



# THE LOTUS BUD

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## *Dear Sangha,*

In this edition of The Lotus Bud we celebrate the miracle of being alive. As Thay says, *Breathe! You are Alive!*

We begin with Thay's discussion of the miracle of life and follow this with the reflections of Pieter, a member of the Dutch sangha, on his experience of returning home from Plum Village to learn about the tragic death of many of his fellow citizens.

I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Pieter in Plum Village this summer (July 2014) where we enjoyed the miracles of mindfulness together. 🙏

*Chris / True Dwelling of the Mind*

## *Life is a miracle*

Our true home is in the present moment. To live in the present moment is a miracle. The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green Earth in the present moment, to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now. Peace is all around us — in the world and in nature — and within us — in our bodies and our spirits. Once we learn to touch this peace, we will be healed and transformed. It is not a matter of faith; it is a matter of practice. We need only to find ways to bring our body and mind back to the present moment so we can touch what is refreshing, healing, and wondrous.

The best way to touch is with mindfulness. You know, it is possible to touch without mindfulness. When you wash your face in the morning, you

might touch your eyes without being aware that you are touching them. You might be thinking about other things. But if you wash your face in mindfulness, aware that you have eyes that can see, that the water comes from distant sources to make washing your face possible, your washing will be much deeper. As you touch your eyes, you can say, "Breathing in, I am aware of my eyes. Breathing out, I smile to my eyes." 🙏

We can do the same with our heart. "Breathing in, I am aware of my heart. Breathing out, I smile to my heart." If we practice this a few times, we will realise that our heart has been working hard, day and night, for many years to keep us alive.

Every day we touch what is wrong, and, as a result, we are becoming less and less healthy.

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That is why we have to learn to practice touching what is not wrong—inside us and around us. When we get in touch with our eyes, our heart, our liver, our breathing, and our non-toothache and really enjoy them, we see that the conditions for peace and happiness are already present. When we walk mindfully and touch the Earth with our feet, when we drink tea with friends and touch the tea and our friendship, we get healed, and we can bring this healing to society. The more we have suffered in the past, the stronger a healer we can become. We can learn to transform our suffering into the kind of insight that will help our friends and society.

We do not have to die to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact we have to be fully alive. When we breathe in and out and hug a beautiful tree, we are in Heaven. When we take one conscious breath, aware of our eyes, our heart, our liver, and our non-toothache, we are transported to Paradise right away. Peace is available. We only have to touch it. When we are truly alive, we can see that the tree is part of Heaven, and we are also part of Heaven. The whole universe is conspiring to reveal this to us, but we are so out of touch that we invest our resources in cutting down the trees. If we want to enter Heaven on Earth, we need only one conscious step and one conscious breath. When we touch peace, everything becomes real. We become ourselves, fully alive in the present moment, and the tree, our child, and everything else reveal themselves to us in their full splendour.

"The miracle is to walk on Earth." This statement was made by Zen Master Lin Chi. The miracle is not to walk on thin air or water, but to walk on Earth. The Earth is so beautiful. We are beautiful also. We can allow ourselves to walk mindfully, touching the Earth, our wonderful mother, with each step. We don't need to wish our friends, "Peace be with you." Peace is already with them. We only need to help them cultivate the habit of touching peace in each moment. — Touching Peace. 🧘

*(edited extracts from Thich Naht Hanh, 1975. 'The Miracle of Mindfulness'. Beacon Press)*



## *Listen, Listen!*

During the July 2014 Summer Retreat in Plum Village I was sitting lazing in the sunshine when I took my smartphone out of my pocket to see if there was any news. One of the headline-items was 'Airplane Crashes'. It appeared that a plane that had departed from Schiphol Airport, Holland's national airport, had crashed in the Ukraine. 'Wow, that's bad', I thought; I know Schiphol Airport, I had been there several times, had departed from it. But there it stopped, the mobile phone was pocketed and I immersed myself again in the protective bubble of the Plum Village retreat. It was so good to be back there again after four years, the beautiful weather, the beautiful Dharma-talks, beautiful moments and people.

### **Message**

The following day I received a text-message from my daughter; 'Did you catch anything about the disaster? About 200 people died!' Erm... Yes, I read about it, but I didn't know that it was that bad. And then it appeared that there were at least 184 Dutch victims. Suddenly it came so close! Terrible. And yet... still abstract notions. An airplane had crashed, and there were many casualties, most of them Dutch. 🧘

Once I had returned home I learned that 298 people had died and that 196 of them were Dutch. I saw the live images of the Hercules freight-planes from which, with beautifully subdued and solemn ceremony,  
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coffins were carried out. One after the other, one after the other... and again... So many coffins, so many hearses, so much silence. I could hear only the rhythmic sound of a line tapping against a flagpole in the wind. There were so many people lining the highways, standing on fly-overs, watching the endless row of hearses and not believing their eyes and their sorrow. What had happened, and why?

And then it really hit me; the scale and pointlessness of it all. And I cried; all these coffins, all these innocent victims. That could have been my daughter, my son, my mother, my father. Or me. 

## Closer

Two days later I got an e-mail from Peter, a friend of mine who had been on holiday to Denmark for a week, together with his girl-friend, her son, and her brother and his family. His wife and their three small children who had also been on the holiday were returning to Malaysia where they lived when the plane crashed. The entire family was killed. Peter was in shock but had no time for sorrow. As a high-ranking officer in the Dutch police-force he could use his knowledge to make the necessary practical arrangements. The news came closer and closer to me.

## Realisation

Why is it, that when reading the headline 'Airplane crashes' you only think 'Wow that's bad...' and that the impact of the full catastrophe only strikes home when

you really see the evidence; all the coffins and hearses, or read the devastating news for one of your friends? Suddenly it comes so close. It can be your child, your brother, your mother. It is your child, your brother, your mother.

Even when reading or hearing a 'superficial' or 'neutral' news item such as 'Airplane crashes' or 'Ferry sinks' or 'Many casualties in multiple collision', one could try to realise its full impact. And yes, I do know that I cannot take all the suffering in the world onto my shoulders and that our defence-mechanism when reading such item works quite well, on its own terms, but then again... Perhaps I should realise more often that these victims are all somebody's brother, sister, mother or child. 

## Gatha

It seems to me that Thay more and more stresses the miracle of life in his Dharma-talks. How extraordinary it is that all the conditions for our life, that all the elements from the cosmos come together in us to form us as we are, living human beings. On the retreat at Plum Village he said; 'Mindfulness is realising what a miracle it is to be alive'. When hearing the bell I always silently recite the gatha:

*Listen, listen!*

*This wonderful sound of the bell*

*Brings me back to my true self.*

Since hearing Thay's talks in Plum Village, and particularly since the airplane disaster, I have added some lines for myself;

## Listen, listen!

*This wonderful sound of the bell  
Brings me back to my true self  
And makes me realise how great,  
Fantastic and miraculous it is  
That I live!* 

I follow the gatha with a little internal dance, a 'yippee-moment', an internal explosion of joy and amazement. The bell, to me, is no longer 'only' an invitation to return to myself in the present moment, but also an invitation to a little internal party. From now on it is a doorway to the ultimate joy; the realisation that I am alive! And how wonderful that is. The gatha and the realisation that follows have become so powerful for me now! Breathe! You're alive! But it can be over just like that.

## Bells of Mindfulness

Anything can be a bell of mindfulness; a car horn, a telephone that rings, the voice of a child, the laughter of your daughter, but also an airplane high in the sky. When I hear or see an airplane I always think 'May they be happy. May they arrive safe and sound'. But perhaps now it is not so much a wish as a prayer

*May they be happy, wherever they are.* 

*Pieter Loogman (Full Path of the Heart)  
Open Heart Sangha, The Netherlands*

## 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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[www.lotusbudsangha.org](http://www.lotusbudsangha.org)

## Online sources for articles in this issue

<http://newsroom.unfccc.int/1758.aspx>

[http://www.ecolo.org/lovelock/what\\_is\\_Gaia.html](http://www.ecolo.org/lovelock/what_is_Gaia.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 ?

Email: [cbarker@uow.edu.au](mailto:cbarker@uow.edu.au)

Post: Chris Barker, Faculty of Arts,  
Uni of Wollongong, 2500

## 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  
221 Maria's Lane  
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