



MIND MOON CIRCLE

Autumn 2022
Journal of the SZC Sangha

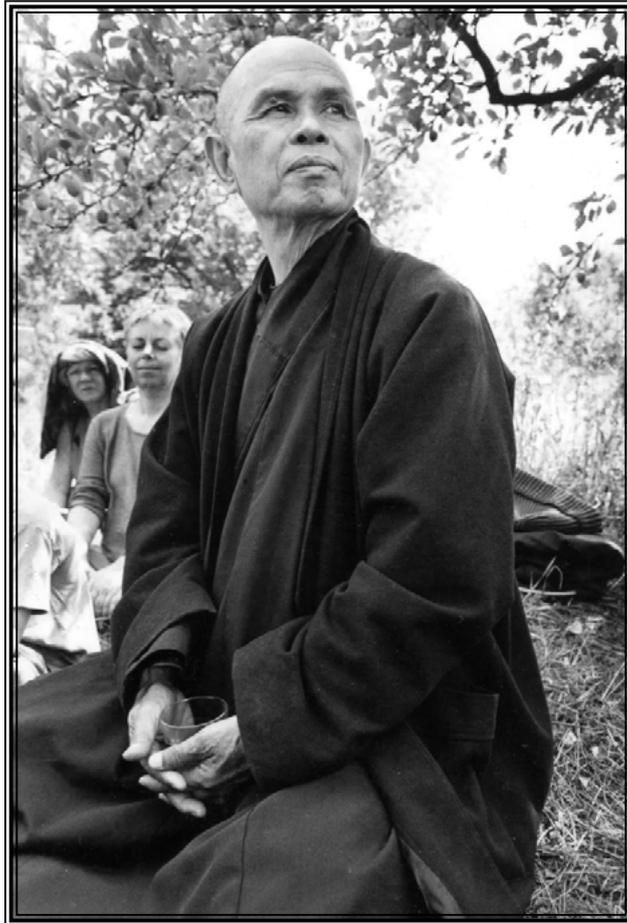


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*“Heading in the one direction of embracing the loving vitality of Spring,
is to walk the path of heroes.*

*Acting in such a way that is neither caught in ideas or notions,
nor taking sides in partisan conflict,*

The light of mindfulness illuminates our true nature,

And in both East and West, the wonderful Dharma is realised.”



photo credits: Jillian Ball

THIS LIFE.
LIVING AND DYING
IN AN EMPTY AND
COMPLETE WORLD

Autumn 2022

*In loving memory of Thich Nhat Hanh
and the embodiment of the teachings on how to fully live a life of mindfulness,
love and kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity.*

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Dear friends,

Here is Autumn Edition of our loved Mind Moon Circle journal.

We come together on these pages as we come together in the dojo of our lives.
To follow in the steps of great masters who planted the lanterns of wisdom and
compassion along our path.

For countless blessings have gentle giant Thầy bestowed upon us by virtue of his
presence. Living in the hearts of many - may your rest in deepest samadhi.

Thank you all contributors. Its a joy to handle your words and pictures.

With love and gratitude, Ameli

*The theme for the next MMC is "Weeding and attending to the soil of your practice". Please
submit your impressions and inspirations to Kerry and Brendon.
Email: stewarts34@bigpond.com*

*Crickets are singing
in the dark garden
zzzz zzzz
rocking gently
with my in breath,
out breath.
Moonlight falls on the table.
Are all asleep?
This moment.*

*No old age. No ignorance
though it rises endlessly.
No death, though
death and old age are all about us here.
Nothing is permanent, unchanging, separate.
This moment. This moment. This moment.*

*Ravens Aaa Aaa from the gum tree,
five skinks, a butterfly.
As I breathe in,
breathe out,
sunshine warms my back.*

*Crying children, starving people,
war, hatred, refugees,
all life threatened... all life breathing...
How to stay open, how to respond?
this breath, this breath, this breath.*

*Clouds come and go, come and go,
come and go.
This moment. This breath.*

JOURNEY

*Here are words written down -
footprints on the sand,
cloud formations.
Tomorrow I'll be gone.*

Thich Nhat Hanh¹

In 2005, when Thich Nhat Hanh was asked,

"You'll be 80 this year - do you plan to retire as a spiritual teacher at any point?"

He replied:

"In Buddhism we see that teaching is done not only by talking, but also by living your own life. Your life is the teaching, is the message. I see myself in my continuation, and I will not retire. I'll continue to teach, if not by Dharma talks, then in my way of sitting, eating, smiling, and interacting with the sangha. You don't need to talk in order to teach. You need to live your life mindfully and deeply."

After suffering a severe brain haemorrhage in November 2014, Thay was unable to speak and partly paralysed yet continued communicating the Dharma. For a time he lived in the Plum Village Monastery in Thailand until, four years after the haemorrhage and soon after his 92nd birthday, he expressed his wish to return to Ta Hieu Temple in Hue.

"It is now time for me to return to the Root Temple... to live on the land of my ancestral teachers, to offer my presence to my monastic brothers and descendants until the day this body disintegrates. I wish to end my days in the home of my spiritual ancestors."

And he asked his many sanghas to have seven-day retreats to mark his passing. In a letter to Elders and descendants on his arrival in Vietnam, he wrote:

"Since leaving the Bao Quoc Institute of Buddhist Studies more than seventy years ago, I have devoted my life to realising the vision that the ancestral teachers have entrusted to me, as recorded in the transmission gatha that I received from my Teacher."

1 "Journey" from Call Me by My True Names: the Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh, pub.Parallax Press, CA, 1999, (p.127).

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The light of mindfulness illuminates our true nature,

And in both East and West, the wonderful Dharma is realised.”

It is an honour to have been able to fulfil, at least in part, the task our ancestral teachers have entrusted to us,” Thay concluded.²

To those who know something of Thich Nhat Hanh, this is an understatement. His selfless service to the world is measureless. Entering the temple in 1942 as a novice monk at the age of sixteen, he also studied at Saigon University, and in 1961 travelled to the US to teach Comparative Religion at Princeton University, then at Columbia. He returned to Vietnam in 1963 and founded the Van Hanh Buddhist University, La Boi publishing house, and an influential peace activist magazine, as well as establishing the Order of Interbeing based on the Bodhisattva Precepts, thus founding the Engaged Buddhism movement, the term Engaged Buddhism first appearing in his book *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. Thay has published over 100 titles in English.

In 1966 with the war raging, he founded the School of Youth for Social Service, a grass-roots relief organisation of 10,000 volunteers, that same year receiving ‘lamp transmission’ from Master Chan That, becoming a dharma teacher of the Lieu Quan Dharma Line in the 42nd generation of the Lam Te Dhyana school (Lin Chi Chan” in Chinese, or Rinzai Zen in Japanese). This same year, he began travelling to the US where he first met Dr Martin Luther King Jr, (who nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967), and to Europe and Australia, to make the case for peace. As a result, both North and South Vietnam denied him the right to return to Vietnam, and he was exiled for 39 years. In 1982, Thay and Chan Khong founded The Plum Village Monastery in the Dordogne, Southern France.

In 1986, when the Sydney Buddhist Peace Fellowship were organising for Thay to visit Australia, he was still on some sort of blacklist and his visa was blocked. We had to do a lot of talking to clear the path.

2 plumvillage.org

I first met Thay at Koko An, Robert Aitken roshi and his wife Anne's zendo in Honolulu, where Thay gave a five-day retreat in 1985. The following year, Thay and Sister Chang Khong (in those days, Sister Phuong) came to Sydney and I documented their visit in *The Awakening Bell* made for SBS-TV. Tony, our son Gully and I joined an artists' retreat with Thay at Ojai, California, in 1987.

In 1988, we documented Thay's pilgrimage to Buddhist sites in India and Nepal. He gave wonderful Dharma talks at every place the Buddha visited. In Kusinagar, when some were desperate to go sari-shopping in the local market, Thay asked, 'Why be in such a hurry? We're all heading for the same destination!'

Heading for the same destination, indeed, but how will we travel - what will we see and hear? What will we be deaf and blind to? How will we embody the Buddha's Way? Each of us makes our Bodhisattva Vows. Each of us has the intention to slow down, to practice compassion and loving kindness, to respond rather than to react.

Throughout our pilgrimage, the bell of mindfulness was 'invited' randomly and we each stopped whatever we were doing, breathed, and said, silently, "Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true self." Slowing down is a practice, especially in the time-poor universe most of us live in - hurry, hurry, hurry - so inured to the pressure of time that we're unaware of the accelerator triggering adrenalin that surges through our bodies. We're too intent on beating the clock, ticking off the to-do list, cutting it fine. What we forget is that under pressure of time, our responses become reactions, and that we may lash out in reaction - forgetting that actions - verbal or physical - which erupt from a place of greed, hatred or ignorance, add to the toxins in our society. We vow to abandon them, but let's not forget what primes them. What conditions give rise to these reactions?

Digging into this question might heal us from the epidemic of sickness in our society arising from time-pressure, exhausting our adrenals and kicking in anxiety and depression. Let's notice the greed arising for experiences or things, knowing how an over-busy life engenders impatience and irritation, and vow to do less, to consume less; on the roads, let's vow to be mindful of Thay's words: 'Why are you in such a hurry? We're all heading for the same destination.'

Honouring Thay's teaching - profoundly simple, gentle and compassionate, let's vow to rest more, to pause, to breathe and to smile. To recognise when we're overdosing on social media and watch less, listen less, read less. The media cycle will continue without us.

Let's vow to recognise when we feel impatient - even when we're doing zazen there may be moments when we think, "I could be doing - whatever - instead of sitting here wasting time on a cushion." Wasting time? Wasting time is impossible because you ARE time. All that we can waste is ourselves, our precious lives. Why would we do that? Each moment of our life is the only time we are actually alive. We have time because we are time.

There is so much to be learnt from Thay's life, his teaching.

After his return to Ta Hieu Temple, Plum Village's website said: 'After resting for two days by the ocean to recover from the journey, Thich Nhat Hanh arrived at Tu Hieu on the afternoon of October 28th, where he was welcomed with a traditional formal procession and the sound of drums and bells. As he entered, he took a moment to reach out and touch the cool stone of the ancient gateway: a seal of arrival and return. Everyone present remained silent as he contemplated the half-moon pond, where he had spent many memorable moments as a young monk, and then made his way to the Buddha hall to pay his respects and offer incense at the ancestral altar.

Thay's health remained fragile but stable. He joined his community in walking meditation at dawn, visiting every corner of this temple that was his home and where he was nurtured as he embarked on his spiritual path. He remained steadfast and energetic in using every breath and every action to build and strengthen the "beloved community of compassion, and to cultivate healing, reconciliation and transformation in his community, society and the world." Thay died on January 22, 2022.

BIRTH AND DEATH

*During many lifetimes, birth and death are present,
giving rise to birth and death.*

*The moment the notion of birth and death arises,
birth and death are there.*

*As soon as the notion of birth and death dies,
real life is born.*

Thich Nhat Hanh³

3 "Birth and Death", from Call Me by My True Names: the Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh, pub. Parallax Press, CA, 1999, (p.168).



photo credits: Chris Eade

1986 Retreat At Burradoo Led By Thich Nhat Hanh

TOP ROW, L - R

Chris Eade, Gary Bates, Stephen Ramsey, John Keating, Ross Bolleter, nun

NEXT ROW DOWN, L - R

?, ?, Cathy Lukeman, Charles Saxton, Gillian Coote, Denise Haslem, ?, ?

NEXT ROW, SECOND FROM BOTTOM, L - R

?, Ben Weiss, Peter Stephens, Kym Lukeman, Jan de , ? (a Quaker) , Greg Somerville, Bernadette Fitzgerald , Tony Coote, Iain Ramage, Annie Bolitho

BOTTOM ROW, L - R

Karen Weiss, Diana Levy, ?, Sister ?, Thich Nhat Hanh, ?, Sister Phuong, ?, Joe Scotland

Image and names courtesy of Diana Levy and Gilly Coote

*News came this morning, your passing away.
White clouds floating, peaceful sky.
My heart wept - gentle breath - peace returned.*

*Your immense love, vast as ocean,
Touched us, our heart opened,
You showed us love without boundaries,
"Human is not our enemy".*

*You walked with us into the samsara realm,
and each step is a wonder.*

*You taught us, the miracle is walking,
and each step is a wonder.*

*You took our hands, taking a stroll,
In the ultimate dimension, while in this worldly life.
And, suffering fall, turning into Bodhi seeds of peace and joy.*

You showed us the forest of sutras, where wisdom's illuminated.

*At the faraway time on Vulture Peak,
You gently spoke: "Let's breathe my dear",
the words I kept till my last breath.*

*Birth and Death, only a game of hide and seek.
Saying goodbye today, we'll meet again
I'd humbly ask to be your student for one more lifetime.*

from Gilly:

I made "The Awakening Bell" in the mid-80's when Thich Nhat Hanh and Sister Phuong visited Australia, and it was then I met Mai Than Truong, who was a long-term student of Thay's since she'd lived in Vietnam. Mai is a Tiep Hien teacher (Thay's sangha) and lives in Sydney; she shared this poem for Thay with me after he died and I asked if it could go into MMC; she said yes, so here it is. Her Dharma name is Chan Luong. If you want to get in touch with Mai, her email is: mai.thantrong@gmail.com

THE FATHER OF MINDFULNESS ARRIVES AT 'BODHI FARM'

Subhana Barzaghi

Beloved Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh passed away peacefully at his root temple Tu Hien Temple, in Hue, Vietnam at the age of 95 on January 22, 2022. Tributes, poems and stories of Thich Nhat Hanh keep flowing from his many followers throughout the world. Like many other people he touched me deeply and transformed my life.

Thầy (Vietnamese for teacher) was a world-renowned spiritual leader, prolific author, poet, relentless peace activist. As a pioneer of engaged Buddhism, Thầy adopted the slogan, "There is no Way to Peace, Peace is the Way". This slogan represents the way of non-violence where the means and the goal of environmental, social and peace activism are not separate. Thầy walked with peace, lived, breathed and embodied the way of peace. Among Buddhists Thầy was considered second only to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in the scope of his global influence. He authored 100 books and founded nine monasteries and dozens of affiliated practice centres around the world.

Thầy was also known as the 'Father of Mindfulness' as he popularized mindfulness around the world. Decades ago, news of Thich Nhat Hanh's peaceful footsteps had reached down to the rainforests of 'Bodhi Farm'. The audacious idea of inviting a Zen master to an alternative (hippie) spiritual community began with a small band of dharma friends; Gai Longmuir, Ian Gaillard, Iain Ramage and myself. Encouraged by our Zen teacher Robert Aitken Roshi who was a peace activist and on the Board of Buddhist Peace Fellowship we set up the first BPF chapter in Australia in the lush sub-tropical forests of the Northern Rivers region of N.S.W.

In the summer months of 1986, under the umbrella of BPF our letter of invitation was sent off into the blue. Six weeks later we received a response from Plum Village in south France. Standing and feasting on mulberries under its generous laden arched branches we opened the long-awaited letter. Our lips were stained with purple juice and excitement. To our utter surprise the venerable Zen master said yes! That Yes, sent many hearts ablaze and his presence left a profound impression that rolled on through the decades.

I sighed with relief when a small brown robbed Vietnamese Zen monk finally stepped onto 'Bodhi Farm'. It was only within a hair's breadth before his departure from Paris that his visa to Australia had been granted. Everything had been organised at our end but we waited with baited breath for the approval. The fraught visa process was because Thầy had been a peace activist during the war in Vietnam and held out a hand to both the allied forces and the communist party. He refused to take sides and instead advocated for peace not war. The South Vietnamese government however deemed him a traitor for his anti-war activism and refusal to condone the war on communism. In the 1960's he was exiled and banished from Vietnam. Unbeknownst to our organising team in the bush the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs still had a classified file on him and were suspicious of his intentions and reasons for coming to Australia.

Our fledgling team flew into action and the visit grew from organising a simple retreat at 'Bodhi Farm' to an Australia wide tour. Thankfully the tour was sponsored by members of the Quaker Society who lent their support to the visa application. The Quakers announced,

“The Vietnamese monk can come as long as he doesn’t talk about politics and just concentrates on Buddhist meditation and peace.” Gilly Coote from the Sydney Zen Centre then picked up the flame of Engaged Buddhism and together with the Quakers organised a Zen retreat and public talks in Sydney.

What emerged as a highly significant part of Thich Nhat Hanh’s interest in visiting Australia was his intention to connect to the Vietnamese Buddhist communities in Fairfield, Bankstown and Liverpool in Sydney. Peace activist and award-winning documentary filmmaker Gilly Coote harnessed her talents into making a film called, “Awakening Bell.” Gilly said, she was inspired to make a film when her heart was broken open by a story. She was moved to make a documentary about Thich Nhat Hanh and sister Cao Ngoc Phuong’s plight after hearing their painful stories as refugees. What struck Gilly was not only their story of survival from the horrors of war but their potent teachings in how to heal and respond to such trauma. In Sydney Gilly filmed Thầy meeting the Vietnamese communities. The refugees had often unresolved tensions between those who left Vietnam before 1975 and the boat people who left after 1975. Thầy’s mission was to help reconcile some of those differences and to teach those who suffered how to free themselves from painful memories. We felt heartened to know that we had played a small part in facilitating Thầy’s deep wish to reconnect with his Vietnamese Sangha. Gilly’s moving documentary focuses on this impressive pair and their Engaged Buddhist philosophy which teaches that one must find peace within oneself in order to achieve peace in the world.

When Thầy and his entourage landed on ‘Bodhi Farm’ the Vietnamese women immediately felt right at home in the lush sub-tropical rainforest as it reminded them of their own tropical home back in Vietnam. A welcoming dinner was arranged in my humble abode. Seven people sat on colourful cushions on the hardwood floor and squeezed around my

small handcrafted oddly shaped wooden table. The women had spotted a papaya tree in the orchard and wanted to add this delicacy to a Vietnamese soup dish. With a long-handled rack, I managed to knock down a green papaya. I was puzzled. What would they do with an unripe papaya? An array of organic salad greens and veggies from my garden sat alongside dishes with Asian sauces wafting with exotic fragrances. To my astonishment the green papaya soup actually tasted delicious. It was the only thing that my daughter remembered about the meal.

After dinner, stacks of plates were piled up all over my tiny kitchen bench. I was about to start cleaning up when Thầy stood up and insisted on washing the dishes. At first, I refused as he was my honoured guest and I the host but sister Phuong interrupted me and said, Thầy really likes washing the dishes. I thought, ‘Who am I to refuse if this Zen master wants to wash dishes?’ He mindfully picked up every plate as if it was a precious antique and slowly, lovingly washed it clean. While the rest of the guests sat and chatted over tea, I kept glancing over at the sink to see Thầy still washing dishes an hour later. I had never seen anyone stand so patiently, enjoying washing the dishes; as if the sink with its warm soapy water was a temple altar.

The role of guest and host were suddenly reversed. There was no irritation, no impatience to get the task over and done with. This was the first humble teaching of mindfulness that night. There was no fanfare, no chanting to announce a dharma talk other than just washing the dishes mindfully.

Washing the Dishes

Washing the dishes

is like bathing a baby Buddha

The profane is the sacred

Everyday mind is Buddha’s mind.

The retreat went ahead in the midst of the community as the ordinary daily activities of family life swirled around it. With a loving buzzing energy our hexagonal meeting hall was transformed into a meditation hall, the kitchen cleaned, the stainless bench sparkled and the storage room was stacked full of boxes laden with fruit and vegies. Cushions of all shapes and colour were arranged in rows on the polished wood floorboards and spilled out onto the wide 12ft veranda. It was not like a formal zen sesshin with black zafus all neatly lined up in rows but rather a colourful hippie makeshift Zen dojo. The large sliding wood doors on three sides of the hexagon building were pulled back opening out to a grand vista of Blue Knob to the north and the Border rangers in the distance. Our much-loved two-storey communal building had been transformed into a Temple hub of mindfulness.

Thầy's suggestion to invite the children to join the retreat raised many parental eyebrows. I could not imagine how a rowdy bunch of free roaming, active, boisterous youngsters could even sit still for 5 mins, little own sit a 7 day retreat! To make them feel welcome, Thầy made sure that each child had their very own meditation cushion and presented the children with their small meditation bell. They laughed and jostled to take turns to ring the bell at the end of their 10min sit. The parents were utterly amazed that they would sit still for 10mins counting their breath! When the bell went, they bowed, hands in prayer position, tiptoed quietly to the stairs and then their little bodies bursting with energy unable to contain themselves any longer, bounded down the stairs, giggling and ran out into the garden to play. Little chuckles erupted from the adults too as we continued to sit for the rest of the meditation period. The silence was punctuated by the children's laughter out on the lawn and the cacophony of bird song serenaded us from the adjacent forest.

Thich Nhat Hanh's foreign Vietnamese name was a mouthful for the young children to pronounce and remember so they made up a chant and nicknamed him, 'think-no-harm'. You could hear their high-pitched little voices chanting, "Think-no-harm, think-no-harm, think-no-harm" along the paths through the forest.

Thầy introduced a range of mindfulness practices which had us engaging with one another rather than the normal solitary, silent practice on retreat. The bell of mindfulness rang periodically sounding through the forest and echoing down the valley inviting one to pause whatever one was doing. Pausing, we put down the garden tools, the hammers, and the cooking utensils and breathed mindfully. The bell invited us to let go all our worries and concerns, listen deeply and become one with the sound of the bell.

A bell of mindfulness

*listen, listen, listen
this wonderful sound,
brings me back,
to my true home.*

Greeting ritual

*I bow and honour the space
and the light within you.
Body, heart and mind are one
a lotus for you, a Buddha-to-be.*

A greeting ritual brought brimming smiles to the faces of young and old as we practiced bowing to one another on the path. This was vastly different from the silent retreat norms where a practitioner refrains from the normal social greetings and sinks into noble silence. Although we had lived side-by-side one another for years; eating communal meals and working in the garden together we had often passed each other on the path preoccupied with an endless list of things to do. While hugs were plentiful, the children beamed with

delight, smiling ear to ear when the adults stopped and bowed to them and they in turn bowed to us. Mindfulness was paired with heart-warming smiles bringing us home to our love and connection with one another. Thầy emphasised that each moment of daily life is an opportunity to arrive in the present moment. I realised that he had never left the monastery; his life was a monastery without walls. He breathed and lived mindfulness from the moment he woke up until he fell asleep under a blanket of rest.

Creating Gathas is another mindfulness practice that lightens the heart, a joyful exercise in both meditation and short pithy poetry. Gathas are short verses that you recite to yourself as you mindfully attend to the daily activities of; washing up, driving the car, turning on the tap or washing the clothes. Inspired utterances are threaded through our long Zen lineage where senior monks and nuns were asked to write a poem about their realisations. Gathas were written on stickers and I posted them by my bed, above the kitchen sink and next to the 12-volt light switch. These simple reminders of turning on the light of present-moment-awareness cut through my automatic habits and the incessant internal blah, blah, blah of the mind. The practice of mindfulness had transformed my ordinary daily activities into the everyday sublime.

WAKING UP

*Waking up this morning, I smile.
I am the whip-bird in the forest
both call and response
I am the ancient chorus
that sings my heart awake.*

DRINKING TEA

*This cup of tea mindfully held
in my two hands
sip by sip, nourishing body and mind
I dwell happily
in the present moment.*

TURNING ON THE LIGHT

*Turning on the light
I see things clearly as they are.
The clear light nature of mind
is the source of all happiness.*

BRUSHING YOUR TEETH

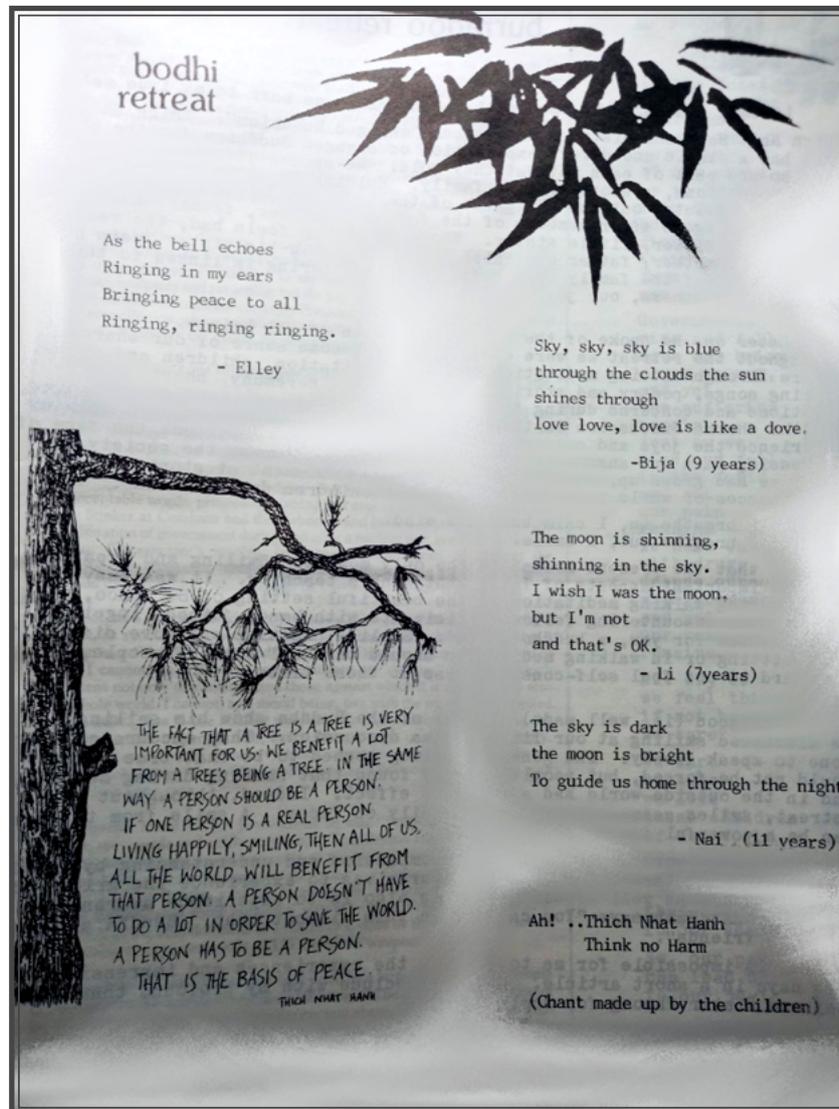
*Brushing my teeth and rinsing my mouth
I vow to speak purely and lovingly.
fragrant with gentle speech,
a flower blooms in the garden of my heart.*

Opposite page: Haiku's and poems from the children and Thich Hhat Hanh on the Bodhi Retreat.
Published in Buddhist Peace Fellowship - Sweet Potato Journal, edited by Gai Longmuir, summer edition 1987.

An unforgettable memory was when Thầy lead the daily walking meditation through the forested trails. At least ten children and twenty-five adults gathered around Thầy as he addressed us in his straw Chinese sledge hat that shaded his long brown loose monastic robes. Under a bright sky, Thầy gave instructions in walking meditation.

“The practice of mindful walking is a profound and pleasurable way to deepen your connection with your body and the earth. As you breathe and take a mindful step, you come back to your true home. Many of us walk for the sole purpose of getting from

one place to another. Thầy invited us to imagine that if you were walking to a sacred place, you would walk quietly and take each gentle step with reverence. I propose that we walk this way every time we walk on the earth. The earth is sacred and when we walk, we make each step a step of peace. If we walk like that, then every step will be grounding, every step will be nourishing. Each mindful breath, each mindful step reminds us that we are alive on this beautiful planet. The earth is our true home and it is always there, beneath us and around us. When you walk mindfully you are kissing the earth with your feet". (Lion's Roar - May, 31, 2019)



The children were entranced by this gentle Vietnamese Zen monk and flocked to him, like bees to a honey pot. To the children he said, "When you breathe in you say, yes to this moment, to this earth, when you breathe out you say, thank you to this earth". Thầy held out his arms wide and the children enthusiastically grabbed hold of his hands or hung onto a piece of his long brown-sleeved robe. Slowly, he started walking mindfully down the dirt road, the children hanging onto him anywhere they could. They were all joined together as if one body was flowing silently down the road. In that moment, like a pied piper; the little ones followed in his peaceful footsteps. Thirty-five years later my daughter Bija remembered walking with Thầy and said, she was happy to join him because he had a kind and a joyful presence.

The adults stood spellbound. I shook my head in disbelief, tears streamed down my face in awe. I had been a pre-school teacher for the Wallace Road Outreach children's

program and had eight children four and five-year-olds under my care at times but I could never manage to organise a group of children to be calm, attentive and walk quietly. Mesmerised the adults followed in behind as the whole community walked mindfully together for forty minutes; it was a sight to behold. It was as if we became one flowing, communal body walking through the gardens, past the avocado orchard, along the dirt road towards the mud brick house. We paused and bowed at flowers along the way, then turned and walked back under the canopy of the trees refreshed by the wonder of walking.

The mind can go in a thousand directions
But on this beautiful path, I walk in peace.
With each step, a gentle wind blows
With each step, a flower blooms.

The community gathered in the hall each afternoon to listen to this brown robed monk's dharma talk. As each person bowed at the threshold, we collectively transformed the hall into a sacred space, a communal dojo. The children sat on the floor in the front row giggling expectantly, like a special play was about to begin. Thầy told stories and Buddhist parables to the children for the first 15 mins. I was so impressed when he calmly persevered as the little ones wriggled and fidgeted but eventually sat still: all ears. This was followed by a dharma talk for 45mins to the adults. His capacity to speak to adults and children reminded me of the stories of how the Buddha taught the four-fold Sangha and was skilfully able to communicate the dharma teachings according to the audience's different levels of understanding. Thầy conveyed profound teachings in such simple ways. A flower and some garbage lay on his cushion. As he held it up, he asked us to consider the rose and the garbage. "Without the vegetable wastes which turn to compost that provides the rich elements and nutrients for the rose bush we would not have the exquisite, colourful, perfumed rose. So we learn to accept and value the garbage

equally with the rose. The rose is on her way to being garbage and the garbage is on her way to being a rose". My heart trembled and opened with these simple yet profound teachings of inter-being, viewing reality as an interconnected whole. It was if the trees, children, birds, clouds and flowers tumbled inside and sat on the cushion with me.

The entrance to the communal garden was lined with wooden compost boxes layered with dark, rotting matter full of bountiful microbes and nutrients, I paused and looked at them in a new light. The benefits of making compost are well known but to be honest forking, turning over and shovelling pungent, smelling rich compost into beds was a job that I never fully enjoyed. Viewing, the compost, on its way to sweeter pastures; loved up by leafy greens, crinkly silver beet, lettuce, bok-choy and a gazillion juicy red cherry tomatoes made it seem more like a mutually happy loving partnership.

The metaphor of the rose and garbage wasn't lost on me. I could see the relevance to my own inner life. The idea that turning over my difficult painful experiences and working with my shadow could then become the fertile manure for transformation. It fitted with one of my favourite slogans, 'No mud... no lotus'. However, simply unearthing the dark sticky feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy fed by the rusted on old beliefs of never being good enough just seemed to leave me feeling miserable. Falling into that familiar, painful, dark hole, that usually took me days to climb out of, needed something more than turning it over in my mind. The teachings offered a way to transform those painful memories of abandonment into the fertile manure for transformation. My rose bush had its thorns, its protective defences. This compassionate practice offered a path to sweeter pastures.

One of the most powerful dharma talks Thầy gave was a commentary on

the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra which embodies the profound wisdom teachings of emptiness. While these teachings were deeply familiar to me and I had tasted the insubstantiality and emptiness of all things, Thay's simple, clear and heart felt expression brought new life to this ancient sutra.

Famously, he held up a piece of paper and asked, "If you are a poet, you can see there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper? Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either, so we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are." Thay went on to explain that, "When Avalokiteshvara, says that our piece of paper is empty, he means it is empty of a separate independent existence. It cannot be just by itself alone, we inter-be. Avalokiteshvara looked deeply into the five skandhas; form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness and discovered they are empty yet full of everything in the cosmos".

Thầy finished with a prayer, "May the depth of your heart and the heart sutra become one". I was moved deeply my heart overflowing with gratitude. I lay down on the grassy slope above the orchard and wept. Tears of grief and love flowed together. The earth held me tenderly and bore witness to my heart broken open yet whole under a vast clear sky. The heart sutra had penetrated down to my marrow and overflowed fastening itself to every living thing.

Sister Phuong a nun and wise teacher in her own right noticed my tears and was worried about me but I was simply speechless. I could not express exactly what had touched me so deeply. I silently bowed to thank her for her concern but lay on the grassy hillside staring up at the vast clear sky wondering. Was it Thầy's presence, the perfume of an awakened peaceful heart that had touched me? Or was it just a pure, simple clear exposition of the heart sutra, honed down to its essence that a curious child could easily understand. Or was it his ability to convey that which is beyond words that cannot be defined, yet is felt and known? The heart-felt teachings had bypassed my rational brain. It was as if Thầy was a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara and had jumped straight out of antiquity offering divine utterances.

Meeting Thich Nhat Hanh helped to integrate a split within me between two great Buddhist traditions that I had studied in: Zen and Insight Vipassana meditation from the Theravada tradition. Over the generations there was a confluence of both Zen and Theravada Buddhism in the monasteries in Vietnam. Zen had filtered down from China and Theravada Buddhism had spread through South-East Asia from its birthplace in India to Myanmar, Thailand, across to Cambodia and then into Vietnam. What really surprised me was they were not two separate traditions in Vietnam but were practiced and integrated seamlessly into the monastic training.

Faithfully, I had studied and trained in both traditions in equal measure. Sitting with Thầy, I felt a homecoming, a sense of wholeness, as if my right and left hand had come together in prayer for the first time. I had always intuitively felt that both Zen and Insight Meditation practice were complimentary in nature, but now two chambers of my heart were stitched back together. Thich Nhat Hanh represented the harmonious blended embodiment of both traditions.

There are very few teachers that I have met in my life that I would say are great Bodhisattvas, fully enlightened human beings. Meeting Thầy was like walking into a

force field of peace. He was one of those extraordinary yet ordinary humble human beings with a heart as wide as the world - an embodiment of mindfulness, kindness and compassion. It was an amazing privilege to be in his presence. When an enlightened soul walks this earth with peace the perfume of liberation lingers and inspires.

*I vow to live fully in each moment
to look at all beings
with the eyes of compassion.*



photo: Jillian Ball

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When I gather ideas for making new artworks, I often go into the Australian bush to be open to whatever arises and takes my attention. This involves going slowly with no fixed destination and my little sketch book. I stop and draw a scene or tree that I find interesting. Then I take that drawing and redraw it as a life-size design to make in clay in 3 dimensions. The modelling is also a kind of focused meditation.

The result is an expression of my connection between local trees and my meditation practice: serenity and perception.

Here is a poem and commentary from Dogen, from "Moon in a Dewdrop":

*The moon,
abiding in the midst of serene mind;
billows break into light.*

This poem by Dogen, titled 'On Zen Practice', illustrates the dynamic aspect of concentration in serenity. Moonlight, which appears to be still, shimmers on ocean waves that crash against rocks and burst into droplets. Millions of bits of light burst, spread, and merge with one another.

For Dogen, meditation practice implies this sort of mutual permeation between an individual's practice is part of the practice of all awakened beings, each individual practice is indispensable, as it actualises and completes everyone's activity as a buddha.¹

So, as I interpret it, he's sitting in deep zazen in the moonlight by the ocean. He notices in his serenity, the moon. This is not the actual moon in the sky, rather a metaphor for that serenity of mind, or a glimpse of no-mind.

As the "wave" crashes on the rock nearby, this serene moon-mind is scattered on each droplet - like reflected in the dewdrop - and breaks into light, clarity, enlightenment.

I have been drawn to the beauty and mysterious moonlight for a long time. These images and metaphors choose me, based on my affinity and observations. Then I create them, returning to the source of inspiration. This source is just that - in-breath. Serene mind, clarity.

My version of the billowing light breaking on the rocks, or the moon in a dewdrop are leaves and trees.

Viewing the moon through the gum trees disperses that shimmering light between the leaves. In one of my latest works, "Focus", I depict that source, a symbol of enlightenment, in front - not separate from the actual leaves.

1 Moon in a Dewdrop, Edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, Northpoint Press, 1985

I found this passage from the introduction in Moon in a Dewdrop, relevant:

Dogen suggests that one who can “locate” himself in the timelessness of all moments will also discover the stillness of all movements.

Similarly, size is relative; object is big or small according to one’s viewpoint. If one becomes free of viewpoints, objects are no longer experienced in terms of comparisons.

The timelessness of moments and the stillness of movements further translate to the sizelessness of objects. In this realm, there is no concept of whole or part . . . In this realm of nonduality, all things have buddha nature.

It is also said that all things are buddha nature. In the same manner, all things are buddha-dharma; all buddhas are realization.²

So having created my art from that mysterious source, inspiration, inner core, I can analyse and discuss how they came about. Not the other way around.



Ancient Wisdom – Tree holds the Moon, 2022

Introducing each other to the vast connection of energies, held together for us to observe, experience, and become.

*Here I am –
experienced, wise, clear.*

2 Moon in a Dewdrop, Edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, Northpoint Press, 1985



Listen, 2022

Scribbly gum, Royal National Park, Kirrawee.

Based on an actual tree (see photo below), this scribbly gum has endured suffering but ultimately survived. Its regrowth has caused a burnt-out hole creating a window into its history, its regeneration, not hiding but announcing the empty hole. This hole and its growing trunk are metaphors for form and emptiness as espoused in the Heart Sutra. The scribbles on the surface make up the word "Listen".

Form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form.

Hole and trunk make up this tree.

Distilled into one word – Listen



Focus, 2022

Leaves appear grouped as a circle

Looking up through the branches is the moon, yet it appears in front of the leaves, dissolving apparent distance and size.

Or is it a glimpse of leaf litter on the path?

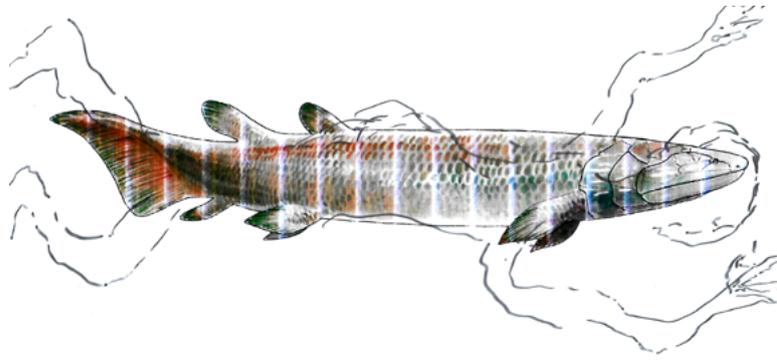
Look up through the leaves, the moon.

Look down on the path, the moon.

Light is sprinkled throughout.

THICH NHAT HAHN'S TEACHINGS DELVE INTO OUR INTERCONNECTEDNESS WITH ALL...
HIS FALLING AUTUMN LEAVES STORY - UNFOLDED - TO THIS...

<i>I am...</i>	<i>I am</i>
<i>The ocean I</i>	<i>other</i>
<i>swim,</i>	<i>swimmers, –</i>
<i>the ocean is in...</i>	<i>Surging...</i>
<i>the body,</i>	<i>presences</i>
<i>The molluscs</i>	<i>rippling,</i>
<i>I see through</i>	<i>I am rocks,</i>
<i>my goggles,</i>	<i>seaweed,</i>
<i>each day....</i>	<i>tiny fish</i>
<i>they are in</i>	<i>in schools...</i>
<i>this body....</i>	<i>in me,</i>
<i>I am in ...</i>	<i>Crabs scabbling</i>
<i>Molluscs,</i>	<i>on rocks...</i>
<i>I am –</i>	<i>Nodilitterinas,</i>
<i>Clouds</i>	<i>chitons, octopuses...</i>
<i>billowing,</i>	<i>Periwinkles,</i>
<i>Waves</i>	<i>bream, starfish...</i>
<i>splashing,</i>	
<i>exploding,</i>	<i>Almost 80 years now,</i>
<i>bursting against</i>	<i>body</i>
<i>rocks..</i>	<i>energy</i>
<i>I am waves.</i>	<i>diminishes...</i>
<i>I have a</i>	<i>will wear out.</i>
<i>Dharma name</i>	<i>Perhaps,</i>
<i>Of waves.</i>	<i>something I</i>
<i>Kyo Rho</i>	<i>touch</i>



*will bear
A finger
caress....*

*Thich Nhat Hahn says,
nothing dies,
nothing is born...
Autumn leaves
joyfully dance,
float
Transforming
they nourish,
enliven,
our Earth, a tree.*

*Once, when
with
Uncle Max,
Dulumunmun –
Yuin Elder,
a Jewish group,
someone asks
Uncle Max,
“Do your people have
ancestors, like us?”
Uncle Max responds,
“Yes indeed,
we do!
And our ancestors
include
Wombats, kangaroos,*

*birds, fishes,
rocks, grasses, trees”.*

*Canowindra, NSW...
Our Ancestors --
360 million years ...
Devonian period,
inland rivers,
lakes teemed
with fish.
Gondwana
dries,
thousands of fish die,
in billabong,
silted, buried,
millions of years.
Mid-twentieth century,
bulldozer-operator
turns
rock, buried
hundreds of
million years.
beekeeper,
sees significance
of this
fossil
fish
impregnated
rock ...
Years later,
80 tonnes of*

Opposite page: *Fish Ancestor*, image by Caroline Josephs

*fossils
unearthed as
Canowindra
realises
profound
import
of this find!!
Canowindra
community
excavate
four thousand
fish fossils
some have
fins with
fingers
like ours!
My own moment of
illumination
I am fish!
Linked
through ages in ways
undreamed
David Attenborough
visits Canowindra –

I am thrilled.
fossil fish—
my own ancestor.
My mortality
sinks
to*

*dot in ocean.
My fish friends,
my fish stories...
Everything
interconnected.
Presence pervades.

There is body
mortality...
near-death
experiences
in my 70s.
Nearing 80 years
now....re-drafting
will,
a late-life
marriage.
The practicality of
the act...
brings
mortality.

Recalling our
last meeting
With my aged
mother
In hospital bed
after
heart attack.
We speak*

*Of my older daughter's
pregnancy...my mum
says, "It's thrilling!"
I turn to go...
she waves me out
tiny figure in the
white bed, saying,
'Life goes on!'
I did not
know then...
These were
last words
ever
She spoke
to
me...*

*Thich Nhat Hahn
foreseeing
his dying,
goes back
to homeland –
Vietnam,
His last days there,
saying to
sangha,
"Do not build
a stupa
for me or
put my body
there..."*

*I will not be
inside it.
I will not be
outside it.
Do not seek me there".*

THIS LIFE
LIVING AND DYING IN AN EMPTY
AND COMPLETE WORLD

Brendon Stewart

Pablo signs off his emails with this wonderful reminder of Thich Nhat Hanh when he speaks of miracles; *the "miracle" he says "is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth, dwelling deeply in the present moment and feeling truly alive."* There is a release in this, a release to accept reality. The brilliance of the earth, our earth, is the brilliance of the only conceivable paradise: there is nowhere else to go.

5 GOOD IDEAS:

Live true to yourself

Don't work so hard

Have the courage to express your feelings

Stay in touch with friends

Choose to be happy

Approaching reality isn't straight forward, there is much to resolve. How best to approach these problems? Commentators over the centuries set the story up as a journey towards 'wisdom'. Jung for example called this Individuation. Christians might call it coming to God and accepting Christ in your life, Buddhist speak of it as Waking Up. No journey is ever the same; Heraclitus of Ephesus (another old chestnut) spoke of never being able to put your feet in to the same river twice. While we share many things with our human friends we each make this journey alone. We are born alone, even though our mums are right there too, and we die alone, with luck we may have loved ones near-by. Along the way we are young, strong and physically powerful, later possibly confused and anxious about losing that power some call this the mid-life crisis!! then we are old, weak physically yet hopefully wise and funny!

Our personal journey is time based and we engage with ever so many different insights throughout our life. We do not have the same experience or understanding of religion, of love, of happiness, of sadness, of anger, of politics of justice consistently throughout our lives.

Good spiritual and psychological health depends on being able to be as imaginative as possible with this journey.

I think this poem has been offered before, I can't remember who shared but thanks, here it is again.

*Thank you my lifelong afternoon
late in this season of no age
thank you for my windows above the rivers
thank you for the true love you brought me to
when it was time at last and for words
that come out of silence and take me by surprise
and have carried me through the clear day
without once turning to look at me
thank you for friends and long echoes of them
and for those mistakes that were only mine
for the homesickness that guides the young plovers
from somewhere they loved before
they woke into it to another place
they loved before they ever saw it
thank you whole body and hand and eye
thank you for sights and moments known
only to me who will not see them again
except in my mind's eye where they have not changed
thank you for showing me the morning stars
and for the dogs who are guiding me*

William Merwin

This MMC is honouring the life of the great teacher Thich Nhat Hanh whose writings, practice and teaching have been a beacon to many, worldwide over decades

I have had a number of teachers on the way, both in an official capacity and unofficial, some Christian teachers, some Buddhist, and some neither. Some who knew they were my teachers and some who did not, but all who I have loved and who have taught me wisdom and compassion.

Sometimes I have known a person who says or does something that makes think, in the words of the song, "I must remember this." because what they say points to truth and enters my heart. My Aunty Jessie was such a one. I remember her saying "the older I get the less I know" when she had lived for many years and had very few still to come. She was the most thoughtful, wise and non judgemental of people and although she said this maybe 30 years ago I have never forgotten it. And one day, when she was in a lot of pain, I commented on how difficult life was, but she would have none of it. "There are always pleasures in living" she announced when dying looked like a good option.

Just a week ago a good friend and teacher died. He was my piano teacher. I knew him in that capacity for around 10 years. As a teacher myself I have some understanding of what makes a teacher 'good'. Ability to relate to the student, and tailor to their ability, enthusiasm for the subject, and a tendency to encourage the student to grow. I had learned piano as a child, it was my passion, then as younger adult, but that particular teacher made me feel hopeless so I stopped. Learning with Dave was a pleasure. It was fun.

I wanted to play Bach and I did. For 10 years I played some toccatas, a fugue or two and some of the French Suites. It gave me delight. Bach I found enriches, enlivens the mind. My playing was impaired by a weak left arm, a result of polio as a baby. I once said something to Dave about the curse of a disability when my left arm refused to cooperate. But he countered that maybe disability was a blessing. I had never thought about my polio arm as being a blessing, but that early illness has in some ways been definitive for me, in who I am. Dave himself was cursed or blessed depending on interpretation, having been born with cystic fibrosis. Like my Aunty, however his life was a demonstration that there are always pleasures in living. His

interests were numerous, music, teaching, composing, food, swimming, sewing, painting, gardening. He loved his wife, his dogs, his students, his family, his friends, the mountains and the beach. There are always pleasures in living and things and people worth loving.

Three years ago he had a lung transplant and there were many medical complications, which eventually I think, led to his death. When I visited him in hospital after his transplant he said something I have never forgotten, "I have stopped being critical of people. You never know what they have gone through." He had been in hospital with people close to death and some had not survived.

But he loved life and looked forward with optimism. A week before he died I visited him, in hospital. He looked very ill, jaundiced but was going home, he said, and getting ready. Exercising, planning, appreciating. I've got the best room in the hospital he enthused, (he knew, he'd occupied a few). It was a room with a view of trees and playing fields of Sydney University. But he was imagining sitting in a sunny garden when he went home, happy. Bring me some of those biscuits when you come next, he requested. "I will see you very soon" I promised "and bring those biscuits." But I did not. I got Covid and Dave got sepsis and died within a week.

Yesterday I watched his funeral on line rather than in person as I was just over Covid and there would be immune compromised people at the service. One thing his wife said, she said many actually, but this one I mention. She noted, 'He never watched tv, followed social media, or listened to podcasts.' I don't mention this to criticise those who do, but to note that he didn't waste time. He was relatively young to die but had lived a wealth of life.

For me his life was a lesson in how to live, a demonstration of not frittering away the time we have and remaining focussed on what matters. On the funeral notice there was the statement, under a photo, David Haywood, "YOU MATTERED" As a zen student, I am grateful to all my special teachers both in our zen tradition or not and especially at this time and in this little piece to my Aunty Jessie and to Dave whose lives have added wisdom and meaning to my life on this earth and who mattered..

The Case

“Is God real?”, Little Heart asks.

“Yes”, replies Old Man.

“Where?”

Old Man tickles her. “Here!”

The Verse

This very mind is Buddha.

This very body is Buddha.

Old Man performs an exorcism

As Little Heart squeals and squirms.

Reflecting on Thich Nhat Hahn's legacy, I've been struck by how brilliantly he took Buddhist practice back to an early and radically simple form, making it accessible to a wide public. The core of his teachings that centre on the breath, foundational to meditation practice, derive from the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*¹, found in the Buddha's Middle Length Discourses. Here the Buddha instructs his disciples in sixteen different methods of inhaling and exhaling which incorporate the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The first method is the basis: *Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.* It is within the reach of most people to take this initial step and confidently make it their own. Settled in the fact of breath itself, one can move on: *I am breathing in a long breath. I am breathing in a short breath.* And then: *I am breathing in and making my whole body calm and at peace. I am breathing out and making my whole body calm and at peace. I am breathing in and feeling joyful. I am breathing out and feeling joyful.* The methods expand so that as one breathes one focuses awareness respectively on body, feelings, mind and objects of mind. Thus a person can remain present and at ease with all dimensions of being,

For the benefit of contemporary practitioners, Thay condensed and updated these instructive statements into short verses, simple and easy to recall. He then further shortened them into memorable key words: *In/out, Deep/Slow, Calm/Ease, Smile/Release, Present Moment/Wonderful Moment.* And he went on to create his own cogent expressions and gathas.

Listen, listen. This wonderful sound reminds me of my true self.

Some found their way into rather incantatory tunes.

I have arrived, I am home, in the here, in the now; I have arrived, I am home, in the here, in the now.

I am solid, I am free; I am solid, I am free.

In the ultimate I dwell; In the ultimate, I dwell.

Sue Bidwell recently presented me with a chant much loved in Plum Village, *Namo Valokitesvara*. As she sang, her right hand extended very slowly out into a mudra which circled around, opened and came back to her person. I might say as a gloss that these two words honour the Bodhisattva of compassion. That repeating them attunes us to the

1 The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing, with commentary by Thich Nhat Hahn, trans. Annabel Laity (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988).

movement of compassion in the world of suffering. That the mudra portrays compassion's embrace, uniting self and others. But this is extra. Sue's offering was a meditation in itself. You can see and hear the Plum Village community chanting *Namo Valokitesvara*². At the centre of the assembly is Thich Nhat Hahn, silent and still and utterly focussed with the hand gesture. He is so completely *there*, speaking peace.

His dharma leads people to find peace in themselves. Case in point....I once had a peaceful dream. I was lying in a bed, breathing. In out in out. Breath in breath out. Calm. There were other beds around me, other people breathing. Then I realised it was an anteroom. Death was the main room. It was okay. There was nothing to fear. We were all breathing and dying. But death had no opposite, no meaning. The Buddha was at home.

Thay's life of loving service continues to inspire. His teaching continues to heal and transform. His delight in the natural world underlines of its preciousness. His dharma ripples wide. Whoever knows what improbable customer will meet this Vietnamese monk? The Buddha is always at home.



Glenys Jackson, 2022. *Walk along the canal, waterlogged grass*

The Three Vows of Refuge:

I take refuge in the Buddha.

Buddhanature pervades the whole universe, but it can seem hidden until we wake up from our dream. I vow to take refuge in this awakening, and to the peace that this brings to the world.

I take refuge in the Dharma.

The truth cannot be expressed in words or contained in thoughts, and yet when I hear the teachings I see that they are a true guide to living. I vow to take refuge in this truth, and to share it with others.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

Nobody can wake up for me, and yet my practice would not be possible without the support of my many companions along the way. I vow to take refuge in the support of the community, our ancestors, birds, stones and rubbish trucks.

The Three Pure Precepts:

I vow to keep all precepts.

Life is full of opportunities to indulge in the unwholesome, which harms my practice and promotes disharmony in the community. I vow to practice the precepts, so that I can steadily keep to the path.

I vow to practice all good Dharma.

Life is full of opportunities to practice the wholesome and promote harmony in the community. I vow to practice good Dharma, so that the Buddha Way can spread far and wide.

I vow Save the many beings.

Innumerable beings suffer in endless cycles of delusion. I vow to liberate the many beings, so that we may all be at ease in life and death

The Ten Grave Precepts:

I take up the way of Not killing.

There is fundamentally no self that can kill or die, yet all beings suffer and fear death. I vow to protect life and act compassionately towards all beings.

I take up the way of Not stealing.

In the ultimate sense nobody owns anything and nothing is owned, yet we suffer when we are deprived of what we consider ours. I vow to take only what is given, and only as much as I need.

I take up the way of Not misusing sex.

There is not a single object in the whole universe, yet when we treat beings as separate from us, they suffer. I vow to treat all beings with kindness and respect and to refrain from harmful sexual behaviour.

I take up the way of Not speaking falsely.

The absolute truth can never be obscured, yet when I deceive another it breeds distrust and bolsters ego. I vow to speak from my deepest truth in a skilful and compassionate way.

I take up the way of Not giving or taking drugs.

My original nature is always clear and unobstructed, yet when I cloud myself with intoxicants it only furthers suffering. I vow to not intoxicate myself or others with drink, drugs or avoidant behaviours.

I take up the way of Not discussing the faults of others.

Stories are fundamentally insubstantial, yet gossiping and labelling limit possibilities and construct self. I vow not to tell the tales that hold us back.

I take up the way of Not praising myself while abusing others.

Nothing ever truly separates us, but arrogance and comparisons create illusions of self and other. I vow to not indulge in attitudes of better or worse, while also honouring our uniqueness.

I take up the way of Not sparing the dharma assets.

The world is full and complete as it is, and yet when I am stingy others are deprived of the opportunity to practice. I vow to practice generosity continuously so that we may all realise the Buddha way.

Not indulging in anger.

Anger is a natural part of being human, yet left unchecked it causes hurt and fear. I vow to practice vulnerability and wisdom, so that defensiveness does not obstruct the true Dharma.

Not defaming the three treasures.

Buddhanature is not subject to defamation or praise, yet unwise words might discourage my brothers and sisters from engaging in the way. I vow to live from the three treasures so that others might experience peace in their lives.

The Three Vows of Refuge:

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the Buddha's awakening and in the all-pervading Buddha nature. I vow to cultivate the clarity to see that these are not separate, and to perceive the complete coming forth of all things.

I take refuge in the Dharma.

I take refuge in the Dharma as teaching and the fullness of the many dharmas that arise and fall. I vow to cultivate the humility to accept and live these completely.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

I take refuge in the Sangha of all Beings. I vow to cultivate the openness and trust to let go into the arms of the Sangha. Although I do not go for Dokusan with the magpies they are still my teachers. Although there are places that I cannot go there is nowhere I am not home.

The Three Pure Precepts:

I vow to keep all precepts.

Each precept contains the others. I vow to practice skilfully and embody the precepts in every moment.

I vow to practice all good Dharma.

The Buddha way is always present. I vow to cultivate the Buddha way in every moment and practice all good Dharma through any hardships.

I vow Save the many beings.

The many beings are already saved and yet suffering continues. I vow to save the many beings through my practice and through my actions in the world.

The Ten Grave Precepts:

I take up the way of Not killing.

Although there is fundamentally no birth or death, birth and death come forth fully in each moment without hindrance, gain or loss. I vow to cultivate the compassion to honour life and death in every form.

I take up the way of Not stealing.

There is no one who owns and nothing to own and yet taking what is not given causes harm. I vow to cultivate the generosity to give freely and not cling to ideas of self and ownership.

I take up the way of Not misusing sex.

Sensuality arises as naturally as the blossoms in spring, and yet its misuse can destroy lives. I vow to honour the integrity of every being and their interconnectivity.

I take up the way of Not speaking falsely.

The fundamental truth cannot be explained and yet communication is essential for human life. I vow to cultivate authenticity in all speech and conduct.

I take up the way of Not giving or taking drugs.

Drugs themselves are neither wholesome nor unwholesome but they become wholesome when used as medicine, and unwholesome when used as intoxicants. Although the Way is always present, the unwholesome use of drugs obscures that fact. I vow to practice skilfully to only give and take drugs when it is wholesome.

I take up the way of Not discussing the faults of others.

Judging another is comparison which hardens the heart and obfuscates one's true nature. I vow to speak in a compassionate way that does not create division between self and other.

I take up the way of Not praising myself while abusing others.

To hold oneself up against another is what creates both self and other. I vow to recognise the illusory nature of difference, that each of us is not better, not worse, always coming forth completely without hindrance.

I take up the way of Not sparing the dharma assets.

Not sparing the Dharma assets is to give and receive without hesitation or obstruction. I vow to not let dualistic thinking obstruct the original Dharma sharing that has been here from the beginning, so I do not put myself in the way of what would otherwise flow freely.

Not indulging in anger.

Clinging to anger perpetuates one's suffering and transmits it to others. I vow to cultivate the spaciousness to recognise anger as a teacher and allow it to soften and reveal the deep caring that lays beneath it.

Not defaming the three treasures.

Not defaming the three treasures is to polish them in everyday life. To polish the Three Treasures is to take refuge in them and sincerely practice the Way. I vow to practice sincerely and honour the Three Treasures in all their manifestations.

The Three Vows of Refuge:

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I vow to actualize and embody the wisdom, compassion and joy of the Buddha in the world - there are no other hands, feet, eyes, ears and words but these, no other mouth, heart and body but this

I take refuge in the Dharma.

I vow to continue to realize and actualize the emptiness of the self in each moment

I take refuge in the Sangha.

I vow to be fully present in each interaction with all brothers and sisters, to face the mirror of the other and act from that place of realization

The Three Pure Precepts:

I vow to keep all precepts.

I vow to continually return to an ever clearer and deeper understanding of the precepts and to act from that understanding. By abandoning evil intentions, thoughts, words and deeds I will not create harm or suffering.

I vow to practice all good Dharma.

I vow to match my actions to my deepening realization and thereby act in accordance with circumstances, but unhindered by circumstances

I vow Save the many beings.

I vow to practice the compassion and wisdom of the Buddha mind through giving freely, through loving kindness, through good conduct, and through identification with and empathy for others

The Ten Grave Precepts:

I take up the way of Not killing.

I vow to practice compassion and reverence for all life and to not wantonly, thoughtlessly, selfishly or harmfully take from any being or from the environment

I take up the way of Not stealing.

I vow not to take anything that is not mine, to give first and freely, and to practice fair share for all

I take up the way of Not misusing sex.

I vow to respect sex and intimacy as most sacred, and so not to grasp or deny myself or others in relationship but honor all in body, spirit and mind

I take up the way of Not speaking falsely.

I vow to abandon the need for self protection and so surrender to the self evident truth in each circumstance

I take up the way of Not giving or taking drugs.

I vow to not give, take or share any substance, action or words that cloud the minds of myself or others

I take up the way of Not discussing the faults of others.

I vow to abandon fear and defenses and so constantly seek, trust and acknowledge the goodness and wholeness of myself and others

I take up the way of Not praising myself while abusing others.

I vow not to give rise to the notion of a separate self by grounding myself in the Buddha way and practicing ever deepening enquiry, acceptance and compassion into the thoughts and actions of myself and others

I take up the way of Not sparing the dharma assets.

I vow to actualize a healing presence, freely given, and to do this through my actions and intentions for the benefit of all beings

Not indulging in anger.

I vow to observe anger arise and to quickly abandon it and to practice acceptance by seeing in others nothing that needs to be other than it is

Not defaming the three treasures.

I vow to actualize as deeply as possible the wisdom, truth and intimacy of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and to respect all true spiritual paths and so encourage others to live a spiritual life in their own way

As a child, I believed that sadness, anger or fear were fleeting emotions that could and should be whisked away with jokes, being a trouper, distracting oneself in worthwhile tasks like caring for others, being a good child or doing school work. The whole of society seemed to reinforce this view; in the embarrassed, disappointed, or scolding looks of teachers and adults, the sports teams and Brownies with their ethos of soldiering on, in the attempts to distract, and the silence. Especially the silence.

In more recent times, suffering is diagnosed and medicated, relegated to the realm of the unhealthy, not to be endured.

I recently found Thich Nhat Hanh's book "No Mud, No Lotus" while spending some time seeking solace at the Nan Tien Temple. On its very first page, he states:

"There are many books and teachers in the world that try to help people be happier. Yet we all continue to suffer. Therefore, we may think 'we are doing it wrong'. Somehow, we are failing at happiness. That isn't true."

It was a warm blanket of comfort from the start.

Underneath, he writes:

"If we learn to see and skilfully engage with both the presence of happiness and the presence of suffering, we will go in the direction of enjoying life more. Every day, we go a little farther in that direction. Eventually we realise that suffering and happiness are not two different things."

I believe he is pointing to the enormous energy taken up in the denial of suffering, in avoidance, distraction, censorship. Also, the additional suffering we cause ourselves with judgement, rumination, justification, blame. When even a portion of that energy can be released, suffering is given space and allowed to just be. While the situation may remain the same, we are living in our own truth, and we have freedom.



Jillian and Rae Ball, June 2022, *Watercolour*

*Four hands
stroke maple leaves.
Water flows.*

*Sweet rain falls on an iron roof
Filling many water tanks
Ageless river gives to the ocean's heart*

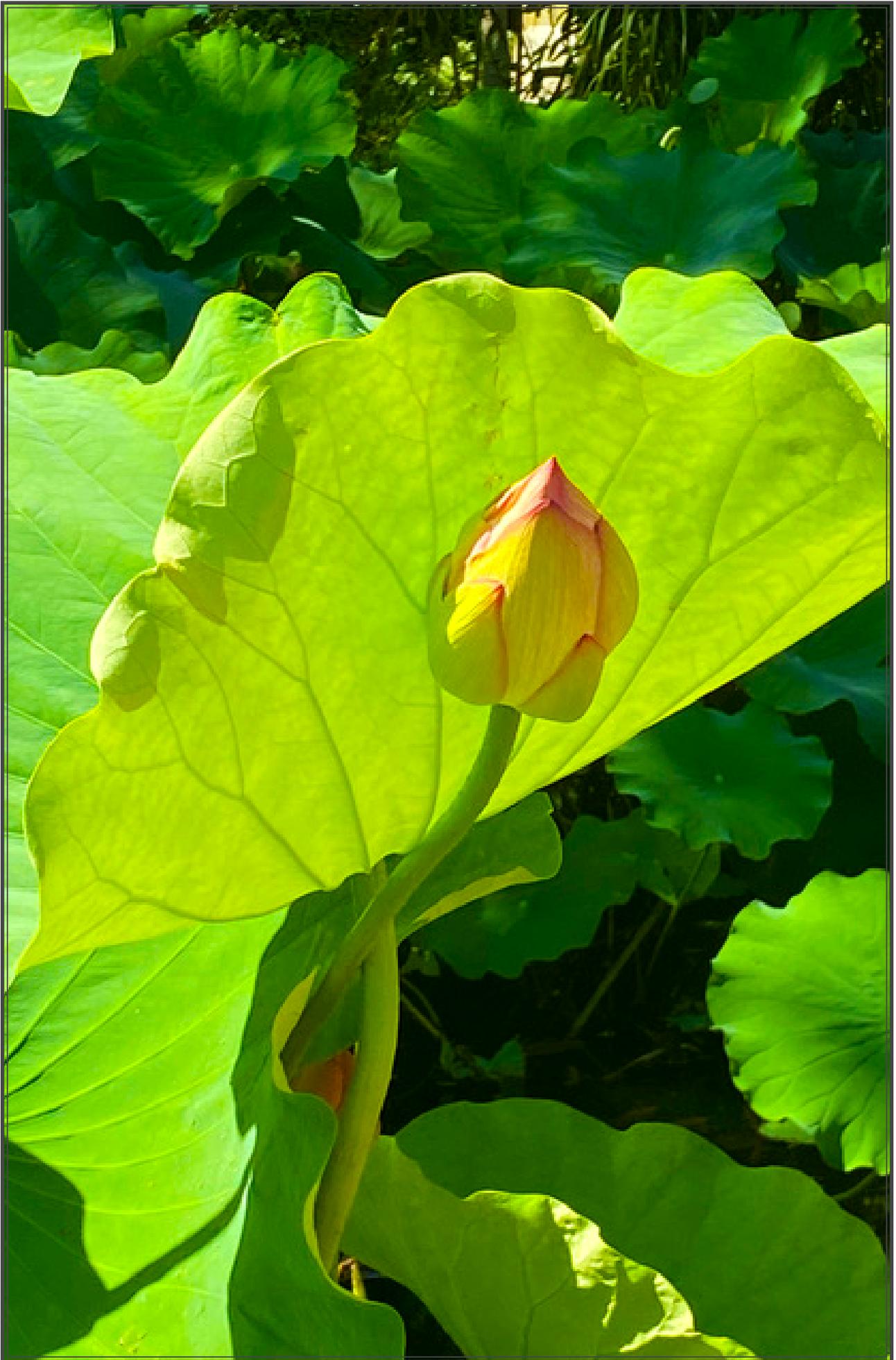


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