



COMMUNAUTE BOUDDHIQUE ZEN VILLAGE DES PRUNIER

23rd December, 2018

Dear Beloved Community,

Our dear Teacher has been at Từ Hiếu Root Temple now for two months, with many of our elders, including Sister Chan Khong, Brother Phap An and a team of monastic attendants. Thay is doing well, his eyes as bright and lucid as ever. Even in the heavy rains, Thay visits the tomb of his teacher everyday, sometimes three times in the day. He has been coming out to enjoy the grounds of the Root Temple, visiting the Half Moon Pond, along all the paths past the bamboo groves, and the well where he would wash his feet as a young novice after attending the buffaloes. It has been lovely to see so many people visiting Hue to be near Thay, to enjoy the Root Temple and to pay tribute to our spiritual ancestors.

Thay's return to Từ Hiếu has been a bell of mindfulness reminding us all of how precious it is to belong to a spiritual lineage with deep roots. Whether we have attended a retreat; or simply read one of Thay's books or watched a talk, and have been touched by his teachings—we are all connected to this ancestral stream of wisdom and compassion. Throughout his teaching career, Thay has opened the Dharma door of connecting with our ancestors, as a way to tangibly practice the Buddha's teachings on no-self, and to see ourselves as a continuation and not a separate self-entity.

Connecting to our true home

In this holiday season, we have a chance to return home to our roots, to be with our loved ones, and to take time to come back to ourselves. With our mindful breath and steps, with our awareness and care for our physical body, and with our connection to our community of fellow practitioners, we know that, wherever we are, we can have a true spiritual home to take refuge in.

As Thay would often remind us, the greatest gift we can offer to others—and ourselves—is our true presence. To return home is to be present. Breathing in and out with the energy of mindfulness is enough to establish ourselves in the present moment, right where we are, with whoever is around us; whether they are joyful and festive, or facing challenges, loneliness and sorrow. With our mindful breathing we can truly be there with whatever is coming up, in ourselves and in our loved ones. Simply being present with compassion, care and deep listening is enough to make a difference and bring relief.

Where is Thay?

Looking deeply with the eyes of signlessness, we can see that Thay is not only in Vietnam. Thay is fully present in us as we enjoy a meal with our loved ones, knowing it is a precious moment. Thay is sitting at our side as we breathe relaxingly and wait in our car at a stop light. Whether we are in a city, a remote village or out in the field of action for climate and social justice, wherever the practice is, our teacher is there too. Thay is there when we can pause and enjoy the simple wonders of life and when we can resist the

rush, confusion and noise of modern society. Thay is there in our community wherever any of his students, lay and monastic, are practicing mindful walking, breathing, listening and engaging.

We know that our planet is facing great challenges, in terms of environmental destruction, climate change and species extinction. Our human family is experiencing profound political instability, social turmoil, continued violence and displacement. When we reflect on the past year as practitioners, we are asking ourselves, What can we do to help? What's the best we can contribute as individuals and as mindful communities to the collective awakening? Where can we find a true refuge for ourself and for others?

Thay's words of guidance are clear:

To take refuge, first of all, is to take refuge in the island of ourselves and then in the island of a Sangha. These islands are communities of resistance. "Resistance" does not mean to oppose others. It means to protect ourselves, like staying inside the house to protect ourselves from the weather. We resist being destroyed by society's pollution, noise, unhappiness, harsh words, and negative behavior. If we do not know how to take care of ourselves, we may get wounded and be unable to help others. If we join with others to build a sangha that can nourish and protect us and resist society's destructiveness, we will be able to return home. Many years ago, I suggested that peace activists in the West establish communities of resistance. A true sangha is always therapeutic. To return to our own body and mind is already to return to our roots, to our true home, to our true person. With the support of a sangha, we can do it.

—Thich Nhat Hanh (["Finding our True Heritage"](#))

The power of communities

Internationally, our community of resistance is growing stronger and becoming a stable refuge for many people from all walks of life. As a sangha we are practicing to go forward one breath at a time, one step at a time, one person at a time, beginning with ourselves. With the support of the collective we can recognize, embrace and transform whatever is coming up inside us, so we can see clearly what to do and what not to do to help the situation. We now have over 1,500 local sanghas, and every week new sanghas are forming around the world. We have the [Earth Holder Sangha](#), the [ARISE Sangha](#), the [Wake Up movement](#) of young people and the [Wake Up Schools network](#) cultivating mindfulness in education. Each year, dozens of young men and women from many different nationalities are ordaining as monastic brothers and sisters; our growing community now reaches over 100,000 people per year worldwide, joining us for retreats, public talks and mindfulness workshops. Our new [Healing Spring Monastery](#) outside Paris opened in November and will be offering a peaceful refuge for many Parisians this holiday season. This autumn, our monastic brothers and sisters in Plum Village came together to deepen our chanting in English and French, the fruit of which is the new CD [Chanting as a River](#). We will "resist" together as a spiritual family by bringing freshness to pollution, serenity to noise, kindness to places of harshness, and seeds of peace to the fields of hate.

Will your New Year be new?

The New Year 2019 is an opportunity to reflect on what ways we can resist to ensure a better path forward for ourselves, our community and our planet. It will require us to be courageous in making changes in our

life to ensure the New Year will truly be “new”. We can resist by making a clear, compassionate resolution in terms of daily mindfulness practice, transforming habit energies, or taking our life in a new direction, even in small ways.

In October, [new scientific research](#) called for a change in diet away from meat and dairy towards less resource-intensive plant-based foods. We can commit to a number of plant-based food days per week. We can find ways to eat local, seasonal and organic foods; and maybe ask our local restaurant to offer more vegan or vegetarian choices. We can make other consumption choices that reduce damage to our planet. For example, making a commitment not to buy any more clothing items for this coming year by looking into our closet and asking, Do we really need another sweater or pair of shoes? In this kind of resistance there is no corporation, no politician and no policy to oppose or to rebel against. It all comes down to our own free conscious choice to change the way we consume whether that is food, fuel, energy or other items from around the world. We can make these choices in the spirit of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, with compassion and joy, and without judging others or imposing our views.

Collective insight

Changing the collective consciousness will require us to gather, discuss action and exchange ideas in our local sanghas to find ways to inspire and propel change. As a 15-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg reminded us at the recent Poland climate conference, we do not want to steal the future from our children. Sacrifices must be made, conveniences reduced, and habits changed. Looking deeply together we can continue our Teacher and find skilful ways to support new frontiers of healing and compassion for our planet.

Dear beloved community, as we write this message, the days are getting longer as more light shines on the northern hemisphere. It is a great happiness to have each other and a beautiful path to walk together. Wherever we are this holiday season, we are not alone. We have a path of practice, we have a community.

We wish you a peaceful and warm holiday season,

The brothers and sisters of Plum Village

p.s. If you would like to receive updates like this about Thay and news about the community continuing his legacy directly in your inbox, please sign up [here](#).