



THE LOTUS BUD

Magazine of Mindful Living ~ Issue No 72, July 2015

Dear Sangha,

In this edition of *The Lotus Bud* we return to the theme of Sangha, the community of mindfulness, that is at the heart of Thay's teachings. While we have touched on this subject before in *The Lotus Bud* it's always worth reminding ourselves of why our sangha matters, as a dimension of 'Interbeing'. 🙏

Chris / True Dwelling of the Mind



Image by BSPS Region 5

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. 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. 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 Communities" - Thich Nhat Hanh



Image by catlovers

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



Image by Raul Hernandez Gonzalez

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 mindfulness, 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.

Excerpt 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*



Image by James Gaither

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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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)
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