sangha we are very weak. In a society where everyone is rushing, everyone is being carried away by their habit energies, practice is very difficult.



Image by _sjg_

That is why the Sangha is our salvation. The Sangha where everyone is practicing mindful walking, mindful speaking, mindful eating seems to be the only chance for us to succeed in ending the vicious cycle.

And what is the Sangha? The Sangha is a community of people who agree with each other that if we do not practice right mindfulness, we will lose all the beautiful things in our soul and all around us. People in the Sangha standing near us, practicing with us, support us so that we are not pulled away from the present moment. Whenever we find ourselves in a difficult situation, two or three friends in the Sangha who are there for us, understanding and helping us, will get us through it. Even in our silent practice we help each other.

In my tradition they say that when a tiger leaves the mountain and goes to the lowland, it will be caught by humans and killed. When a practitioner leaves his or her Sangha, he or she will abandon her practice after a few months. In order to continue our practice of transformation and healing, we need a Sangha. With a Sangha it's much easier to practice, and that is why I always take refuge in my Sangha. 🙏

Excerpt from "Friends on the Path: Living Spiritual Communiities" - Thich Nhat Hanh

Practicing in the Sangha

The function of the bell in the Sangha is to bring us back to ourselves. When we hear the bell we come back to ourselves and breathe, and at that point we improve the quality of the Sangha energy. We know that our brother and our sister, wherever they are, will be stopping, breathing, and coming back to themselves. They will be generating the energy of right mindfulness, the Sangha energy. When we look at each other, we feel confident, because everyone is practicing together in the same way and contributing to the quality of the Sangha. So we are friends on the path of practice.

The Sangha is made out of the work of individuals, so we have the duty to help create the energy of the Sangha. Our presence, when it is a mindful presence, contributes to that energy. When we are absent during the activities of the Sangha, we are not contributing to the Sangha energy. If we don't go to a sitting meditation, we are not feeding our Sangha. We are also letting ourselves go hungry, because we are not benefiting from the Sangha. We don't profit from the Sangha, and the Sangha doesn't profit from us. 🙏

Don't think that we sit for ourselves. You don't sit for yourself alone, you sit for the whole Sangha - not only the Sangha, but also for the people in your city, because when one person in the city is less angry, is smiling more, the whole city profits. If we practice looking deeply, our understanding of interbeing will grow, and we will see that every smile, every step, every breath is for



everybody. It is for our country, for the future, for our ancestors.

The best thing we can do is to transform ourselves into a positive element of the Sangha. If members of the Sangha see us practising well, they will have confidence and do better. If there are two, three, four, five, six, seven of you like that in the Sangha, I'm sure the Sangha will be a happy Sangha and will be the refuge of many people in the world. 🙏

Excerpt from "Friends on the Path" by Thich Naht Hanh

Engaging in Sangha

Building sangha requires engaging in sangha and offered here are a few tools that may help.

Practicing True Goodness

Goodness, kindness or virtue is a fundamental teaching of the Buddha. However being good (or doing good things) can be very subjective. That is why having the mindfulness trainings as a guide is so helpful. They can assist us to see what has worked over time. A meditation practice without virtue is like a ship without a rudder. They say it this way, mindfulness trainings always go together with concentration and insight. Reciting the mindfulness trainings together is the foundation for a healthy sangha, a treasure for all time. 🙏

Tip: As well as reciting the trainings with the sangha, review a mindfulness training before bedtime and ask yourself 'How did I go today?'

Practicing True Humility

True humility goes a long way to producing well being. It contains non judgment and not thinking we are better than other. Arrogance along with pride are opposites of humility. Can we see the situations where we have a need to always be 'right'? The practice of Right Speech is a good place to reflect on our own humility. I try to practice restraint before giving in to the desire to add my own stories to others sharing and also restraining myself from correcting others. Am I sure I am right? Is it really necessary correct or contradict what has been said?

To practice True Humility well you must be able to recognise the obstacles to that practice. A 'near enemy' of True Humility, is false humility. It is a pretender wearing the mask of humility yet lurking under the surface is our ego seeking pity. Ultimately, True Humility puts the interest of others and the sangha family before our own self-interest and ideas. 🙏

Tip: In quiet reflection, look at times when you are critical of others in your thinking or speech. Then say a little prayer at night. 'Dear Buddha, it's hard to be humble, when I'm perfect in every way.' and smile to the pretender in yourself and to your own imperfections.

Practicing Service in the Sangha

Service can be natural, easy and joyful but sometimes self-pity gets in the way and we think of it as a burden. Everyone can be of service in a practical way that brings joy to the sangha. In a past life the Buddha had the form of a Bodhisattva called Sadhipaributta who recognised that everyone had Buddha nature, that everyone had the potential for Buddha mind. The trouble for Sarapaributta was being scorned by those who didn't believe him! Sometimes we gladly offer a lotus to the other person, to recognise the Buddha in that person, but deep down we have a belief that we ourselves do not have the potential of Buddha nature. We can see the life of the historic Buddha from the aspect of his unshakeable service to the sangha. Everyone in the sangha (including you!) has a Buddha inside just waiting to be of service in their own unique way.

Tip: Be yourself, be a Buddha and ask yourself regularly 'How can I be of service to the sangha?' The Buddha did it, and in your own way, so can you. Truly engaging in the sangha takes some courage and will sometimes mean stepping out of our comfort zone. Yet the best place for spiritual growth is right there being involved. In developing true virtue, humility and service your happiness will be true happiness and your wisdom will be a loving wisdom that truly relieves suffering - your sangha will truly be a Pureland. 🙏

John Barclay



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.

Contacts

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Notices...

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

Mindfulness Walk

On Sunday 11th of March The Smiling Heart Sangha will host a mindful walk in the Blue Mountains.

Gathering time: 10.00 to 10.30 am

Finishing time: 3 pm

Walk starts: around 10.45 am

Location: Darwin Trail from Wentworth Falls township to the actual Wentworth Falls. For details contact Ann Le (Anh Thu) on phone: 4782 9632 or mob: 0433 665 766 or email activefamilyhealth@yahoo.com

Save the date for the April Retreat

Friday 13 - Sunday 15 April, 2012

at Camp Coutts, Waterfall.

Please be advised the retreat will not be on during Easter long weekend.

We will be joined by Sisters from Nhap Luu/Entering the Stream, Brother Phap Hai of Deer Park and Brother Phap Kham of the Asian Institute of Applied Buddhism (Hong Kong).

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.

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 Melbourne 03 5349 2729