



THE LOTUS BUD

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Dear Sangha,

In the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism there is an image of the Bodhisattva Manjushri (bodhisattva of wisdom) holding in one hand a lotus flower that blooms from a plant that is growing in the mud while the other hand holds a sword. One interpretation of this image is that the sword of wisdom that cuts through illusion arises in conjunction with lotus of compassion that springs from the mud of our suffering. In this edition we explore the idea that we should not turn away from suffering but embrace it as the mud in which compassion and wisdom are born.



The lotus in the mud

In the Mahayana tradition of mindfulness practice there is a special term for the turning of our hearts toward compassion and enlightenment: Bodhichitta utpada.

Thich Nhat Hanh translates Bodhichitta as the Mind of Love. More precisely, Chitta is the mind consciousness that is the medium for emotions, cognitive functions, and attitudes. Bodhi means awake, enlightened, fully open. Pema Chodron describes the experience:

“Sometimes the completely open heart and mind of bodhichitta is called the soft spot, a place as vulnerable and tender as an open wound. It is equated, in part, with our ability to love. Even the cruelest people have this soft spot. Even the most vicious animals love their offspring.” (From *The Places That Scare You*) 

Utpada means arising. Bodhichitta utpada is the subtle transformation that

occurs in our deep consciousness when for a few moments, maybe a few hours, we feel blissfully at peace with ourselves, with those around us, and with the whole world. Many of us have had moments like this on retreats. It is not simply holding new ideas or new perspectives, it is a different consciousness.

In the Mahayana tradition the awakening of Bodhichitta is the most precious state imaginable. A bodhisattva, an enlightened being, is someone who is able to sustain Bodhichitta throughout his or her daily life, day after day. If we are practitioners, we are bodhisattvas-in-training. 

How do we develop our Bodhichitta? The tradition tells us that the most direct route is through fully experiencing suffering, our suffering and the suffering of others. Thich Nhat Hanh explains:

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"It's like growing lotus flowers. You cannot grow lotus flowers on marble. You have to grow them in mud. Without mud, you cannot have a lotus flower. Without suffering, you have no ways in order to learn how to be understanding and compassionate. That's why my definition of the kingdom of God is not a place where suffering is not, where there is no suffering... I would not like to go to a place where there is no suffering. I would not like to send my children to a place where there is no suffering, because, in such a place, they have no way to learn how to be understanding and compassionate." 

(From *Brother Thay, A Radio Pilgrimage*, June 4, 2009.) Mitchell Ratner, *Still Water Sangha*

[Online source](#)



Image by Done del Castillo

The Guest House

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture, still, treat
each guest honorably.*

*He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the
malice, meet them at the door
laughing, and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whatever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

Rumi
[Online source](#)

Suffering nourishes compassion

We have been practicing "engaged Buddhism" in Vietnam for the last thirty years. During the war, we could not just sit in the meditation hall. We had to practice mindfulness everywhere, especially where the worst suffering was going on.

Being in touch with the kind of suffering we encountered during the war can heal us of some of the suffering we experience when our lives are not very meaningful or useful. When you confront the kinds of difficulties we faced during the war, you see that you can be a source of compassion and a great help to many suffering people. In that intense suffering, you feel a kind of relief and joy within yourself, because you know that you are an instrument of compassion. Understanding such intense suffering and realizing compassion in the midst of it, you become a joyful person, even if your life is very hard...

Meditation is a point of contact. Sometimes you do not have to go to the place of suffering. You just sit quietly on your cushion, and you can see everything. You can actualize everything, and you can be aware of what is going on in the world. Out of that kind of awareness, compassion and understanding arise naturally, and you can stay right in your own country and perform social action. 

Thich Nhat Hanh, from Peace is Every Step

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Question and answer with Thich Nhat Hanh

Q: Why do we cling to our suffering?

Thay: Many of us are not capable of releasing the past, of releasing the suffering of the past. We want to cling to our own suffering. But the Buddha said very clearly, do not cling to the past, the past is already gone. Do not wait for future, the future is not yet there. The wise people establish themselves in the present moment and they practice living deeply in the present moment. That is our practice. By living deeply in the present moment we can understand the past better and we can prepare for a better future.

Today I attended a Vietnam war veterans' discussion, and my heart is still heavy. The condition of the war veterans-their heart, their mind, their body-do you think that they will ever be emotionally healed in this lifetime? I think if they practice with all their heart and they are determined to relieve the past, they will be healed. 🙏

We cling too much to the past; we have to face the future. We have to stand on the ground of the present moment. The war in Vietnam was just a war. There are many wars still going on and we continue to create victims of war and war veterans. The number of American soldiers who died in Vietnam was something like 55,000. Every year the number of people who die in car accidents in America is exactly that number, 55,000. So there is the equivalent number of dead people caused by alcoholism and unmindful driving. This is another war. The toll is as huge as the damage inflicted by war, and every time a person dies because of a car accident, it creates many war veterans in the children who lose their mother, the mothers who lose their son. 🙏

If we stick to our suffering we can never stand up for healing and prepare the future for our children and their children. I would say to the Vietnam war veteran, okay, you did kill five children. We know that. But here you are, alive in the present moment. Do you know that you have the power to save five children today? You don't have to go to Vietnam or southeast Asia. There are American children who are dying every day; they

may need only one pill to be saved from their illness.

If you know how, every day you can save five children from dying. Why do you let yourself get caught in guilt and become paralyzed year after year? Why don't you make a bodhisattva vow to use your life to work for the safety of many children? Did you know that 40,000 children die in the world every day just because of the lack of food and nutrition? You are here; you can do something. Why do you let yourself get caught in the past? You can save children in the here and now. You can use your life in a very useful and intelligent way. You can very well transform that negative energy into a positive energy that empowers you and makes life meaningful. 🙏

[Online source](#)



Image by Zorlah

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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www.lotusbudsangha.org

Online sources for articles in this issue

<http://www.stillwatermpc.org/dharma/dh20100401.htm>

<http://persweb.wabash.edu/facstaff/hulenp/sperit/poetry/rumi/guesthou.html>

<http://www.ic.sunysb.edu/Clubs/buddhism/dailylife/thayq-a.html>

We would love to hear from you.
We want the The Lotus Bud to be a place for sharing our experiences and building the Sangha; so why not write a short piece about your experiences with mindfulness ?

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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 activities

Wednesday Mindfulness Meditation
Sydney, Inner West

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.

Meditation and monthly Mindfulness Days at Canley Heights

Southwest Sydney - 7.30pm
Friday Night Meditation and Monthly Mindfulness Days.
49 Ferngrove Rd Canley Heights.

Mindfulness Days at Nhap Luu (Entering the Stream) Meditation Centre
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