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begins
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PALESTINIANS

AND ISRAELIS

LISTENING

TO EACH OTHER

THICH NHAT HANH





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Our Way Out is the Way In
Sister Thai Nghiem

IN 2001, in the hopes of helping heal the ongoing conflict, Thich Nhat Hanh called on his students in the Middle East to come together in Plum Village, France and begin two weeks meditation and mindfulness practice.¹ The retreat inspired us to invite fifteen to thirty Palestinians and Israelis to come to Plum Village every year to be together, to listen to each other, and begin their own internal peace process.

I was privileged to be one of the first participants. Seeing how the practices offered in this book worked for me and for all of us as individuals and as groups, in spite of the difficulties, has strengthened my faith in the path of peace and freedom and inspired my decision to ordain as a nun. I now practice in Plum Village, while my Palestinian and Israeli friends continue to practice regularly together in the midst of the fire.

As a young nun, the most inspiring thing for me is to know that my real freedom is in my hands because I have a choice. We do not have to wait for anyone or anything in order to make the choice of living in peace and of living a life of understanding and love. If I want war to end, if I want nonviolence to be realized in my life, I am the one who has to stop fighting and put an end to the battle inside of me. Transforming my own mind is what will make the difference. Freedom depends on my own thoughts and actions. This is the kind of freedom that the practice of Plum Village is offering to us. Our way out, as Palestinians and Israelis, is the way in.

The Palestinian-Israeli groups who have come to Plum Village have been able to listen wholeheartedly, even when suffering is being shared, without judging and without commenting. In doing so, they have been able to create brotherhood and sisterhood, a true holy land in which our care for each other is revealed and we are able to nourish our compassion and understanding. It has been a challenging process. We have had to look in ourselves and embrace our pain and overcome suspicion.

Like everyone else on this earth, I long to have a home in which I feel safe. It is in human kindness, the kindness that is

in me and in you, that I find this safety. That is my refuge and it is everywhere, even if sometimes it is hidden from my eyes. I am learning to touch it and cultivate it more and more in myself and in others. When I lose trust in myself and in others it is because I forget that this kindness is there.

For true transformation, we need to work not only on the individual level but on the collective one as well. Both the individual and the collective consciousness need healing. This may take a long time, and the effects of some of our actions will only be visible in the long run. Nevertheless, we can start doing something right now to stop the violence and to support others in doing so too. We can start by expressing clearly that no act of violence or oppression has ever brought peace or happiness to anyone, neither the oppressed nor the oppressor. We should not be afraid to take a clear stand. But if, while taking a clear stand, we find ourselves excluding any of our human brothers and sisters—whoever they may be and whatever party or nationality they may belong to—then we have already failed in our efforts to live in peace. No one should be excluded from our peace process.

The Palestinian and Israeli friends that have practiced in Plum Village were not alone in their process of individual and collective healing. The international community played a significant role not only by bearing witness but also by practicing together with us and truly listening. Without the presence of the international community, the process would not be complete. We all carry the responsibility for the fire in the Middle East. As Israelis and Palestinians, individually and collectively, we should learn to take refuge in the help of the international community.

If we want to offer peace and space to others we need to cultivate them within ourselves first, because we cannot offer what we do not have. This book shares some insight into the roots of suffering as well as suggesting methods of returning to ourselves and of cultivating that inner peace. Palestinians and Israelis also share personal stories of how they have put those methods into practice and experienced their own transformation.

In this book, you will find inspiring words and practices for peace. Cultivating these practices will help you to bring light

to exterior and interior places that are darkened with despair. It may also help you to reach out to others who may not have made their choice yet. May this book help inspire all of us to choose peace and to be peace.

Introduction

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, groups of Palestinians and Israelis have come to Plum Village to practice mindfulness. When they first come, they are often suspicious of each other. They can't look at each other with sympathetic eyes. But with the practice and the support of the community, they are able to calm their suffering, their anger, their suspicion, and their hate. After several days, they are able to see that the other group also suffers. It takes time.

When we see that another person also cries and is in a state of despair, we see him or her as a human being, and suddenly the level of hate, fear, and suspicion in us decreases. We feel better. Now we can look at the other person with more understanding and compassion. There are brothers and sisters in the practice, whether they are monastics or laypeople, who know how to help.

We don't always have the wisdom of the Buddha, of God, of Allah, of Mohammed, or of Jesus. That is why practicing mindful breathing, mindful walking, and total relaxation in order to take care of our suffering, our anger, and our fear is very important. Without it, we cannot go far. If we just sit and discuss, we go nowhere. The White House has organized many peace talks, but the White House has never offered the practices of deep relaxation, mindful walking, and mindful eating so that we can embrace our anger and fear.

In Plum Village, we try to do things differently. We don't discuss strategies of peace. We practice bringing peace into ourselves first. Then, in a small circle, we look at each other and recognize each other as human beings with a lot of suffering. It is possible to see that our true enemies are hate, fear, despair, and especially wrong perceptions. Human beings are not our enemies. We don't understand ourselves and we don't understand others and so we destroy each other. That is why our practice always begins with calming and embracing the pain and sorrow. We discourage the practice of talking and discussing the situation in the Middle East. A lot of talking has been done for many years, and it has not worked.

Once we are successful in calming our emotions, we can begin the practice of listening deeply to the other person to

understand his or her suffering. Deep listening goes together with the practice of loving speech. We try to speak of our suffering without blaming the other side. We speak without bitterness, blame, or anger. This helps others understand our situation and our suffering. If we use deep listening and loving speech, communication will be possible. Once communication is possible, peace will be the outcome.

At the end of each retreat, Palestinians and Israelis come together to report on the fruits of their practice and to discuss how to continue the practice when they go back to the Middle East. In a conflict zone or a war, it is particularly important to have a community to practice with. Without others, you will lose your practice, your peace, your compassion, and your happiness. With compassion radiating from our eyes, we make people around us happy and we can manifest peace right here and now.

At the end of a recent retreat, one of the Palestinian participants asked me this question: "I came here from Palestine, where we live under the Israeli occupation. We suffer daily from all kinds of social and material oppression. I came here, and I left behind my people who are getting killed, bombed by planes, shot at by tanks of the Israeli military. At this very moment, we are losing our lands because of the Israeli decision to build the separation wall. With all this suffering that we live with every day, we still believe that there must be a different kind of Israeli people whom we haven't yet met. Maybe this is why we are here in Plum Village, in order to meet the other kind of Israelis. How can we convey to our innocent children that there is still brightness and hope and that a better life could be waiting ahead for them?"

And this was my answer: More than forty years ago I was in Vietnam in the midst of war. Hundreds of thousands of American soldiers were in the country and the Vietnamese people died everyday, civilians and military, adults and children. I was aware that American soldiers also died every day in Vietnam. But the number of Vietnamese dying was much greater than the number of American soldiers. There was despair among the young people in Vietnam. They saw the war dragging on and on.

I remember one day when a group of young people came and sat with me and one young person asked: "Dear Thay, do you have any hope that the war will end soon?" I myself did not see any sign of an end to the war. I did not want myself and the young people to drown in the ocean of despair. Despair is the worst thing that can happen to us. I stayed silent for some time. Finally I said, "Dear friends, the Buddha said everything is impermanent. The war has to end one day." The question is, what can we do to accelerate the impermanence? There are things we can do. It is very important to find out what we can do every day so that we do not drown in the ocean of despair.

What you say to the young people may be very close to what I said in Vietnam forty-three years ago. I think many American soldiers felt the same. More than 50,000 of them died in Vietnam and many of their families could not have their bodies to bury in America. You know that there are Israelis who are for peace, who do not agree with their government. Supporting them is one of the things you can do. Knowing that there are Israelis like that is one thing that can bring you out of despair. On the Israeli side it is the same; they know there are Palestinians who see the suffering of the war and do not want to follow the path of violence. That helps them feel better also. There are young Israelis who have the courage to refuse to go to the army. Their act is a kind of Dharma talk about nonviolence.

A few people have come to Plum Village, Israelis and Palestinians, who are for peace. I count very much on them to open a way for peace. Both sides have tried very hard for peace in the past many years but without much success. If there is not a spiritual dimension to our peace process, then all our efforts may be useless. The spiritual dimension helps us to think and see things more clearly. That is why the practice of looking deeply is important. To meditate does not mean that you run away from reality, but that you have a chance to sit down, to look deeply at the situation, and to see things more clearly and find the better way to end the conflict and the suffering. I hope this book is full of many insights that will help Palestinians and Israelis and all of us to suffer less right away. I hope these practices will help us

have clear minds so that we can take up the kind of action that will bring peace and reconciliation. These are not dreams. These are things that we can do. This has been demonstrated by groups of Palestinians and Israelis who have come to Plum Village. They have found transformation and can make peace among themselves right here. Here we have done it on a small scale. If we can do it on a larger scale, there will be peace in the Middle East.

1

The Right Time for a Picnic

Once there was a teacher who lived with his students in a temple. One day, a student asked, "Dear teacher, can we arrange to have a picnic?" The teacher said, "Yes, we will find a day when we can have a picnic." Yet they were so busy, they never found even one day. A year passed, then two, then three, and still they hadn't had a picnic. One day, while walking together in the city, they saw a funeral procession. The teacher asked his student, "What is that?" And the student said, "They are going on a picnic. The only picnic they have is when they die."

I HAVE LIVED through two wars in Vietnam, and I know what war is—you don't know whether you will be alive this afternoon or this evening. There is fear, anger, and despair. If you don't know how to manage these things, you cannot survive. That is why our practice is to have a picnic right here, right now, and not wait. Is it possible for Israelis and Palestinians to have a picnic and for everyone to enjoy every moment of it? I think so.

The picnic can be happening right now in this very moment. A bomb may explode today, but still we will have our picnic. We are all sitting here together. We have nothing to do. We just enjoy sitting, with no worries, because sitting is a pleasure. Listening to someone speaking is also a pleasure. You don't need to learn anything, pass an exam, or get a diploma. You just sit and enjoy breathing in and out, listening to someone speaking about peace. It is not my intention to give anyone ideas about peace; you already have plenty of ideas. Our intention is to *be* peace right in the here and the now.

Often our bodies are not at peace. We can learn how to bring peace into our body right in the here and the now. Our body suffers, especially during times of war. We feel tension, stress, and pressure. We have worked our body too hard and it is full of conflicts. The way we handle our bodies makes them suffer so much that we have no real peace. To bring peace into our bodies, we allow them to rest and have a chance to renew and heal themselves. We can do it today.

Even after one or two hours, we will feel much better. We are not just *talking* about peace in our body, we are actually *bringing* peace into it.

We all have feelings of sadness, pain, or excitement. Our feelings flow through us like a river and often overwhelm us. Being together with friends who know how to handle their feelings and emotions, we can learn how to handle ours as well. Within fifteen minutes of breathing and being mindful, we can begin to know how to handle our fear, despair, and anger; this is very important. If you cannot handle your body and your feelings of anger, fear, and despair, you cannot talk about peace. Handling them well will bring peace and harmony into your body, feelings, and emotions.

When we are overwhelmed, we do not perceive things as they are; we have wrong perceptions about who we are, who others are, and what the world is like. These wrong perceptions are the foundation of all our actions that bring unhappiness, destruction, fear, and anger. We need to be able to handle our perceptions, so we know whether our perception is wrong or correct. Most of our suffering comes from our wrong perceptions. We should take the time to look deeply into the nature of our perceptions so we are not caught by them, because our perceptions are the foundation of all our feelings, emotions, and afflictions.

In daily life we are seldom free of our feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. We are rarely truly ourselves. Often we are victims of our feelings and perceptions; we are like a leaf floating on the ocean, with the waves pushing it to and fro. We don't have sovereignty over our situation. That is why it is so important to come home to ourselves. In this way, we cease to be dominated by our circumstances. This is the basic practice of peace. If we have some peace in our body, our emotions, and our perceptions, then we can help another person to have peace. But we have to begin with ourselves. You cannot be an instrument of peace if you have no peace within yourself. When you become an instrument of peace, you become an instrument of God, of Allah, of the Buddha, and of ultimate reality. This is not too difficult. We can do it.

FINDING REFUGE

Sometimes we feel very tired, we have no more energy, and

we want to give up—our situation is so difficult. We feel like we cannot do anything. We want to seek a place where we can be protected and take refuge in God, in the Buddha, or in Allah. Imagine a wave that is very tired of rising and falling, up and down, and would like to seek refuge. There is a refuge for the wave, and that is the water. If the wave recognizes that she is water and seeks refuge in the water, she is no longer afraid of rising and falling. It is very important that she knows she is water, and that she doesn't have to seek water outside of herself.

Maybe you are a wave, and you are so tired of rising and falling, of being born and dying. You are looking for something solid, safe, and long-lasting in which to take refuge. If you are a wave, you don't have to look for the water. You *are* the water in the here and the now. God does not exist outside of us. The ultimate, our refuge, is not outside us, it is right here inside us. "I rest in God" means "I take refuge in the ultimate." We can call the ultimate Buddhahood, God, or Allah; it is all the same thing.

When you rest in God, you don't have to run, you just go home to yourself like the wave in the water. If the wave continues to search, she will never find the water. The only way to find the water is to go home to herself. When she realizes that she is water, she has peace. She practices resting in God in the here and the now. Although she continues to rise and fall, she is peaceful. We can practice this: God, not as an objective separate entity, but God as the ground of our being.

Many of us are caught in taking refuge in a notion. We think we are taking refuge in the Buddha, but we are only taking refuge in our notion of the Buddha; we think that we are taking refuge in Allah, but Allah is just a notion we have in our head. That is why we want to take refuge in the present moment, in our in-breath, our out-breath, our steps. These are much more concrete ways of taking refuge. Breathing in, I take refuge in my in-breath, I am entirely my in-breath. I trust my in-breath, and together with my in-breath, I become peace. Breathing out, I take refuge in my out-breath, I become my out-breath. I trust my out-breath and I become peace with my out-breath.

MINDFUL WALKING²

In Plum Village, when we walk, we take refuge in each step, and we get in touch with the ultimate in our steps. We take a step and we take refuge entirely in the step. The ultimate becomes available to us in that moment. You have to bring one hundred percent of your body and your spirit to take refuge in your step.

In our daily life we have the habit of running. We seek peace, success, love, God—we are always on the run—and our steps are the means for us to run away from the present moment. But life is available only in the present moment. God is available only in the present moment. Peace is available only in the present moment. Making a step and taking refuge in your step, means to stop running. For those of us who are used to always running, it is a revolution to make a step and stop running. We make a step, and if we know how to make it, peace and God become available in that moment of touching the earth with our feet.

During slow walking, when I breathe in, I make a step, and when I breathe out, I make another step. I invest myself entirely in making the step while I breathe in. If I take refuge entirely in the step, I encounter the ultimate, God, and life, because life is available only in the present moment. These are very simple things, but we do not have enough time to notice them. The past is already gone, the future is not yet here, there is only one moment when we can be truly alive: the present moment. Our in-breath and our step bring us home to the present moment. That is why it is so important to take refuge in our in-breath and our step, because they are the only means of bringing us home to the present moment, where we can touch life and encounter it deeply.

I HAVE ARRIVED

Imagine you are on a plane flying to New York. Once you sit down on the plane, you think, “I have to sit here for six hours before I arrive.” Sitting in the plane you think only of New York, and you are not able to live the moments that are offered to you now. But it is possible for you to walk on to the plane in such a way that you enjoy every step. You don’t need to arrive in New York in order to be peaceful and happy. As you walk on to the plane, every step brings you happiness,

and you arrive in every moment. To arrive means to arrive somewhere. When you practice walking meditation, you arrive in every moment—you arrive at the destination of life. The present moment is a destination. Breathing in, I make a step and another step, and I tell myself, “I have arrived, I have arrived.”

“I have arrived” is our practice in Plum Village. When you breathe in, you take refuge in your in-breath, and you say, “I have arrived.” When you make a step, you take refuge in your step, and you say, “I have arrived.” This is not a statement to yourself or another person. “I have arrived” means I have stopped running, I have arrived in the present moment, because only the present moment contains life. When I breathe in and take refuge in my in-breath, I touch life deeply. When I take a step and I take refuge entirely in my step, I also touch life deeply, and by doing so I stop running. Stopping running is a very important practice. We have been running all our life. We believe that peace, happiness, and success are present in some other place and time. We don’t know that everything—peace, happiness, and stability—should be looked for in the here and the now. This is the address of life—the intersection of here and now.

There are seeds of peace and joy within us. If we know how to take refuge in our in-breath, in our step, then we can touch our seeds of peace and joy and allow them to manifest for our enjoyment. Instead of taking refuge in an abstract notion of God, Buddha, or Allah, we take refuge in the reality of the ultimate. God can be touched in our in-breath and our step. Many of us have succeeded in doing this. We enjoy living deeply every moment of our daily life, through the practice of touching the ultimate—touching joy and peace in the here and the now.

This sounds easy, and everyone can do it, but it takes some training. The practice of stopping is crucial. How do we stop? We stop by means of our in-breath, our out-breath, and our steps. That is why our basic practice is mindful breathing and mindful walking. If you master these practices, then you can practice mindful eating, mindful drinking, mindful cooking, and mindful driving, and you are always at peace. We should not be like the teacher and his students who were

always running until they saw a funeral and realized that this was the final picnic. We have to enjoy our picnic right here and right now. We have the means to do it. If you think that it is very difficult to make an in-breath or a step in mindfulness, you are wrong. They are highly enjoyable. You can touch peace just by breathing in or making a step. You touch the seed of peace inside you and remove the tension and conflict in your body, your feelings, and your perceptions.

Our practice is the practice of mindfulness—mindfulness of breathing, walking, eating, dishwashing, and cooking—always dwelling in the here and the now and not allowing ourselves to be pulled away by worries, projects for the future, or regrets about the past. We have to reclaim our freedom, because we have lost it. We are caught by our past and our worries about the future. We don't have the capacity to be here and now in order to touch life. That is why it is very important to learn the art of being peace in the here and the now.

With the presence of a community to practice with, this becomes easier. On your left there is a friend who knows how to breathe in and out and touch the present moment. On your right there is another friend who knows how to make a step and dwell peacefully and happily in the present moment. Behind you there is a sister and in front of you there is a brother who can do the same. You are surrounded by people who know the art of living in the present moment, the art of stopping, touching the seeds of peace and joy that are in every one of us, and becoming an instrument of peace for people around us.

"I have arrived" is a practice, not a statement or declaration. I have arrived in the here and the now, and I can touch life deeply with all of its wonders. The rain is a wonder; the sunshine is a wonder; the trees are a wonder; the faces of children are wonders. There are so many wonders of life around us and inside us. Our eyes are a wonder—we need only to open them and we see all kinds of colors and forms. Our heart is a wonder—if our heart stops beating, then nothing can continue.

When we go home to the present moment, we touch the wonders of life that are inside us and around us. We just

enjoy—we don't have to wait for tomorrow to have peace and joy. When you breathe in, you say, "I have arrived," and you will know whether you have arrived or not, you will know whether you are still running or not. Even sitting quietly, you may still be running in your mind. When you feel you have arrived, you will be very happy. You must tell your friend, "Dear friend, I have really arrived." This is good news.

When you make a step, it is wonderful to arrive in every moment. That is why we don't talk while we are walking. If we are busy talking, how can we arrive? If we need to say something, we can stop and say it fully. We do one thing at a time. After we have finished talking or listening to the other person, we resume walking and enjoying our steps. If you know how to walk like that, you are always in the kingdom of God, in the presence of Allah, in the Pure Land of the Buddha, just as the wave is always in the kingdom of water.

I enjoy walking in the kingdom of God every day. It is something you can do right now—it is not something to hope for. Why should I deprive myself of that joy? It is very healing and nourishing. My friends can do this, too, if they really want to. If all you want in life is a diploma or a large salary, that may take time, but if you want to enjoy walking in the kingdom of God, you can do it now—as long as you are able to go home to the present moment.

When you breathe in, you can say, "I have arrived." When you breathe out, you can say, "I am home." Our true home is the here and the now. It is only in the here and the now that we have our real refuge. In the present moment, we can get in touch with our ancestors, with God, and with our children and grandchildren. They are already available in the present moment. That is your true home. And if you feel that you are home, then you don't need to run any more, and your practice is successful. If you still feel that you need to run, then you have not arrived, you are not home yet. Your home is not only in the Middle East, Holland, England, or America, your home is here—here means life. All the wonders of life are available in the here and the now, and it brings you a lot of joy, peace, and happiness.

THE FIVE REALMS OF PEACE

We have our own territory of peace inside us, which is made

of five realms—our body, our feelings, our perceptions, our mental formations, and our consciousness. We have to bring peace into our body and remove its conflicts, tension, and pain. There are also a lot of storms, afflictions, and pain in the realm of our emotions. We have to learn how to bring peace into the territory of our feelings and emotions.

When I look at my pen, I have a perception of it. Whether my perception corresponds to the reality of the pen or not is a real question—because we live with many wrong perceptions. We believe that we are the only ones who suffer, that others are making us suffer, and that they don't suffer at all. That is one kind of wrong perception. If we have the time to breathe in and breathe out and have peace in ourselves, we can see that other people also suffer greatly as we do, and they need to be helped and not punished. That is why peace cannot be possible without removing the elements of wrong perception. When our perceptions are born from anger and fear, they cannot be called correct perceptions. In turn, our wrong perceptions give rise to fear, anger, and despair, which can lead us to commit acts of violence, punishment, and killing. That is why it is very important to practice sitting and walking meditation, so that we can bring peace to the realm of our perceptions and remove the wrong elements.

The fourth realm is that of mental formations, *cittasamskara*. A formation (*samskara*) is something that manifests when many conditions come together. A flower is a physical formation—the rain, the sun, the earth, time, space come together for the flower to manifest. Our body is a physiological formation. All formations are impermanent and are constantly changing. Our fear, our anger, our discrimination, hope, joy, and our mindfulness are all mental formations. In the Buddhist tradition we have identified fifty-one mental formations. When we contemplate our mind, we are not looking at a clear and empty space, we are looking at our mental formations.

Finally, there is the realm of consciousness. We have to go home to our consciousness, because our consciousness is the ground of everything. Our body, our feelings, perceptions, and mental formations are born from the ground of

consciousness. Not only does our body contain our consciousness, but our consciousness contains our body.

I AM SOLID, I AM FREE

What does it mean to be solid? It means to stay in the present moment. We have a tendency to be pulled back to the past. We regret something or feel guilty and we get lost in it. We are not solid because we are victims of the past. We are not capable of living in the present moment because the past has become a ghost, always pulling us back to itself. There are those of us who only think of the past, who are not capable of enjoying life in the present moment, who are not free and solid.

There are also those of us who are caught by our worries, fear, and uncertainty about the future. These worries and fears do not allow us to be in the present moment and to touch life. When we say, "I have arrived, I am home"; "you cannot get me, I am in the here and the now"; or "I am master of myself," then we become solid. "I am solid" is not wishful thinking. If you are able to arrive and feel at home, then you become solid naturally. This is a recognition that you are here and you are now; you are home. This is no longer a hope, it is a reality, and you become aware that you are more solid. If you spend three minutes walking, arriving, and feeling at home in every moment, then solidity has become a reality, a fact. You know whether you are solid or not. You are solid when you are fully established in the here and the now. The past cannot get you, and the future cannot get you; you are free. That is why we say, "I am solid, I am free."

Free from what? I am free from the past, from my worries, from my fear. That is why solidity and freedom are not two things. When you are solid, you are free; when you are free, you are solid. It is like the here and the now. Solidity and freedom are the foundation of your peace and happiness. Every mindful step we make helps us cultivate more solidity and more freedom. Be yourself, be free, be established in the here and the now. Touch life deeply, and receive the nourishment and peace that you need so much.

The wave is now resting in the water. You are resting in the ultimate, in Allah, in God, in your Buddhahood. This is the

recognition that you are touching the ultimate in the here and the now. It is not a matter of time. The ultimate is available in the here and the now; water is available to the wave right here, right now. The ultimate is your foundation. By walking and breathing like this, you are always in touch with God—not as a notion, not as an idea, but as a reality. You can touch God by touching a flower, by touching the air, by touching another person. Outside of these things there is no God. If you remove all the waves, there is no water left. To touch the wonders of life in you and around you means to touch the ultimate.

ENJOY YOUR BREAKFAST³

When you make a cup of tea, enjoy the present moment. Pick up your cup mindfully and smile to it. If you are full of ideas and thoughts, you cannot do it. Non-thinking makes it possible for you to pick up the cup. You don't think of anything. You are just aware that you are picking up the cup. You put a teabag in the cup, and you take refuge entirely in the act of putting the teabag in the cup. Don't think of the past or the future. Enjoy picking up your cup and putting in the tea bag. Smile at them. You are in touch with the wonders of life. Stay with them; don't run after life. Pick up your cup with your whole body and mind.

I learned from my teacher how to light incense when I was a sixteen-year-old novice. He said, "My child, breathe in, take the stick of incense, and look at it: 'There is a stick of incense.' Put your left hand on your right hand as you hold the incense and then light it. You put one hundred percent of your body into the act of lighting incense. When you put the incense in the holder, do it in the same way, with all of your body and mind. You are mindful and concentrated during the whole time of lighting and offering the incense."

Mindfulness is a kind of energy that belongs to the realm of mental formations. It is a good mental formation—a very important one. When you breathe in, if you know that you are breathing in and you take refuge entirely in your in-breath, that is called mindfulness of breathing. Your in-breath becomes the only object of your mind. When you breathe in, you don't think of anything at all. You just *are* with your in-breath—one hundred percent.

When you walk, if you know that you are making a step and you are fully aware of each step, that is called mindfulness of walking. When you drink tea, if you stay with your tea one hundred percent and don't allow yourself to be pulled away by the past, the future, or your thinking, then you are practicing mindfulness of drinking tea. Mindfulness is the energy that helps you to know what is happening in the here and the now, that helps you to recognize the present moment as your true home and to know that the wonders of life are there. Breathing in, I know that the sunshine is there. Breathing out, I know that autumn leaves are falling. Mindfulness is the energy that helps us be aware of what is happening.

In France there is a yogurt advertisement that says, "*Mangez-la tout doucement, pour que ça dure longtemps.*" ("Eat it slowly, so it will last a long time.") If you are in a hurry, it takes just a few seconds to eat some yogurt, but if you know how to enjoy the yogurt, you eat every spoonful slowly and stay with your yogurt. In the same way, take time to enjoy your tea. Ask yourself whether you are capable of being peaceful and joyful while you are drinking tea. Challenge yourself today. Bring in your mindfulness so you are entirely with your tea from the moment you begin to make it until you have finished drinking it. Allow yourself enough time to drink your tea in such a way that peace and relaxation are possible. Ban worries, fear, and despair. Don't allow them to spoil your life. You have a chance to drink a cup of tea—why spoil it with your fear and uncertainty? If you succeed in drinking your cup of tea, it is a victory for peace—peace for yourself, for us, for your country, and the world.

When I walk mindfully from here to there, I enjoy my in-breath, my out-breath, and my steps. You can enjoy every moment of your daily life when you are mindful and concentrated. When you are concentrated, you sink deeply into what is there. When you contemplate a flower, if you have mindfulness and concentration, you get in touch very profoundly with the flower, which is a wonder of life. When you hold your tea and enjoy it, if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you get in touch deeply with

your tea and enjoy the peace, joy, and freedom that is offered to you by drinking tea. Freedom is our practice. If you have some freedom and solidity brought to you by mindfulness and concentration, peace and joy are possible.

You can do the same thing while eating your breakfast. Although your breakfast is not fancy, the happiness brought to you by having enough time to eat breakfast can be very great. If you know how to sit there as a free person, then the twenty or thirty minutes of eating your breakfast is a time for you to enjoy peace. Why do you have to worry or be fearful while eating your breakfast? Why do you have to hurry? Many of us do not eat our breakfast properly in the morning before we go to work. We allow our mind to be carried away by our worries about what will happen during the day. We are not with our breakfast, we do not take refuge in our breakfast. Stay with your breakfast from the beginning to the end. Enjoy the whole time. If you can sit with freedom at your table, then eating breakfast will be a time to live, to be happy and free. If you succeed in having freedom and peace during your breakfast, you will have peace and freedom at other times, also.

When you eat your lunch, enjoy every morsel of food—a piece of carrot, tomato, tofu, or bread is a wonder of life. The cosmos has come together to offer you this food. Stay with the piece of bread and take refuge in it. If you eat your bread mindfully, with concentration, you get in touch with Allah, with Jesus, with the Buddha. You don't have to run in order to find the Buddha, to find God, to find Allah. They *are* in your bread. When you take refuge in your bread, you get in touch with the ultimate. Eating breakfast or lunch is a deep practice of peace—don't seek peace and the ultimate outside of it.

PEACE IS IN EVERY MOMENT

A meditation hall is bigger than just the room you sit in. It includes the air and land outside and even the bathroom you use. You might think that the restroom is not as holy as the meditation hall, but that is not true. In the spirit of Zen, the restroom is as holy as the meditation hall or the Buddha hall. That is why we put a pot of flowers in the restroom to show that it is a place in which to practice. When you wash your

hands in the restroom, enjoy the water running through your fingers—that is God, that is happiness. Are you capable of enjoying the feeling of the water which is a wonder of life, flowing through your fingers? If you are in the here and the now—mindful and concentrated—feeling the running water on your fingers is wonderful, very nourishing, and very healing. Enjoy every second, and smile to yourself. Peace is available in the here and the now. Brush your teeth in such a way that peace and joy are possible. Challenge yourself: when you are brushing your teeth, ask yourself whether you are happy or not. Give yourself enough time to enjoy it. Also, when you urinate, enjoy it. Why do you hurry? Enjoy your time in the restroom.

Peace and joy should be possible in every moment. Please try. When we walk together as a group, we enjoy the collective energy of mindfulness and concentration. If we get lost in our thinking, if we are carried away by our projects, by the past, or by the future, then the solid walking of a brother on our right or a sister on our left will bring us home to the here and the now, and we can resume our mindful walking. Every step like that heals and nourishes. Don't think of it as a difficult practice. The practice should be joyful and pleasant. If you suffer during walking, sitting, or eating, then you are not practicing correctly. It is a picnic—you should be able to enjoy every moment.

From time to time we invite the bell to sound. The bell is the voice of God, of the Buddha, of Allah in us, calling us to our true home, to the here and the now. Whenever the telephone rings, it is also the voice of God calling us back to the present moment. Whether you are helping in the kitchen or working in the vegetable garden, you enjoy every minute of cooking or of taking care of the garden. You are always in the kingdom of God—don't leave it. The passport to enter into the kingdom of God is mindfulness and concentration. Keep this passport with you and you will be able to stay in the kingdom and not have to leave. Enjoy your picnic.

PERSONAL VOICES

Helping Each Other Be Human:

A Palestinian Reflects on Mindfulness

I have some experience with mixed groups of

Palestinians and Israelis, but my time in Plum Village was unique. Something happened, quietly and with deep listening, that helped me to be in touch with each person's pain and suffering. I am concerned that the experience I had here will be like a dream that will fade away the minute I land at the Israeli airport and experience humiliation and disrespect again, after living for two weeks surrounded by people who are respectful and supportive of Palestinians. I would like to see us continuing what we have done here in Israel and expanding it. I learned two important things here: I learned to listen deeply without rejecting the other person and his or her point of view, even if it was difficult for me to hear; and I learned how to share, especially difficult feelings and experiences, in a calm and respectful way, so that the other person would want to listen. We were not trying to find solutions, but rather understanding and support.

The Path of Love: An Israeli Speaks

Being exposed to terror, violence, and denial every day, whether you are a Palestinian or an Israeli, makes it hard to stay in touch with your tenderness and softness, makes it hard to open your heart and not put on a suit of armor, and makes it hard to be able to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. Each one of us, in our own lives, and all of us together, are trying to help each other to do that. Having always learned to do the opposite of opening our hearts, it takes time and some hardship, but it makes every moment of our lives, the beautiful as well as the difficult, deeper and more meaningful. Even though we all suffer, we can slowly start to feel the rays of gratitude gently warming us.

Because we come from different areas it is difficult for us to meet together, and local mixed groups have not yet been established. It is almost impossible for Palestinians coming from the West Bank, who are not Israeli citizens, to join us when we meet in Israel. If they do manage to enter through the countless checkpoints, their stay within the borders of Israel is

usually illegal and therefore they risk being arrested. For the Jews in the group, it would be dangerous and often impossible to go to the West Bank. Occasional meetings between Israelis and West Bankers are possible, but meetings on a regular basis with the goal of creating a mixed group of practitioners is, under these circumstances, very difficult. This kind of obstacle takes great effort to overcome.

During the Dharma discussions we try to create an atmosphere of openness and support in which we can learn to speak with love, without blaming, and to listen deeply. People often express their happiness at having such a group where they can take refuge and be embraced. They share about the practice in daily life and about the pain of being exposed to violence daily. They also express their fears of the violence, of the despair, of each other, and of fear itself.

2

Cultivating the Seeds of Peace

IT IS NOT MY INTENTION to give you ideas just to put in a notebook. No one can give anyone else ideas about peace. Instead, I would like to offer you an opportunity to recognize the seeds of peace and joy that are already in everyone.

When it rains, the rain penetrates the soil. If there is enough rain then all the seeds in the soil will be penetrated and have a chance to sprout. In the same way, during a Dharma talk, we don't need to do anything. We don't need to try to understand or record what is being said. We just allow the rain in, and suddenly we find that the seeds of understanding, wisdom, and love sprout. The seeds of peace, joy, happiness, and the kingdom of God are already in you, not outside of you. If you are looking for God and you think that he or she is outside of you, you will never find God. It would be like a wave running to search for the water—she will never find it. She has to go home to herself with the strong conviction that the water is within her. Then there is a chance for peace.

When the brothers and sisters at Plum Village chant, they do not address their words to someone outside of themselves—the Buddha, a bodhisattva, or God. Their chanting is a kind of rain that waters their seeds of understanding and peace. When we stand up and bow toward the altar, it does not mean that the Buddha or God is in that direction. When we bow, we touch the ultimate in us. We touch what is good, beautiful, and true. There is a Buddha statue on the altar, but it is only a block of stone, it is not the Buddha. The Buddha is the capacity of understanding and loving that is in every cell of our body.

THE ART OF LIVING ALONE

The most precious gift we can offer to our beloved is our energy of understanding and love. If we do not have understanding and love within us, we have nothing to offer to another person or to the world. How can we cultivate understanding and love? We can cultivate it when we are alone. To be alone does not mean you have to cut yourself off from society, go to a mountain, and live in a cave. To live alone means you are always yourself—you do not lose

yourself. You can sit in the marketplace and yet you can be alone. You are the boss; you are not a victim.

When you practice walking mindfully, you concentrate on your steps and your in-breath and out-breath. Even if you are walking with two or three hundred people, you are still alone. Mindfulness and concentration are in you, and every breath and every step nourishes and enriches you and brings you the energy of understanding and love. If you are not yourself, you cannot love, and you cannot offer anything. To be alone means to come home to yourself, become the master of yourself, and not allow yourself to be carried away. Understanding is the foundation of love. If you cannot understand yourself, you cannot love yourself. If you cannot understand your beloved, you cannot love her.

Suppose you don't understand your beloved's suffering, her difficulties, or her deepest aspirations. How can you say that you love and understand her? You have to be yourself, and then when you look at her, you will begin to understand. If you are not yourself, how can you listen and see deeply? When understanding is there, then love is possible. Love is the water that springs from the source of understanding. A relationship is meaningful only when each person is himself or herself. If you and the other person are empty of understanding, love, and beauty, you don't have anything to offer to each other.

We love to talk; it is a pleasure. But if you don't practice mindfulness, then you may just allow yourself to be carried away by talking. You won't have much to offer, and the other person won't have much to offer, either. When there is something in you that is very precious, you can offer it and share it. Talking is one way of offering and expressing yourself. But if you have only empty ideas, that is not a true gift. You may have opinions about everything, but that may not be what the other person needs. What the other person needs is your understanding, your love, and your insight—not as ideas but as a living reality.

When you embody insight, compassion, and joy, a relationship becomes meaningful. If you know the art of living alone—of knowing how to be yourself and cultivating the energy of peace, understanding, and compassion in each

moment—then your relationship will deepen. This is quite simple. When you have five or ten minutes free, use them to enrich yourself, to become more solid, more free, more understanding, and more compassionate. When we love someone, joy, understanding, and compassion are the best offerings we can make to our beloved. If you want to have something to offer, then cultivate it by being alone.

Imagine a tree receiving nourishment from the earth, the water, and the minerals. With all that it takes in, it nourishes the branches and leaves and creates flowers. A tree has so many things to offer to the world. If we disturb the tree's roots, so that they are not in touch with the soil, the tree can't get the nutriment it needs to make flowers and fruits. Each of us is like a tree. If we do not know how to go home to ourselves, to become fully present, to cultivate and practice looking deeply and listening deeply, then we cannot receive the nutriment we need and we won't have much to offer the person we love.

Our time together is very precious. We want to become an instrument of peace for ourselves, for our family, and for our society. But if we are not solid enough, then although we can practice at retreats, we can't continue the practice at home. There are things that we cannot do alone, but that with a community, a Sangha, become easy. Alone we tend to be lazy. Even though we know how to sit, how to listen to the bell, and how to practice mindful walking, we don't practice them, because no one around us is practicing them. That is why the presence of a community whose members are also practicing, is a great encouragement and support.

TAKING CARE OF OUR FEELINGS

We know that the morning is beautiful—the hills, the mist, the sunrise. We want to get in touch with that beauty and allow it into our hearts. We know this is very nourishing. But sometimes an emotion or feeling comes up and prevents us from enjoying what is happening in the here and the now. While another person is able to let the mountains, the glorious sunrise, and the beauty of nature penetrate his body and mind, we are blocked by our worries, our fear, and our anger, and the beauty of the sunrise cannot penetrate us. Our emotions prevent us from getting in touch with the

wonders of life, the kingdom of God, and the Pure Land of the Buddha.

What should we do in these circumstances? We think that we have to remove that feeling or emotion in order to be free again, so that the beautiful sunrise can penetrate us. We consider our fear, anger, and worries as enemies. We think that without them we would be free, and that these feelings get in the way so that we cannot receive the nourishment we need. It is in moments like this that we stick to our mindful breathing and recognize our afflictions, whether they are anger, frustration, or fear. Suppose we are feeling worry or anxiety. We practice, "Breathing in, I feel that anxiety is in me. Breathing out, I smile to my anxiety." Maybe you have the habit of worrying. Even if worry is not necessary, you still worry. Every time you feel worry coming up, you know that happiness is not possible. You would like to ban worry and remove it. You know that when you worry you cannot get in touch with the wonders of life and you cannot be happy. So you get angry at your worry; you don't want it. But worry is a part of you, and that is why when your worry comes up, you have to know how to handle it tenderly and peacefully. You can do it if you have the energy of mindfulness. You cultivate the energy of mindfulness with mindful breathing and mindful walking, then you can recognize and tenderly embrace your worry, fear, and anger.

When your baby suffers and cries you don't want to punish him or her, because your baby is you. Your fear and anger are like your baby. Don't imagine that you can throw them away out of the window. Don't do violence to your anger, your fear, and your worries. The practice is to recognize them. Continue to practice mindful breathing and mindful walking, and with the energy generated by your practice, you can recognize the intense feelings, smile to them, and embrace them tenderly. This is the practice of nonviolence directed to your worries, fear, and anger. If you get angry with your anger, then it is multiplied ten times. This is not wise. You already suffer a lot, and if you get angry with your anger, you will suffer more. A baby may not be pleasant when she cries and kicks, but her mother picks her up tenderly and holds her in her arms, and the tenderness of the

mother penetrates the baby. After a few minutes, the baby feels better and may stop crying. Without the basic practices of mindful breathing and mindful walking, you have no way to generate the energy of mindfulness. It is the energy of mindfulness that helps you recognize your pain and sorrow and embrace them tenderly. Then you feel some relief and your baby is quiet. Now you can enjoy the beautiful sunrise and allow yourself to be nourished by the wonders of life around you and inside you.

A DROP IN THE RIVER

Sometimes we cannot practice alone, because we are just beginners. We have some mindfulness and concentration, but they are not strong enough to hold our baby. That is why we need a community to practice with, a Sangha. The group energy is strong, and if you know how to borrow from it you will be strong enough to hold your baby and not be overwhelmed by suffering.

Taking refuge in the Sangha is very important. When you throw a rock into the river, no matter how small it is, it will sink to the bottom. But if you have a boat, you can keep many rocks afloat.

The same is true of a Sangha. If you are alone, you may sink into the river of suffering, but if you have a community of practice and you allow it to embrace your pain and sorrow, you will float. Many of us have profited from the collective energy of the Sangha. If you see that the Sangha is precious and crucial for your practice, when you go home, try your best to set up a group of people to practice with you, and everyone will profit from the group. That is your boat.

When you practice well, you become your own refuge, and a refuge for your beloved and your family. If you can transform your family into a Sangha, then other people can come and take refuge in your family. If you are capable of bringing a few families together, you can set up a Sangha. If the practice goes well in your group, it becomes a refuge for many people. There is no hope without building a Sangha.

When we are in a Sangha, we are like a drop of water in a river. We allow the Sangha to hold us and transport us. Don't be like a drop of oil in the river, not mixing with the other drops of water—that way you arrive nowhere. Allow yourself

to be transported by the Sangha so that your pain, sorrow, and suffering are recognized and embraced. You have to trust the Sangha. Imagine you are a drop of water that would like to go to the ocean. If you go alone, you might evaporate, but if you allow yourself to be embraced and transported by the Sangha, then you will get there. You suffer only when you are a separate drop of water. Please remember this.

Sometimes we feel that we cannot go on anymore, that we are going to crack, that we are the victim of despair. It helps if we can remember that we have a friend. If our friend were there at this moment, sitting close to us, we would be okay. That friend has solidity and joy, and if he or she sat close to you, you would survive. But that friend is far away. Alone you are lost, and you know that you cannot restore yourself. If you feel like that, if you are in such a state of mind, you must try any way you can to go to that person. Abandon everything. Just go to him or to her, because you need balance, and no one else around you can help you restore your balance to survive this difficult moment. When you arrive and sit close to that person, you will feel able to survive. You will see that you can breathe, walk, drink tea, and know that you are okay. You also know that you cannot stay with him or her all the time. At some point, you will have to go home and resume your life.

Store up these moments when you are with your friend and cultivate enough energy so that you can survive when you are alone. During the summer and the fall, the sky is clear and there is sunshine. You know that the winter will be harsh, and you will need some wood to put in your stove to heat your home. If you wait until winter to cut the wood, it will not have time to dry before you need to burn it. So you cut the wood in summer and fall, bring it home, and stack it, so it is ready for winter. If we don't master the practice of being ourselves and generating the energy of mindfulness and concentration when we are with our friends, it will be difficult if not impossible to do so when we are on our own.

SELECTIVE WATERING

Our mind can be seen as having two layers. It is like a house with a basement and a living room. The upper layer is called "mind consciousness" and the lower layer is called "store

consciousness.” Sometimes we speak of the store consciousness as the earth, the soil of our consciousness. The seeds of understanding, love, joy, and happiness, and the seeds of sorrow, fear, and despair are all buried there. When you hear a Dharma talk, it falls like rain on the soil of store consciousness, penetrating the seed of joy and making it sprout and bring forth flowers in mind consciousness. When you hear words of violence and fear, it waters the seed of anger in you, which sprouts and brings forth a flower of anger, or a flower of fear or discrimination. The kind of rain that you receive determines what kind of seed will come up. Down in the store consciousness they are called seeds, and up in the mind consciousness they are called mental formations.

In Buddhism, we speak of fifty-one categories of seeds. Mindfulness is one of them. If you practice mindful walking, sitting, drinking, and eating, then the seed of mindfulness becomes stronger and stronger. It grows stronger in your store consciousness, and when you need it to come up it is easy. If you don't practice, it just remains a small seed.

When you were a baby the seed of anger in you may have been very small. If your parents did not know how to take care of you, if you were exposed to an environment full of violence and anger, then the seed of anger grew. When you are in a war, the seeds of anger and violence grow and occupy the living room of your mind. Our happiness and suffering depend entirely on our seeds. There are people who were not angry or violent ten years ago, but are now very angry. There are ways to prevent watering the seeds of anger and also ways to allow the seeds of mindfulness, joy, and compassion to be watered every day.

If you have a family, they will profit from this practice. You can organize your lives in such a way that your family becomes a practice unit. You know how to help yourself, your partner, and your children avoid watering the seeds of violence, anger, and fear. You organize yourselves so that the seeds of joy, understanding, and compassion are watered many times a day. This practice is called “selective watering.” We water only the good seeds and refrain from watering the negative seeds.

The practice of selective watering can bring forth results very quickly. One hour of practice can make a big difference. The person you love has all kinds of seeds in her: joy, suffering, and anger. If you water her anger, then in just five minutes you will bring the worst out in her. If you know how to water the seeds of her compassion, joy, and understanding, then she will bloom like a flower after just twenty minutes of practice. That is for her to enjoy, and for you to enjoy also. If you recognize the good seeds in her and say, "Darling, you are wonderful," then you are just telling the truth. You are watering her self-confidence and she will become the source of happiness not only for herself but for you as well.

MAKING YOUR GARDEN BEAUTIFUL

The other person is your garden and you are the gardener who can learn the art of flower-watering. In each one of us there are flowers and there is also garbage—the garbage is our anger, fear, discrimination, and jealousy. If you water the garbage, you will grow garbage. Alternatively, you can water the flowers of compassion, understanding, and love. It is up to you.

In fact, you have two gardens: your own garden and that of your beloved. First, you have to take care of your own garden and master the art of gardening. If you don't know how to practice selective watering in your own garden, then you won't have enough wisdom to help water the flowers in your beloved. By cultivating your own garden well, you also help to cultivate her garden. Even a week of practice can make a big difference. You are more than intelligent enough to do the work. You need to take your situation in hand and not allow it to get out of control. You can do it. Every time you practice walking meditation, investing your mind and body in every step, you are taking your situation in hand. Every time you breathe in and know you are breathing in, every time you breathe out and smile to your out-breath, you are yourself, you are your own master, you are the gardener in your own garden. We are relying on you to take good care of your garden, so that you can help your beloved to take care of hers.

When you have succeeded with yourself and with your

beloved, you become a Sangha—a community of two people—and now you can be a refuge for a third person. In this way, the Sangha will grow. There is mutual understanding between you and your beloved. When mutual understanding is there and communication is good, then happiness is possible, and the two of you can become a refuge for a third or fourth person.

We can also look at our own relationships. Whether you are partners, father and son, or mother and daughter, if you have a difficult relationship and you want to make peace with the other person, you have to go through this process. The father has to go home to himself, and if possible, the son also goes home to himself. The son may be the initiator of the peace process. He knows that he has to help himself before he can help his father. He goes home to his garden and cultivates the flowers of compassion, understanding, and joy. After he has succeeded, he comes to his father fresh and compassionate. Before that, he could not help his father; he felt that it was impossible. But since he transformed himself, he has become pleasant, joyful, with a lot of compassion, and he knows that he can help transform his father.

A REAL ROAD MAP TO PEACE

Many people in the world are concerned about the suffering in the Middle East. If you can organize a people's peace conference, you will have tremendous power to educate yourself, the other group, and the whole world on how to make peace.

The peace process, the road map to peace, does not come from the government. It comes from your own heart and from your beloved, and then the two of you can form a multitude. If there are enough of you who know how to handle fear and anger, and how to calm yourselves, then you can organize a people's peace conference. You don't need your government to do it. Your government has tried very hard in the past and has not succeeded. They don't really know the peace process or the road map to peace. They talk about it in terms of politics but they don't know how to think in terms of human beings.

When warring parties come to a peace conference, each side is full of suspicion, anger, and distrust. With those

emotions in their hearts, not much can be achieved, because there is no peace inside as a basis for making peace with the other. Negotiators for peace should have some peace in themselves. At least they should know how to handle their anger, fear, and suspicion.

In peace talks people normally make a lot of proposals and have many discussions. A real peace conference should be organized like a retreat, and both groups should be given time to calm themselves and take care of their emotions, their fear, and suspicion. There should be time for each side to cultivate their own garden. Some of us know how to help. Some of us from the Middle East know about the practice of calming, of resting, and of embracing our fear and our anger, and we can help prepare the ground for mutual understanding.

When you can help your beloved to make her garden beautiful, then mutual understanding and communication become possible. If there are enough of you who know the art of cultivating your own garden, then you can organize a peace conference. The Israeli group can practice together for one or two weeks, going back to themselves and cultivating their own garden. Meanwhile, the Palestinian group will do the same. We need people who know the practice of calming, embracing, and smiling, so that we calm down our emotions, our fear, and our distrust, so that communication is possible. If peace negotiations fail, it is because people don't start with this. They are in a hurry and want to discuss things right away. Mutual understanding is not possible when there is a lot of suffering, fear, and suspicion on each side.

It is possible for you to organize a people's peace conference, somewhere in the Middle East, in Paris, or even in Plum Village. You can invite the international press to come. You are practicing peace—not discussing it—and establishing communication with the other group of people. That is the process of peace—the real road map. You can do it.

DEEP LISTENING AND LOVING SPEECH⁴

Last year, at a retreat in Oldenburg in northern Germany, we had six days to practice and learn about peaceful communication.

In the beginning, people found it very difficult to use loving speech because they had a lot of anger. Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters could not look at each other. It was impossible for them to use loving speech and to listen. After three or four days of practice, the Dharma talks had watered the seeds of compassion and understanding in them. We are all capable of recognizing that we are not the only one who suffers, that the other person also suffers very deeply, and that we are partly responsible for his or her suffering. When you realize this, you can look at the other person with the eyes of compassion: "Oh, now I know that he also suffers a lot. It is not only I who suffer. I used to blame him for my suffering, but now I know that I have been partly responsible for my suffering and I have made him suffer, also." In that moment, you will understand. With understanding and compassion, when you look at him or her, the situation changes. Suddenly you find you can listen to the other person with compassion, and communication is possible.

On the fifth day of the Oldenburg retreat I gave instructions on how to bring about reconciliation with your beloved, and I told the retreatants that they had until midnight that night to complete this work. I gave the Dharma talk at nine o'clock in the morning. I asked them to do the work of reconciliation, using loving speech and compassionate listening. Then we had a day of practice. If your beloved was in the retreat, you could go to her or him and listen deeply and use loving speech, "Darling, I know that you have suffered a lot for many years. I have not been able to help you suffer less. In fact, I have made the situation worse. I blamed you for my suffering. Now I know that I have contributed to your suffering. I am sorry. Please give me a chance. I don't want you to suffer. I want you to be happy. Please tell me of my unskillfulness. I don't want to repeat the mistakes I have made in the past. If you don't help me, I cannot do it. So please help me." Many people in the retreat were able to speak in that way for the first time. Until then the seeds of understanding and compassion in them had not been watered. Four or five days of selective watering can transform the whole situation, and they were able to do this on the fifth day.

On the morning of the sixth day, four men came to me and reported that the night before they had used their cell phones to talk to their fathers and were able to reconcile with them. It was remarkable, because their fathers had not come to the retreat and had not practiced at all—just one person practiced, and that helped the other. When you are transformed, when you have understanding and compassion in you, you can transform another person. That night they were able to use loving speech and open the doors of their fathers' hearts. They were very happy.

Suppose you are not an individual but a group—a group of Palestinians who desperately want peace. Now you know the real peace process. We cannot look for God or for peace in the government. We should look for peace within our heart. The real peace process has to come from ourselves, within our group and our people. We should not continue to blame the other side for not practicing peace. We have to practice peace in order to help the other side to make peace.

Suppose the Palestinian group knows the peace process. You come together, and you are not in a hurry to discuss peace. You take your time practicing peace, being peace. And when your garden is beautiful, you approach the group of Israelis. In the meantime, if the Israeli group knows the peace process, they will do the same. Then, if the two groups come together as two beautiful gardens, mutual communication becomes easy.

I think in six months' or a year's time your group could organize a people's peace conference. It could be anywhere, and the world would come and listen to you and see how you practice peace. Many of us from all over will come and support you in your people's peace conference. That would draw the attention of the world and of your governments.

Your government will listen to you if you are a real entity of peace, if you can listen to the other group with all your compassion, and see that their people suffer as much as your people. Both adults and children live in constant fear. When you are able to see them as victims of suffering, the nectar of compassion will flow in your heart and you will suffer less. When you suffer less, you will help them to suffer less. Every agreement made with that kind of mutual understanding will

be a real peace solution, a text signed by both parties. If fear, anger, and suspicion remain intact on both sides, then it is only a piece of paper; it is not peace. If there is compassion and mutual understanding, then you don't even need a piece of paper.

We can't wait for our governments to initiate the peace process. They may continue for a long time and not arrive anywhere. We have to take the situation in hand and organize the peace process through our own practice.

WRITING A LOVE LETTER

If you have difficulties with someone in your life, you might spend some time alone and write a letter to him or her. Give yourself three hours to write a letter using loving speech. While you write the letter, practice looking deeply into the nature of your relationship. Why has communication been difficult? Why has happiness not been possible? You may want to begin like this, "My dear son, I know you have suffered a lot during the past many years. I have not been able to help you—in fact, I have made the situation worse. It is not my intention to make you suffer, my son. Maybe I am not skillful enough. Maybe I try to impose my ideas on you, and I make you suffer. In the past I thought you made me suffer, that my suffering was caused by you. Now I realize that I have been responsible for my own suffering, and I have made you suffer. As a father I don't want you to suffer. Please help me. Please tell me of my unskillfulness in the past so that I will not continue to make you suffer, because if you suffer I will suffer too. I need your help, my dear son. We should be a happy couple, father and son. I am determined to do it. Please tell me what is in your heart. I promise to do my best to refrain from saying things or doing things that make you suffer. You need to help me, otherwise it is not possible for me to do it. I can't do it alone. In the past, every time I suffered I was inclined to punish you, and say or do things that made you suffer. I thought that was the way to get relief, but I was wrong. I realize now that anything I say or do that makes you suffer, makes me suffer also. I am determined not to do it anymore. Please help me."

Spend three hours, even a day, writing such a letter. You will find that the person who finishes the letter is not the

same person who began it. Peace, understanding, and compassion have transformed you. A miracle can be achieved in twenty-four hours. That is the practice of loving speech.

THE ART OF DEEP LISTENING

The practice of deep, compassionate listening is crucial. If you don't have compassion, you cannot listen, because what the other person is saying may water the seeds of irritation and anger in you, and you may lose the compassion you have and no longer be able to listen.

If you know how to listen for one hour, deeply, with compassion, the other person will suffer much less. It is very healing and transforming. That is the practice of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva—the great being who has the capacity of deep listening.

When you listen compassionately to your beloved, it helps her to suffer less. Even a therapist has trouble with this. If she does not know how to listen to herself, she will not know how to listen to you. That is why you have to be the therapist, you have to be the bodhisattva, and listen to your beloved. First, you have to see that your beloved has suffered a lot and that you have made the situation worse. Now listen to her and look at her with compassion. Ask her to tell you what is in her heart.

She may not be able to use loving speech yet; what she says may be full of bitterness, blame, and judgment. But if you are a bodhisattva, you can continue to listen with compassion. Listen with only one purpose—to help her to suffer less. Then, even if her speech is full of judgment, bitterness, and accusation, you will still be able to listen. The energy of compassion protects you. What your beloved says cannot water the seeds of irritation and anger anymore because you are able to nourish compassion and keep it alive.

Compassion is mindfulness. If you can maintain that awareness, you are protected. Your seeds of irritation and anger will not be watered and you can listen for one hour without being affected by what she says. You don't want to correct her, even if her speech is full of wrong perceptions and accusations—you feel only compassion, "Oh dear, she is the victim of so many wrong perceptions." You don't want to

punish or criticize her because you have compassion.

You know that you can help her remove wrong perceptions later, you don't need to do it now. If you try to correct her now, you will spoil everything, so you just listen and think, "Well, tomorrow or the day after, there is plenty of time for me to offer information that can help to correct her wrong perceptions." With that in mind, you are not in a hurry to correct her. You are very peaceful and compassionate. That is peace.

A few days later, when you feel the atmosphere is good, you begin to release some information, "Darling, it was not like that, it was like this." Don't try to release all the information at one time; she will not be able to bear it. After three days you release a little information, and then five or six days later, you release some more, helping her to correct her perceptions. This is a peace process. In a relationship between two people, whether partners, son and father, mother and daughter, the process is the same. The situation may have dragged on for many years, but if you are determined to practice, one week is enough to restore communication and improve the quality of your relationship, to make yourself and your beloved happy.

When we come to the situation of two warring parties it is exactly the same kind of process. Your group, whether Israelis or Palestinians, can begin to write a collective letter, and the language can be the same, "Dear people, we know that you have suffered a lot during the past many years. We thought that we were the only people who suffered, but now we realize that you have also suffered a lot. We have not been able to help you to suffer less, in fact we have made the situation much worse." This is the truth. "It is not our intention to make your group suffer. We have not been very skillful. We didn't know the peace process, and we have reacted with anger and frustration. We wanted to punish you every time we suffered, that is why we have made the situation worse. We don't believe in punishment anymore. We need your help. We don't want to continue like this. We really want to give you a chance to live peacefully and happily so that we will be able to live peacefully and happily also, because your peace and happiness is crucial for our peace

and happiness. If you don't have safety and security, then we will not have safety and security. We recognize that we inter-are. Our peace and safety depends on your peace and safety. That is why you must help us and we must help you. Let us come together as brothers and not as opponents. Please speak to us, and we will listen to you."

The Palestinians and Israelis who have come to Plum Village over the years have been offered this practice. During the first five or six days we don't say anything. We just practice mindful breathing; mindful walking; recognizing the fear, anger, and suffering in ourselves; and calming down. Then we sit down and listen to the other group and recognize that they have suffered a lot also. Now we are able to look with the eyes of compassion, and we use deep listening and loving speech. When it is the other group's turn to speak about their suffering and frustration, then mutual understanding becomes a reality. On the last day, the two groups come together to report to the whole Sangha about their practice.

You are intelligent people. You have to use your intelligence and lucidity to make peace in yourself and with your beloved, so that you can make peace with those that may seem like your enemy. They desperately need you, and you also need them.

PERSONAL VOICES

Building a Space Inside of Us:

An Israeli Finds a Space to Dream

To me, the possibility of Jews and Arabs living in peace, sharing one territory, one country, as equals, without feeling threatened, seemed a very distant dream. But, during our time together I felt it was not a dream. In the here and the now there was a reality we, Arabs and Jews, shared. I felt, in that moment, that we could be together as human beings, beyond religious and national definitions. I felt how deeply the practice has changed every one of us; how practicing deep listening, talking from the heart, walking mindfully, eating mindfully, and smiling mindfully together has opened my heart to my own confusion and suffering and to the others' confusion and suffering, and also to

our joy. We could sit together and be a container for our pain and anger. For me, the practice is building a space inside of us in which we can handle whatever comes up, without fighting with each other, without arguing, just being open to our own pain and to the others' pain.

3

Finding Happiness

I HAVE WRITTEN about the practice of solitude. You might think that you can be joyful only when you are with other people, talking and having fun. But our joy and happiness can be very deep in solitude as well. If we have deep joy and happiness, then we have a lot to give and share. Without the capacity for living alone, we become poorer and poorer; we don't have enough nourishment for ourselves and we don't have much to offer others. That is why learning to live in solitude is very important. Each day we should devote some time to being physically alone, because then it is easier to practice nourishing ourselves and looking deeply. That does not mean that it is impossible to practice being alone and looking deeply when you are with a crowd of people. It is possible. Even if you are sitting in the marketplace, you can be alone and not be carried away by the crowd; you are still yourself. We are still ourselves even if we are in a group discussion and even if there is collective emotion. We still dwell safely and solidly in our own island.

There are two steps. The first step is to be alone physically. The second step is to be able to be yourself and live in solitude even in a group. Being in solitude does not mean that you cut yourself off from others. It is because you are in solitude that you can be in communion with the world. I feel connected to you because I am fully myself. It is so simple. To really relate to the world you have to first go back and relate to yourself.

EACH STEP A FLOWER BLOOMS

I would like to recommend an exercise that can be done several times a day. Find a path about a hundred feet long. You may start next to a tree and end by a rock or another tree. At the beginning, just choose a short path in the woods or in your neighborhood. From the beginning to the end may take two or three hundred steps—it doesn't matter how many. The quality is not in the number of steps, it is in each step.

Let us say that you are born at the point where you begin walking (A), and you will die at the point where you stop walking (B). This is your life span, and you walk between the

two points in such a way that you enjoy every step. You know that after point B there is nothing waiting for you, so you are not eager to get there. You are born like Siddhartha, the baby Buddha. When Siddhartha was born he made seven steps and with each step a lotus flower bloomed beneath his foot. You can be born in this very moment as a baby Buddha—why not?

Give yourself an opportunity to be born as a baby Buddha, begin to make a step, and a lotus flower will bloom under your foot. When you step again, another lotus flower blooms. When we walk in such a way that fresh lotus flowers bloom under our feet, we enjoy our steps completely. We touch deeply the wonder of life under our feet. We are not thinking about point B, because there is nothing there but the cemetery. We don't like the thought of going there. That is not the direction of life. We don't want to rush to that place.

What is the direction of life? The direction of life is here and now. This is very simple and scientific. We have learned that the past has already gone and the future is not yet here. Only the present moment is available, and the present moment is the direction of life. We arrive in every step. With our first step we can say to ourselves: "I have arrived, I have arrived." The second step is not more or less important than the first step. In the first step you can experience bliss, happiness, joy, solidity, freedom, and the kingdom of God. Why do you have to hurry? Why do you have to run? Why do you have to walk quickly?

To make it easy, combine your in-breath with your first step. You breathe in and you make a step, and you are determined to arrive. You don't need the second step to arrive. You invest yourself entirely in your first step. If you want to, stay with your first step and breathe out, or breathe in and out again. You don't need to make the second step. Sink deeply into that moment.

Touch the present moment as deeply as possible and touch all the wonders of life that are there in the present moment. You can touch them not only with your feet, but with your eyes, your ears, and your mind. You touch everything that is there—the leaf, the pebble, the little flower, the sound of the bird. You are completely free from the desire to run to point

B. You have real freedom. Up till now you have not been free because you have been running. When you make the first step and enjoy it deeply, the desire to run is no longer there. You sink deeply into the present moment and touch the here and the now. It can be very joyful. You have solidity and freedom, and you enjoy touching life in you and around you.

Bring your attention down to the sole of your foot and touch the earth deeply. The deeper you touch, the more solid and free you become, and your joy cannot be described. You are free. This is the practice of aimlessness. You are free from any aim, any desire; there is nothing to run after. The word in Sanskrit is *apranihita*. It means “not to put something in front of you and run after it.” Most of us have an object to run after and that is why we are always on the run; we cannot stop. This is the practice of stopping. Try to do it alone. Go to the woods, choose two trees, and walk the path between them so that each step brings freedom and joy. You may take as long as you like. During each step you are fully free from the desire to run. This is an art and it is the basic practice of stopping. Buddhist meditation cannot be successful without this practice.

Even when you sleep you may continue to run and search. If you practice stopping, you see that everything you are searching for is already here and now. Practicing like this, you will find that the kingdom of God and the Pure Land of the Buddha are available right here and right now, twenty-four hours a day. The question is whether we are available to the kingdom. You have to destroy whatever you are looking for; you have to throw it away and go home to yourself. God, solidity, freedom, immortality—everything is available in the here and the now. With this understanding, walking is not difficult, it is delightful. Every minute of it has the power to heal and transform.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

You don't have to be formal when you walk in the kingdom of God. You can adopt any style of walking that brings you the deepest joy. You don't have to show anyone that you are practicing. When you see something interesting you can kneel down, look, and smile. You continue breathing in and out mindfully, so that you stay in the here and the now in a

solid way. You get in touch with the here and the now not only with your feet, but with your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, hands, and mind. The six sense organs can come together and touch the here and the now. Your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are in touch with form, sound, odor, taste, touch, and perceptions.

Healing is not possible without your body and mind coming to a stop. When your body and mind continue to be under pressure and tension, healing is difficult. The moment you are able to stop physically and mentally, your body and mind develop the capacity of self-healing. Every step helps you to heal yourself physically and mentally. If you can practice like that for a few days, you will notice the change in your body and your mind.

When you cut your finger, there is no reason to worry. You only have to clean the wound and your body knows how to mend the cut; you don't have to do anything. Our body has the capacity to heal itself, but we have to allow it to do so. We allow it to rest and come to a stop. That is why it is good to practice total relaxation.⁵ You can invite your partner, your friend, or your child to come and lie down, and together you stop both physically and mentally and your body and mind are able to heal themselves. We have lost our capacity to rest. Even if we have ten days of vacation, we don't know how to use them to rest. Sometimes after a vacation we feel even more tired. That is why relaxation and stopping are an art we have to re-learn.

The distance separating you and the kingdom of God is a flash of mindfulness. With mindfulness of breathing you are again in the kingdom. Through the practice of mindfulness there are ways to stay in the kingdom and not run away. Mindfulness is the holy spirit, the energy of God, and it is always available as a seed in our store consciousness. Every time we touch that seed it becomes an energy protecting us, bringing us back to our true home—life, the kingdom. Please throw away your idea that the kingdom of God exists outside of you and in the future. The kingdom of God is you, because you belong to the kingdom of God. It is the ground that you touch. It can be seen in a dead leaf, in a pebble, an insect, the sunshine, the water, the rain. It is right here, right now.

If I were to offer you a gift, I would offer nothing less than the kingdom of God. “It is a waste to be a human being on Earth if you don’t know how to enjoy walking in the kingdom of God.” To earn a diploma, you have to spend many years studying, but walking in the kingdom of God is only a matter of awakening to the fact that the kingdom is here, you belong to it, and you are a wonder. If you think that you are less than a wonder, you are wrong. You are a real wonder—you don’t have to be something else. You are a miracle. You are wonderful as you are. Whether you are a man, a woman, black, white, Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, you are all wonders. You can awaken to this fact, and know that you don’t need to run anymore to be happy.

Imagine you are an astronaut who went to the moon. You were very eager to go there and have a look. You had to bring along oxygen and water, and you wanted to have a picnic up there. Suppose after one or two days on the moon you discover that something is wrong with your spacecraft and you cannot go home to Earth. The amount of oxygen you have with you is only enough for three days, and you know that there is not enough time for the people on Earth to send another craft for you, that you will die before they can come. If the people at ground control were to ask you, “What is your deepest desire at this moment?” your answer would likely be something like this, “I want to go home to the Earth. I love the Earth—the small dirt path, the red earth, the green grass, the flowers, the trees, and the squirrels running up and down. My deepest desire is to go home and enjoy walking on the earth. I don’t want to be the president of a big corporation. I don’t want to be a famous writer or filmmaker. I don’t want anything except to go home to my planet and enjoy making steps.”

What are you waiting for? Now you have been rescued; you have come back to Earth. Why don’t you enjoy yourself? If you know how to walk like this, you will treasure the Earth, and you will find ways to protect the planet, rivers, trees, squirrels, and human life. When we walk in the kingdom of God we become an instrument for peace. It is a wonderful thing to be born here as a human being and to be able to recognize that we are alive. This is the beginning of the

peace process.

WASHING DISHES MINDFULLY

Some years ago I wrote a book on how to wash the dishes called, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Beacon Press, 1975). We usually think that washing dishes is for the purpose of cleaning them. Some of us are not used to washing dishes. We think of it as dirty work, and we leave it for others to do. I think you should go home and share washing the dishes with your partner. It can be very joyful, standing together, and there is enough space for both of you. Try not to buy a dishwashing machine.

When I was a novice, I had to wash dishes for one hundred monks. There was no running water—no cold water, no hot water, no tap water at all, and no soap. You may wonder how I managed to wash the dishes! I had only a coconut skin as a sponge. Many people in my country still use this. You take a layer of coconut skin and dry it to make into implements for cleaning pots and pans. As a novice I had to go out and gather wood in the pine-covered hills. We gathered dead branches and pine needles into a big heap. You can cook rice or soup just with pine needles.

We were just two novices washing the dishes for one hundred monks. It was a lot of fun washing dishes together, even without hot water and soap. Some countries have modern homes that are very comfortable. The water, hot and cold comes right into the kitchen; you have only to turn on the tap. You can stand there and enjoy washing dishes. But maybe you are lazy. You see a big pile of dishes and you don't want to go over and wash them. But as soon as you roll up your sleeves and stand in front of the basin, it is not difficult any more.

Whether you are living in one of these modern countries, or you have only a well for water, you can still enjoy washing the dishes.

Suppose the baby Buddha—or the baby Mohammed or the baby Moses—had just been born. You would want to bathe him with water. Wash every bowl, every dish, as if you are bathing the baby Buddha—breathing in, feeling joy; breathing out, smiling. Every minute can be a holy, sacred minute. Where do you seek the spiritual? You seek the

spiritual in every ordinary thing that you do every day. Sweeping the floor, watering the vegetables, and washing the dishes become holy and sacred if mindfulness is there. With mindfulness and concentration, everything becomes spiritual.

If you want to finish washing the dishes as quickly as possible so you can sit down to drink your tea, then the time for dishwashing is no longer worth living. If you cannot enjoy washing the dishes, then when you sit down and drink your tea you will be thinking of other things and you will also waste your time of drinking tea. You are always thinking of something, of the next thing, and you waste your life in that way. That is why, in order to fully enjoy your cup of tea, you have to fully enjoy washing the dishes. Make it joyful. You can organize your daily life in such a way that every moment is a celebration.

CONDITIONS FOR HAPPINESS

Suppose you sit at the foot of a tree and jot down on a piece of paper the conditions for happiness that are available to you now. This is a true meditation, for which you need mindfulness and concentration. For example, you may write: “I can do walking meditation each day, several times a day” or “the air is fresh and the day is cool.” There will come a time when two sheets of paper will not be enough. For whom are you writing these things? To whom will you give the sheet of paper? You don’t need to give it to anyone. Maybe you will need it. Every time you read it you will see that you are a happy person, because there are so many conditions for happiness available.

Most of us trample on the conditions for our happiness. We think that we are not happy, that we need more conditions to be happy, and that these conditions are to be found in the future. The teaching and the practice urge us to come home to the here and the now and to realize that many conditions for happiness are already available—more than enough for us to be happy. You remind yourself, and you are reminded by your community and your teacher, that happiness is here—just enjoy it.

SUFFERING AND HAPPINESS INTER-ARE

This does not mean that there is no suffering. A place

without suffering cannot exist, because it is impossible to have happiness without suffering. Happiness and suffering inter-are. It is like left and right. To think that the right can exist without the left is absurd. Without the left, there can be no right. If one is not there, the other is not there, either. If you had never been hungry, you could not know the joy of having something to eat. If you had never been cold, you could not feel the happiness of having something warm to wear.

In Plum Village we have several lotus ponds. Lotus flowers cannot grow without mud. The mud does not necessarily smell as good as the lotus flower, but without the mud there could be no flower. If you are a gardener, you know that compost is necessary for flowers and vegetables to grow. When you look into a flower you see the compost and the manure. Flowers and garbage depend on each other. A flower will become a piece of garbage in ten days. If you meditate well, you can see the compost and garbage in the flower now. If you don't meditate, you wait for ten days and then the flower becomes garbage. When an organic gardener looks into a heap of garbage, he or she can already see the tomatoes and lettuce, because the gardener knows how to transform the garbage back into flowers.

The same thing is true with suffering and happiness; they are both organic. Happiness can become suffering if you don't know how to handle it. If you don't know how to handle love, it can turn into hate. If you know the art of organic gardening, you can turn suffering back into happiness, and hate into love again. Because of garbage we can make beautiful flowers, because of suffering, we can learn to be understanding and compassionate. How can you expect your children to become compassionate if they don't know what suffering is? Compassion is made of understanding. If there is no understanding of suffering, there is no compassion.

You may have heard about the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth is suffering, also called ill-being. The Second Noble Truth is the understanding of the roots of ill-being. There is no doubt that there is suffering on our planet Earth, but the Earth is also a place where we can learn understanding and compassion. If we are able to get in

touch with the wonders of life, if we know how to be happy in every moment, we will not create suffering for ourselves and for others.

Understanding is very concrete; it is the opposite of ignorance. When you suffer, you get angry, and you want to punish your beloved. You believe that by punishing him you will suffer less. That is not understanding, that is ignorance. After you punish him, he will suffer a lot, and he will find ways to punish you back. When you are punished, you get angrier, and you try stronger ways to punish him. In this way, the cycle of anger and punishment continues.

We know we have the capacity to hurt our beloved with our words as well as our actions. She might suffer the whole day or for many days. We know that she can also make us suffer. She can say or do something that keeps us awake all night and makes us lose our happiness. Of course, both people have the capacity to punish. After punishing each other for a long time, you discover that neither of you has profited from this. Then you have an awakening, an understanding, that is very clear and simple: mutual punishment does not take you anywhere. So, you may want to begin by saying kindly, "My dear friend, let us stop punishing each other. Let us help each other. The path of punishment should not be taken. The path of helping and protecting should be followed. I make a vow not to punish you anymore, my beloved, because I know that by punishing you, I will make you suffer and make myself suffer. If you have the same kind of awakening, you will learn that punishing me not only makes me suffer, but also makes you suffer." That is understanding, that is compassion.

You, as a group of Palestinians and Israelis, have undergone a lot of suffering. Every time your people are hit by a bomb or a weapon, you want to retaliate. The message is very clear, "If you attack us we will attack you back. A tooth for a tooth—that is politics. If you commit an act of terrorism, you will be terrorized." That message is aimed at dissuading the other side. You terrorize and threaten each other. But if you are enlightened, awakened, and have seen suffering and learned from suffering, then you know that the course of punishment has not brought any positive result.

Sit down together and write a love letter. The letter must be the product of your understanding and compassion. If you don't have enough understanding, you cannot write the letter. The letter may take several months, because you want to manifest all the awakening and compassion that you have in your heart. When you have finished the letter and the other group reads it, they will see that you wrote it out of your awakening and compassion and that it is not just diplomatic. That will move their hearts. It will speak directly to the hearts of the Palestinians, the Israelis, and all the people in the world who are concerned about the suffering in the Middle East. You are speaking for your own people because your government has not been able to do so. You are part of a real peace process.

I have seen people who have written a love letter to their partner, their son, their father, their wife; and when their beloved has received the letter, they are completely transformed and reconciliation became possible. If it works for two people, it will work for two groups of people. Are you awakened enough? Are you enlightened enough? Do you have enough understanding and compassion to truly see the situation? If you can see your own suffering and you can see the suffering of the other group of people, you will be able to write such a letter. That letter will be like thunder, because it is nothing but truth, enlightenment, and peace. This is our practice of peace. In the meantime, you can write a personal letter to your beloved to see how enlightened and compassionate you are. Then you will know whether it is time for you to sit down as a group and write a letter to the other group.

PERSONAL VOICES

Something Is Beginning to Settle and Grow Stronger: A Palestinian Woman Speaks

In the past, I thought that language was just a tool for communicating. Yet, in the last few months, I realized that my mother tongue is not just a language—it is a part of my being, my culture, my traditions, and my history. It is the basis of belonging to my people and nation. Giving up my language is actually effacing a part of me. When I first used my mother tongue, I felt I

regained something precious that was missing for years. I discovered that I can communicate with my ideas, feelings, and inner self more easily and smoothly than ever. I saw that creating a space for the Arabic language in our meetings has positively affected the Palestinians, who feel like hosts, rather than guests or strangers, for the first time. I felt a sense of acceptance among the Israelis as well, which gave a feeling of equality.

I feel that something is beginning to settle and grow stronger. There is a real process happening and there seems to be equal participation from both sides, pushing the boat in the right direction. The members of the Sangha belong to two fighting nations. The fight is deeply rooted and is very painful. It has a background of many decades of hatred. Our group is different from others in one major way: it deals with conflict resolution through practicing inner peace, deep listening, and talking with affection and love.

The conflict is there with us in the Sangha, even when we do not talk about it. I see that dealing with it and talking about it need to occur under the shelter of practicing and through practicing.

We have to practice in a very grounded way because we live in a cruel reality. There are many obstacles that can disturb our attention and focus and can water the seeds of hatred and rage in us. Our experience settles our faith and strengthens it inside each of us.

A People's Peace Treaty

IN 1964, I helped found the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS) in Vietnam. It was created during the war to help with the problems of violence, poverty, sickness, and social injustice. We trained young monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen to do social work. We went to the countryside to help peasants rebuild their villages and improve their quality of life through education, health work, and organization.

There were some villages with no schools, where the children had to work from a very young age to help their parents cultivating the land, fishing, and doing many other things; they had no opportunity to get an education. We went to these villages and set up very humble schools. We did not have any money. Just one or two of us would go and play with the children, and begin to teach them how to read and write.

When it rained we would ask the permission of one of the villagers to go into their house to continue teaching. Gradually the parents could see that the children liked us. Finally, we proposed that people in the village help us to build a school. The school would be made of bamboo and coconut leaves—coconut leaves for the roof and bamboo for the walls. It would be the first school ever built in the village. When people saw that we were doing a good thing, then they helped us make the school bigger so that other children could come. We also offered classes in the evenings for the children and adults who could not attend class in the day. We found friends who donated oil or kerosene so we could light lamps for night classes. We began with what we knew and what we had. We did not expect anything from the government, because if you wait for the government, you will wait a long time.

Sometimes we would bring a lawyer or judge from the city to the village so that the villagers could get birth certificates for their children. If the children did not have birth certificates, they could not enroll in public school. In one morning we might issue twenty birth certificates, and the children who had attended our school could then go to a public school.

We also set up health centers made of coconut leaves and

bamboo walls. We mixed mud with straw and made the walls very warm. I showed the young people how to do it. We also put some cement in it to make it stronger. We asked six students who were about to graduate from medical school to come each week to help diagnose and treat the peasants. Villagers came to the center with all kinds of diseases—cataracts, coughs, and colds. We did not have a budget, we only had our hearts. We were young, and it was the energy of love that helped us do these things. We also showed people how to build toilets. Up until then, they went to the toilet in many places. If they had diarrhea, the bacteria could get into the stream and then other people would get diarrhea. We showed them how to use cement and sand in order to make a very cheap toilet seat. We also taught people how to make compost and how to raise chickens. We learned the techniques at school and then went into the countryside and shared our knowledge. We did a lot of things like this and we had a lot of joy.

We also helped form cooperatives, and taught people how to organize themselves and invest their money. One person would borrow money from the other families in order to build a house or to invest in a small business. Then the next month another person would be able to borrow money from others.

In this way, we set up pilot villages. When we arrived at the village, we took photographs of how the people were living. Then, after one year of work, the village was transformed, and we took more photos. We invited peasants from other villages to come and see so they would be inspired to transform their villages in the same way. We didn't rely on any government, because there were two governments in Vietnam—one Communist and one anti-Communist—and they were fighting each other. We did not want to take sides, because we knew that if we took sides, we would have to fight the other side. When you invest your time and your life into fighting the other side, then you cannot help people.

The first thing we had to do was win the people's sympathy. When you go to a village and are looking for a place to stay, you do not choose a wealthy family, because it might set people against you. Also, you do not stay in a house if a beautiful woman lives there, because people might

gossip. Every month, we offered compensation to the people in whose house we ate and slept. You have to win their hearts. We organized the peasants so that they could help each other, take their situation in hand, and not just sit and wait for the government.

DESPAIR AND HOPE

Because of the war, bombing destroyed many villages and there were many refugees. At the beginning, we had planned to work in rural development, but when the war became intense, we took care of refugees and tried to resettle them. In 1969 a village that we had helped build in Quang Tri Province was bombed. It was very close to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the north and the south. The village is called Tra Loc. We had spent more than a year making the village into a beautiful place, where people enjoyed living. Then one day American planes came and bombed the village. They had received information that Communist guerrillas were penetrating the village.

The people in the village lost their homes, and our workers took refuge in other places. They sent word to us and asked whether they should rebuild the village, and we said, "Yes, you have to rebuild the village." We spent another six months rebuilding and then the village was destroyed for a second time by bombing. Again, the people lost their homes. We had built many villages like that throughout the country, but it was very difficult near the DMZ. Then our workers asked us whether we should rebuild it for a third time, and after much deliberation we said, "Yes we have to rebuild it." So we rebuilt it for the third time. Do you know what happened? It was destroyed for a third time by American bombing.

We were very close to despair. Despair is the worst thing that can happen to a human being. We had rebuilt the village for the third time, and it was bombarded for the third time. The same question was asked, "Should we rebuild? Should we give up?" There was a lot of discussion at our headquarters, and we were tempted by the idea of giving up—three times was too much. But, in the end, we were wise enough not to give up. If we gave up on Tra Loc village, we would be giving up hope. We had to maintain hope in order not to fall into despair. That is why we decided to rebuild it

for the fourth time.

Tra Loc village was just one place where the situation was very hard. People were killing each other and dying every day. Russia, China, and America were involved in the war. They had their ideologies, their weapons, their advisors, and their military personnel. Vietnam had become the victim of an international conflict. We wanted to end the war, but we could not, because the situation was not in our hands—it was in the hands of big powers.

It did not seem that there was any hope, because the war had been dragging on and on. I had to practice mindful breathing and coming back home to my true self. I did not have a lot of hope, I have to confess, but if I had had *no* hope, I would have destroyed these young people. I had to practice and nourish a little hope so that I could be a refuge for them.

GOING HOME TO YOURSELF

I had a student, Sister Tri Hai, who graduated in English literature from Indiana University in Bloomington. She had been ordained as a nun. She was caught, arrested, and put into prison for working for peace and human rights. When she was in prison, she practiced walking meditation in her small cell, which she shared with several other women. In order to keep her courage up to survive, she had to practice walking meditation. She was able to help many people in prison. In a situation like that, you survive through your spiritual life, otherwise you will go insane. You have no hope, you are frustrated, and you suffer so much. That is why the spiritual dimension of your life is so important. If you are overwhelmed by anger, despair, and fear, and you are suffering a lot, you cannot help yourself—so how can you help other people? Anger is fire, and it will continue to burn you. We have gone through the fire and we know how hot it is.

Sister Tri Hai practiced walking meditation all night so she could be herself and not go insane. She went back to her true home within herself. Her true home is not in Paris, London, or Tra Loc, because that home can be bombarded and taken away. Your true home is within yourself, and nobody can take it away from you. The Buddha said, “Go home to the island within yourself. There is a safe island of self inside. Every

time you suffer, every time you are lost, go back to your true home. Nobody can take that true home away from you.” The Buddha gave that teaching to his disciples when he was eighty years old and knew he was about to pass away.⁶

There are days when nothing seems to work out for us. We rely on our intelligence, on our talent, and we think that we can succeed. But there are days when everything seems to go wrong. When things go wrong we try harder, and when we try harder things continue to go wrong. We say, “This is not my day; I am so unlucky today.” The best thing to do is to stop trying, go home to yourself, and recover yourself. You cannot just rely on your talent and intelligence and carry on. You have to go home and rebuild yourself, gaining more solidity, freedom, peace, and calm before you can try again.

Many years ago I had a hermitage in a wood about two hours’ drive from Paris. One morning I left the hermitage to walk in the woods. I spent the whole day there and practiced sitting and writing poetry. It was very beautiful in the morning, but in the late afternoon I noticed that clouds were gathering and the wind was beginning to blow, so I walked home. When I arrived at my hermitage it was a mess because in the morning I had opened all the windows and the door so that the sunshine could come in and dry everything inside. The wind had blown all the papers off my desk and they were scattered everywhere. The hermitage was cold and miserable. The first thing I did was to close the windows and the door. The second thing I did was to make a fire. When the fire began to glow I heard the joyful noise of the wind and I felt much better. The third thing I did was to pick up all the scattered sheets of paper, put them on the table, and put a stone on them. I spent twenty minutes doing that. Then, finally, I sat down close to the wood stove. I felt wonderful, and the hermitage had become warm and pleasant.

When you find that your conditions are miserable because the windows of your eyes are open, the windows of your ears are open, the wind from outside is blowing in, and you have become a victim—a mess in your feelings, your body, and your perceptions—you should not try hard. You should go home to your hermitage; it is inside you. Close the doors, light the fire, and make it cozy again. That is what I call

“taking refuge in the island of self.” If you don’t go home to yourself, you continue to lose yourself. You destroy yourself and you destroy people around you, even if you have goodwill and want to do something to help. That is why the practice of going home to the island of self is so important. No one can take your true home away.

FOLLOWING THE LINE OF PEACE

I have been banned from going home to Vietnam since 1966, so I practice having a home within myself. Wherever I go, I feel at home. Don’t think that my home is in Plum Village. My home is more solid than Plum Village, because I know Plum Village can be taken away from us. There were times when the Lower Hamlet was shut down by the French government because we did not meet the building codes—we were too poor to build a fire road, to have the appropriate doors, the kitchen was not up to code, and so on. But we did not suffer so much, because we had our true home inside. If they come and burn your hut and chase you away, of course you suffer, but if you know how to go back to your true home, you will not lose your faith. You know that if your true home is still there inside, you will be able to build another home outside. It is only if you lose your home inside that you lose hope.

Sister Chân Không was born in the city of Ben Tre in the south of Vietnam. One day the U.S. Army learned that a dozen Communist guerrillas had penetrated the town and set up anti-aircraft guns. One American plane that had flown by had been shot at, but it had not been hit. That afternoon many American war planes came and destroyed the town. Their action was motivated by fear. There were about five hundred thousand American soldiers, and about twelve Communist guerrillas, but the Americans’ fear and anger made them destroy the whole town. This was not intelligent practice, it only made the people more anti-American. But when there is so much fear and anger inside, you lose your lucidity and intelligence. When the commander who conducted the operation was asked why they had destroyed the city of Ben Tre, he said, “Well, we had to destroy the city in order to save it.” That is the logic of the military.

RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE WITH UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSION

One night some people came to one of our work camps run by the SYSS. It was not very far from Saigon, on the bank of the Saigon River. We had sent about ten workers to stay there for several months and help rebuild the village. Five of our social workers were sleeping in the camp. The other five were working elsewhere. Sister Chân Không had visited them in the afternoon and had wanted to stay the night at the camp, but she had been called back to the city on an urgent matter. If she had stayed there that night she would have been killed. Some people came to the camp that night, took five of our social workers, and tied them up. They then took them to the riverbank and asked them whether they belonged to the SYSS. They said yes. Then the people said, "Sorry, we have to kill you"—and all five were shot on the riverbank.

We learned later that it was the work of the anti-Communists. Neither group approved of us because we did not want to take the side of any warring party. The Communists feared that we were with the CIA, and the anti-Communists feared that we were disguised Communists. They had fear, but they also had suspicion and anger. Almost everyone was acting on the foundations of fear, anger, and suspicion—and that is the war from within. We wanted to build brotherhood and follow the line of peace. We didn't want to engage with one side in order to fight and kill the other. We wanted to embrace both parties, and that is why each side suspected us of being connected with the other group. The Communists came and said, "You have to go away. If you stay here we cannot guarantee your safety." They said this because we were so kind to the peasants, we were so dedicated to our ideal of serving, and so the peasants loved us and supported us. The Communist guerrillas didn't like that—they wanted all the support for themselves. They controlled the situation at night and the anti-Communists controlled the situation during the day, and we were harassed by both of them. Despite this, we did not abandon our nonpartisan stand, because that was our ideal of service and nondiscrimination. The Communists were our brothers and sisters, and the anti-Communists were our brothers and sisters also. We didn't want to kill our brothers

and sisters.

One of the five social workers survived. He had been seriously wounded, although the anti-Communists had thought he was dead. In the morning, when Sister Chân Không went there in her little car, she discovered that the workers had been taken from the camp, and, finally, she found the bodies of the four who had been killed. She also found the young monk who had been shot in the belly, but who was still alive. We took him to hospital and he survived. He told us what had happened.

We then organized a ceremony and invited many people to come. During the ceremony we made a speech in which we said, "Dear friends, you kill us because you think that we are your enemy, that we are trying to destroy you. But our intention is not to destroy anyone. We have been trained to love and to serve. We do not want anyone to die, whether they are Communist, non-Communist, or anti-Communist. If you really understood us and our motivation, you would not have killed us like that." We knew that they were there, listening in the crowd.

The second time we were attacked was at the SYSS campus where we trained young workers. During the night, people threw grenades into the dorm. They also tried to throw a grenade into my room but it hit the curtain inside the window and was bounced back out. I was in Paris at the time, calling for the cessation of hostilities. The attack wounded several people, and one student died right away. One social worker lost a limb and had 300 pieces of shrapnel in her body from a grenade. Her name was Bui Thi Huong. She also, like Sr. Chân Không, was a native of Ben Tre. We arranged for her to be taken to Japan for treatment. When she was in hospital in Japan, they extracted hundreds of pieces of grenade from her body. There were so many because it was an anti-personnel grenade that is designed to break into tiny pieces in order to hit as many people as possible. They could not remove all of the pieces. There were still about a hundred fragments that could not be extracted, so they left them in her body.

I have a student who was an American soldier in Vietnam. His unit was caught in an ambush and most of them were

killed; only he and a few others survived. This soldier then killed five Vietnamese children, with poisoned sandwiches, as revenge for the attack on his unit. We invited him to speak in a Dharma discussion. We sat there, breathing in and out, giving him the opportunity to speak, because if you cannot tell your story, it will stay with you forever. We practiced compassionate listening and asked him, "Dear friend, if you have anything in your heart that you have not been able to say, please say it now—this is the place to do it." He could not speak for two days. It is very hard to say such a thing—but finally, on the third day, he managed to tell the story. He cried and cried.

That evening I invited him to my room. I said, "Okay, you killed five children. I recognize that. But why don't you see that you can also save five children—you can do it today. There are children dying everywhere in the world, including America, because of violence, poverty, and oppression. One child may need only half a dollar to buy a tablet of medicine that could save his life, but he dies because he does not have the money. You can save five children a day. You have your intelligence, your education, you can go out at this very moment and save children who are dying. Why do you allow the past to overwhelm you and imprison you so that you cannot be alive in the present moment? In the present moment, where life is available, you can do things to repair the past, because according to this practice the past is still there in the present. If you know how to touch the present, you can heal the past. Go out and save five children today and you will feel better." That is exactly what he did. He became healed by this work, and he became my student.⁷

In many reeducation camps set up by the Communists, my students practiced sitting meditation and walking meditation. Sometimes they did not allow us to practice sitting meditation. The reeducation camps were like hard labor camps, and you had to spend all your time and energy working so you had no time to think of other things. In the evenings you might have some time for yourself and you could practice sitting meditation, but many of the guards saw this as a challenge. When you sit like that in order to be free, to be yourself, they feel you are saying, "I am not afraid of

you. I can be myself.” They did not allow us to practice sitting meditation because it radiates the energy of solidity. When you sit like that you prove that you *are* yourself, you are not carried away by your fear, and they want you to be constantly fearful of them. We had to wait until they turned off the light to practice sitting meditation. This was our way to survive. We had to practice breathing, “I have arrived, I am home.” It was not a luxury. If you cannot be yourself, if you do not know how to handle your fear, despair, and anger, you are lost; you cannot help anyone else.

🐼 THE BOAT PEOPLE

In 1978, I went to Singapore to attend a conference on religion and peace, and there I discovered the plight and the suffering of the boat people. Boat people were dying on the ocean, and Singapore had a very hard policy against them. Every time a boat carrying refugees tried to come to shore, they pushed them out to sea to die. They didn’t want to help them. The fishermen who had compassion and saved boat people from drowning were punished; they had to pay a huge sum of money so that the next time they wouldn’t dare save people.

I stayed on in Singapore in order to secretly organize a rescue operation—secretly, because I knew that the Singapore government would not want me to do it. Other people came and helped me—friends from France, Holland, and other European countries. We hired a boat, took medicine, water, and food out to sea, and tried to rescue people.

Malaysia’s policy was also to reject the boat people. They preferred to have them die on the ocean rather than help them to land and take them to prison. A number of our group who traveled to the Malaysian coast witnessed many tragic events. In one incident, two boats full of people tried to land, and the police forced them back out to sea. Then, one of the boats capsized because it was no longer solid enough to be seaworthy. Everyone in the other boat saw the people drowning; no one was able to swim to shore. The people in the other boat were determined to go in again. They managed to land and then they destroyed their boat so that they could not be pushed out again. The police had to take

them to prison while they waited for another boat to come so they could put them on it and push it back out to sea. That was the normal policy.

Immediately, our friends called the press, because we knew that the journalists were the only ones who could save the boat people. If the journalists knew there were people being held, they would take photographs and publish them in the newspapers. Then the Malaysian government would no longer dare to push the boat people out to sea. That was one of the ways to save the boat people—they were put in prison, but they were safe. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had an office in Malaysia. We invited them to come and take notes and take down the names of refugees. These refugees might stay there for several years without the opportunity to be settled in another country because the UNHCR did not work diligently at all. We discovered that many boat people were kept year after year on a number of islands, without any hope of being resettled.

In Singapore we had to do something illegal. We went to the houses of fishermen and told them, “Anytime you rescue boat people, please telephone us. We will come and take them, and in that way you will not be punished.” We gave them our telephone number, and from time to time a fisherman would call us and we would go there by taxi to pick up the boat person. Then, we would take him or her to the French embassy.

The French ambassador in Singapore, Jacques Gasseau, was a man of heart. He knew what we were doing. We came at night when the embassy was closed, helped the boat person climb into the embassy compound, and told him or her to wait there. In the morning the ambassador came with his personnel. They opened the gate and when they saw someone was there, they asked, “Who are you?” The boat person would answer, “I am a boat person, someone brought me here.” We would ask the boat person not to reveal our identity. The ambassador understood. He would call the police, the police would come, record the name of the person, take him or her to prison, and then that person was safe. Otherwise, he or she would have been pushed out to die at sea. We did many illegal things like that.

We had hired three boats and they were full of refugees. We intended to sail them to Australia—to Perth or to Darwin. We had arranged everything so that the boat people would have enough water, medicine, and a little bit of money. Our plan was that when the boats were about to arrive, we would hold a press conference and say, “The boat people are coming, please don’t push them away.” That is the kind of thing we used to do. We did not speak about compassion, we just tried to do the work of compassion.

One night, we were discovered. The Singapore police came and surrounded our office. They had discovered our underground network. The three boats full of refugees were already at sea. The boats did not have authorization to take refuge in the waters of Singapore or Malaysia. The government impounded our fourth boat, which we were using to supply the boat people with water, food, and medicine. We could not get to the boat people, and they were hungry and miserable. There was also a storm.

I was sitting on solid ground, but I was really floating on the sea, because my life and the life of the boat people were the same. Imagine you are responsible for the lives of nearly one thousand people—three hundred in one boat, four hundred in another boat, and so on. There was a child being born in the third boat, the Leapdal. We were in touch with the boat, but it was so difficult. If you don’t practice sitting meditation and walking meditation in this type of situation, you cannot be yourself, you cannot help, and you can go insane.

At midnight, the police came and confiscated our passports and ordered us to leave the country within twenty-four hours. How could we do that while almost one thousand boat people were our responsibility? It was very hard. From one o’clock to five o’clock in the morning, we all practiced walking meditation to be ourselves and to find a way. Finally, at four o’clock we had the idea to go to Jacques Gasseau and ask him to intervene so that we could stay ten more days to complete the operation. At five o’clock we left our office, but there were no taxis, and the embassy didn’t open until nine o’clock. So we carried on doing walking meditation.

We were at the gate of the embassy when it opened. We

went in and talked to the ambassador and he wrote a letter to the Singapore government, intervening on our behalf and asking them to allow us to stay ten more days. We had to wait until almost eleven o'clock to obtain the letter, and then we ran to the office of the Prime Minister. When he got the letter he convened a meeting of all the Cabinet members while we waited outside. Finally, they agreed. We had only fifteen minutes to get to the Ministry of the Interior and have our visas renewed for ten days. If we hadn't had a spiritual dimension in our life, we would have been lost.

PEACE TREATY 8

When people come to Plum Village to be with us, it is not to get social or political support. There is a tendency to speak about your suffering and difficulties so that you can draw more people to support you in order to fight the other side. That is a big temptation. You think if you are strong and you will have more supporters, the other side will have to withdraw. That is the hope of many people. But we know that activities based on that kind of thinking have gone on for many years without bearing any fruit at all.

We have a different kind of approach. Our approach is that we should have a real peace process, a real road map for peace, and it should be based on our spiritual strength—the kind of strength that is lacking in our politicians. If you can bring peace and solidity into yourself and your group, you may be able to influence your government, and together you can propose something that will be accepted; not just a treaty written in political and military terms, but a peace treaty entirely based on your spiritual insight.

You can sign the peace treaty with yourself, because you may be at war with yourself inside. Maybe you are making war on your body. You don't know how to take care of your body, and you have made it suffer a lot. You have destroyed your body with alcohol, drugs, and other substances. Now you have to sign a treaty with your body, your feelings, and your emotions. You should know how to go home to yourself and take care of your anger and despair. You have to make a peace treaty with them before you can have some peace, and before you can be reconciled with your beloved. If there is a war in you, it is very easy to start a war with someone else—

not to mention with your enemy. Your beloved can be your everyday enemy. The way you talk to her, the way you act—full of anger and violence—makes you into an enemy. If your beloved is your enemy, how can you hope to have peace in your country and with the other group?

We all have the seed of wisdom in us. We know that punishing leads us nowhere, and yet we are always trying to punish someone. When your beloved says or does something that makes you suffer, you want to punish her, because you believe that by punishing her you will get some relief. There are times when you are lucid and you know that this is childish and ignorant, because when you make your beloved suffer, she will also try to get some relief by punishing you in turn, and there will be an escalation of punishment. If you cannot stop that escalation between you and your beloved, how can you stop that escalation with the other group of people, with the other nation?

The leaders of Palestine and Israel have the seeds of understanding and wisdom, but there are other seeds—the seed of anger, the temptation to punish, the seed of despair. Even between ourselves, we don't agree. We are in the same camp, co-victims of the other side, but we cannot come together. If we cannot be reconciled among ourselves, how can we be reconciled with the other group? The Palestinians are divided; the Israelis are also divided. Reconciliation needs to take place in yourself, then with your beloved, and then with your group.

We usually begin by going to our beloved and asking her to change, trying to force her to change. This is not the real peace process. The real peace process is to go home to yourself, be reconciled with yourself, and know how to handle your difficulties: how to deal with despair, suspicion, fear, and anger. After that you can take the second step and help your beloved. She will do the same. She has to go back to herself and learn to handle her emotions before you both can help a third, fourth, or fifth person; this is a real peace process.

Can you help? Are you solid enough? Do you have enough understanding, solidity, and compassion? If you practice as a group and you can express your wisdom, understanding, and

compassion, then you will be an important element in the peace process. You have to support your loved ones by watering the seeds of understanding and compassion in them, encouraging them to maintain their wisdom, and helping them to be reconciled with themselves. Your political leaders might feel very alone, and you can help them to feel less lonely. You can bring them many elements of courage, peace, hope, and intelligence.

You should not leave the Israeli and Palestinian leaders alone. Alone they will feel cut off, having to use only their own resources. You have to bring your support, and help them to water their best seeds. The seeds of understanding and wisdom are present in everyone.

Communication should be possible in order to end the war. As long as we are motivated by the desire to punish each other, there will be no end to the hostilities and there will be no happiness in me, in you, or between us. That is a real peace treaty, one based on communication. In our daily life we are the victims of our wrong perceptions—that is why we shouldn't be in a hurry to act. We have to be careful not to act on the basis of our wrong perceptions, on the basis of our anger and despair. If we do that, we will spoil everything.

RIGHT UNDERSTANDING

If you succeed in practicing the peace treaty as a couple, then you have a chance of signing a people's peace treaty with the other group. You don't need to be two governments. You need to be a group of Israelis and a group of Palestinians who are wholly devoted to the cause of peace. Many people will support you, even some politicians. You can sit together and draw up a people's peace treaty, which will be highly educational for your country, for your governments, and for the people of the world. You know that many of us will come to your peace conference to learn about your treaty. Don't just sit there and wait for your government. You have to *be* peace and reconciliation—and you act in the here and now. If you succeed in drawing up a peace treaty between you and your son, daughter, or partner, and if you can live according to that peace treaty, then peace is a reality. If you can do it as a group, then you will have enormous power. You will be able to move and open the hearts of so many people. You will have

our support and the support of many people who are concerned and who want you to have your own country, your own home, and to be able to live peacefully with each other.

Doctors examine a patient very carefully before making a diagnosis. They test and listen before prescribing a treatment, otherwise the treatment may kill the patient. Even if they are sure, they check again. Are you sure of your perception? When you are a victim of wrong perception, you can make yourself and your beloved suffer for many years. Israelis and Palestinians may be victims of their wrong perceptions. We may believe that the other side only wishes our destruction. The fact is that everyone, every group, wants the chance to live in peace. Everyone knows that if one side does not have peace, then the other side will not have peace, either. That wisdom is present in everyone, and that is why there is hope. With our practice, hope will grow and despair will retreat, compassion will grow and anger will retreat. This is not an abstract idea, it is very concrete. I am not talking in terms of theology or ideology; I am talking from my own experience of suffering, of reconciliation, of war, and of peace. Walking, breathing, and going home to our island of self is crucial for hope to survive and for peace to have a chance.

PERSONAL VOICES

I Am not Alone:

A Palestinian Shares His Story

I have been in a wheelchair for three years. Before that, I worked as a physical trainer, and for peace. I worked with my Israeli partner, Israeli friends, and international friends. On May 15, 2001, two soldiers came to my house and shot at me. I fell down; I didn't know what was happening to me. The two soldiers came at me and shouted, "Stand up, stand up" in Hebrew, and one was jabbing me with his stick. They kept shouting, "Stand up, stand up." I was trying to get up, but I couldn't. I had lost all feeling and movement in my legs. A bullet had entered my right shoulder, passed through my lungs, and exploded in my spinal column. The bleeding was internal, so the soldiers thought I was playing with them or trying to hide

something. They didn't realize that they had shot me. Then my family came and tried to help me and take me to the hospital, but they wouldn't allow them to help me. I lay bleeding where I fell for half an hour and all that time the two soldiers were shouting at me. They didn't allow anyone to come and help me. I was going to die. I shouted at them to please be humane and let someone help me because I was going to die. Then I don't know what happened. I don't know how I got to the hospital. I opened my eyes in the hospital, and I knew that my life had changed completely.

I am not alone, in Palestine or in Israel. I know that there are a lot of people suffering. A few days before I came here I was in a rehabilitation center and all the beds were full. There were a lot of people on the waiting list—many of them children, beautiful children. All the time I ask myself and whoever is listening to me, why is this happening?

I am calling everybody—in Europe, America, and everywhere in the world—to think how you can help us, Israelis and Palestinians, to transform this inhumane situation.

Creating a Land of Peace: An Israeli Speaks

Shalom, salaam. My name is Eliahu and I live in Jerusalem. There are two narratives in the Holy Land. Often those narratives are explained in a way that is exclusive of the narrative of the other side. The Palestinian narrative often leaves out the connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. Often, many Israelis will deny that the Palestinians also have a home there and are indigenous to that land. I believe it is our role to weave together a shared narrative of two peoples who are destined and blessed to live in that land together.

When I came to live in Israel, I didn't come as an occupier. The political conditions in the last one hundred years allowed many Jews to return to Israel. But when we arrived there we forgot something—that there was another people indigenous to that land: the

Palestinians. In one narrative that land is called Palestine, and in another narrative it is called Israel. I believe that God chose two of the most stubborn people in the world, the Arabs and the Jews, to live in the same land. The Palestinians are there to teach the Jewish people a lesson, and the Jewish people were brought back there to inspire a certain wisdom in the Palestinians. At the end of the day, the Jews are not going anywhere and the Palestinians are not going anywhere either. This is our home, and we have to find a way to live together in peace and harmony. It may be that in the short term there are two separate states, but I believe that we have to work toward a shared vision, so that we can live together without a fence. Ultimately, the land does not belong to Israel or Palestine, it belongs to the Earth and to God. It is a land for all of us.

All the policies of oppression are manifestations of the seeds of fear, hatred, and misunderstanding. They are the root of all of it. In Palestinian Islamic culture that is called *sheitan*: negative power. That is the ruler, not Sharon or Arafat. The true enemies are anger and fear. The wall being built between the two peoples is a symbol of that fear. In order for the wall to come down, we need to take fear out of the hearts of the people. I have lost several friends in terrorist bus bombings in Israel. I also have many Palestinian friends who have suffered immensely. Ultimately, our vision should be one of how we can live together and how we can cultivate the seeds of compassion, love, mercy, and understanding. Once those seeds are planted in our hearts and the hearts of the Palestinians, then a solution is possible.

A lot of my friends are settlers, a lot of my friends are soldiers, a lot of my friends are Palestinian. My family are the Hamas, my family are the Israeli right wing, we are all part of the same human family. Many of us are sick and in deep need of healing. We are two very wounded peoples who are sharing the same land. In order for transformation to come about, we have to

heal the deep wound of the Jewish people, which is manifesting as oppression of the Palestinians, and we have to heal the deep wounds of the Palestinians and give them justice and equality. We are destined to live together in the same land, and no one is leaving. I would like to put out an intention that we, Israelis and Palestinians, can build a new beginning together here—a beginning of peace, harmony, and understanding. If those goals are achieved, then the political problems will be solved. When I return to Jerusalem, I will spread the message of what I have learned in Plum Village. We are two very broken and confused peoples, and we need your help to bring about healing, transformation, and reconciliation, so that the land we all come from should not be called the land of war, but by the name of its true destiny—the land of peace. We can't do it alone.

In our situation, we all lose, and our wounds will be transmitted to the next generations if we do not take care of them. We hope that our work here has sown seeds for the continuation of the process. This work has the potential to bring transformation on a personal level, resulting in the transformation of society.

Anger and Reconciliation

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a mountain where many gods lived. The gods were very happy. They did not seem to have anything to do. They spent a lot of time just sitting and walking. There was a very beautiful creek on the mountain—the water was clear and limpid. It seemed that every time you drank some of that water you would feel light and liberated, without desire or anger. Along the creek were many cherry trees that seemed to bloom all year round, and the cherry blossoms fell into the stream and flowed with the water. Some of them traveled very far until they reached a city below the mountain.

There was a man in the city who suffered so much that he wanted to die. One day he saw a cherry blossom petal in the stream, and he decided to follow the stream to its source. He told himself he would find it, even if it took many years. After many years of walking, he arrived at the mountain of the gods. He met the gods, and they invited him to come and sit close to the stream, and to kneel down and cup some water in his hands and drink. After drinking the water, he felt he did not have any more desire, even the desire for healing and transformation. He felt very tired; he didn't want anything else. He wanted to give up everything.

He lay down by the creek and fell into a very deep sleep. During his sleep the water continued to work within his body and his mind, transforming and purifying. Because he allowed himself to sleep deeply, the work of healing and transformation was very easy for him. He did not do anything at all. He just lay by the creek and allowed the water he had drunk to work in him. Some of the gods took care of him. They took two little pebbles from the creek that looked like the eyes of a cat, and they went to the man while he was sleeping on the bank and replaced his eyes with these two pebbles. He now had new eyes.

The man slept for a long time. After a week, he woke up. He was very surprised. He sat up, and he saw the sky and the trees. He had never seen them look like that. When he had arrived, the sky and the trees had been there, but he had not seen them as he saw them now, because now he had new

eyes. In fact, everything in him had changed. He had new bones, a new heart, new intestines—he was completely transformed. He felt like he was one of the gods, and he did not want to go home. He told the gods, “I don’t want to go home to that place. I want to stay here with you.” And a god replied, “You have to go home to help your people.” Then the man said, “If I go home I will be all alone. I cannot cope with the situation down there. It is so difficult. No, I never want to go back to that place.” The god then said, “Well, when you go home, you won’t see things exactly as you saw them in the past. You will see the sky, you will see the trees, the houses, and the people, but they will not look like they did before. It is just like when you first came here. You saw the sky and the trees, but now after a week, you really see the sky, you really see the trees. Don’t be afraid to go home. With your new eyes, new lungs, and new bones you will see things differently, and you won’t have to suffer. Do you know something? When you go back there you will see us. We are not only here, we are also down there with you.”

The man understood. He said good-bye to the gods, the mountain, and the stream, and he began his journey down. It did not take several years as it had when he had come; it just took a morning for him to go back. The gods were right. When he went home with his new being, he did not see the situation as so difficult and despairing as he had seen it before. He was able to look with compassion and clarity, his heart was open, and he was able to discover human beings in a different way.

He felt compassion arising in him because he saw that so many human beings were caught in ideas, ideologies, religion, and culture, and that was why their true human nature could not be seen. But now, because he was a free person, he could discover the human being in every one of them. That is why when he looked at them and listened to them he did not get angry or frustrated any more, and with his smile he could help them transform their situation. He found out that he was not alone at all. All the gods that he had met on the mountain were right there to help him and be with him.

The story is a happy one, because the man was able to

spend seven days on the mountain and allow himself to be the object of transformation and healing through drinking the water of compassion. He did not do anything at all during the time he spent on the mountain. He did not practice—he practiced non-practice. He just allowed himself to be embraced by the mountain, the creek, and the trees, and he was renewed. He got new eyes, new ears, new bones, and a new heart. If he had only been on the mountain looking for ideas and answers to bring home, he would not have been able to go home with compassion and without fear. He had not come to look for theories, ideologies, tactics, or strategies. He had come in order to be renewed, and he had allowed this to happen. When he went home he did not take teachings, practices, or answers. He just took himself back, totally renewed.

You do not need answers from someone else about how to change your personal relationships and your relationships to the larger world. If you have your eyes and your heart changed, then you don't need anything else. You don't need any practice or strategy. Find a creek, drink the water, lie down, and allow it to work.

AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE ARE EXACTLY THE SAME

Sometimes it is easier to be angry than to express your own suffering. The Israelis think that they are not Arabs, but they are very similar to the Arabs. They are human beings. They don't want to die, and they want to live in safety. They want brotherhood, sisterhood, and peace. We are separated by names like "Buddhist," "Christian," "Jew," "Muslim." When we hear one of these words, we see an image and we feel alienated, we don't feel connected. We have set up many structures in order to be separated from each other and make each other suffer. That is why it is very important to discover the human being in the other person, and to help the other person discover the human being in us. As human beings we are exactly the same. If you have many layers of garments, you prevent other people from seeing you as a human being. Being "Buddhist" may be a disadvantage, because if you have that title, it may be an obstacle, and people may not be able to discover the human being in you. Also, if you have the label "Muslim," that may turn many

people off, because people are caught in these notions and images and they cannot recognize each other as human beings. It is a pity. That is why Master Lin Chi said that you have to burn all these obstacles—take them out and burn them.⁹ This is a true practice—to burn everything in order for the human being to be revealed. That is the work of peace.

In 1963, I was sitting with a number of my students on the campus of Columbia University in New York. The morning was beautiful, the sun was shining, and we were talking to each other about the Buddhist practice of removing concepts. Suddenly someone passing by stopped and looked at me for a few seconds, and then he asked, “Are you a Buddhist?” I looked up and said, “No.”

Did I tell a lie? I hope that my students understood me at that moment. If I had said, “Yes, I am a Buddhist,” then he would still be caught in his idea of what a Buddhist is, and that would not help him. So “No” was more helpful than “Yes.” That is the language of Zen. When you say or do something, it is to help undo the knots in people’s minds, and not to bind them anymore. That is why the language we use should aim at liberation.

When we listen to the Palestinians and all the sufferings they undergo, we understand their suffering, because we have suffered, too. We don’t want to compare our suffering with theirs, but we understand suffering as a reality. That is the First Noble Truth, “Suffering is.” Of course, we want their suffering to stop. We don’t want them to suffer anymore.

If someone were to say, “We are suffering. We have been victims. Will you take our side? Will you be with me in order to oppose all those who have created the suffering?” then that would be very difficult to answer. You are with them, you deeply understand their suffering, but when you are asked to join them in the fight to destroy those they believe to be their enemies, you are reluctant, because you know that they have tried that method for many years and they have not succeeded. They have not been alone in this fight—they have had supporters both inside and outside their country, but that course of action—trying to destroy those they call

“enemies”—has not brought about anything and has not lessened their suffering. In fact, it has increased their suffering.

I am reluctant to say that I am on your side, that I support you wholeheartedly, and will do everything you want me to do. I am not ready to take sides like that. I would ask, “Yes, I am ready to take your side, but are you ready to take my side? I am a human being like you. Do you know what my side is? It is that suffering must stop. I agree with you that there must be something that can and should be done to stop the suffering. But I may not agree on other things relating to your position. I want to act, I want to have compassion, but I don’t want to act out of anger, violence, and discrimination. If you take my side, I will be with you one hundred percent.”

When you support someone, you bring your whole being to support him or her. In your being is your wisdom and compassion. Without that wisdom and compassion you cannot support someone. If I take your side, it does not mean I am going to help you build a fence, destroy a town, or take a bomb on a bus in order to blow up passengers. Although I am with you in your suffering and your desire to end suffering, I cannot be with you in those kinds of acts. I believe that there are many ways to stop the suffering, and to help the so-called enemies stop suffering too. For me, there is a path that is quite clear. If we keep the poisons of despair, anger, and violence within us, we will continue to suffer, and whatever action we take will not benefit anyone.

That is why to go to the mountain, to lie down, and allow the water of compassion to transform you and remove these poisons from you is so crucial. I am not here on the mountain to ask the gods to join me in fighting my enemies. I am here to allow the gods to help me remove the poisons of violence, fear, despair, and anger. Then I know that when I go home as a new person I can help many people, because now I am equipped with the elements of understanding, compassion, serenity, and solidity.

Injustice is suffered by both sides. The Palestinians have suffered so much. And when the Israelis come and describe to us their suffering, we are able to see that they too have suffered. That kind of understanding is crucial. Once

understanding and compassion are born in our heart, the poisons of anger, discrimination, hate, and despair will be transformed. That is why the only answer is to remove the poison and to allow the insight and compassion in. Then we will discover each other as human beings and we will not be deceived by outer layers like “Buddhism,” “Islam,” “Judaism,” “pro-American,” “pro-Arab,” and so on. This is a process of liberation from our ignorance, ideas, notions, and our tendency to discriminate. When I see you as a human being who suffers so much, I will not have the courage to shoot you. I will ask you to come and work with me so we have a chance to live peacefully together. It is a pity—the Earth is so beautiful and there is enough room for all of us, yet we are killing each other.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF POWER

In the case of Israel and Palestine, it can feel as though the situation is impossible and that the sides are unequal because Israel has more political power, nuclear weapons, and the support of the United States. You may be deceived by the appearance. During the Vietnam War everyone saw that America was the big power and the Vietnamese were a tiny nation without weapons, technology, or the huge amount of money that the Americans had. But the Americans had to withdraw from Vietnam. We should not be too sure. Suppose the Palestinians are more united, they talk to each other nicely, communicate with each other perfectly, live in harmony, and treat each other like brothers and sisters in a community. They would then be able to produce the kind of insight that could help them become very strong, so they could protect themselves, set up a country of their own, and have the world support them in their attempt to have their own country, their own territory, their own sovereignty. I don't think you need to be a big power in order to do that. You need to be intelligent, peaceful, and harmonious. There are things within that we have to do. Don't think that everything inside is okay and that now there are only external things to do. This is a big mistake. Going home to ourselves—rearranging things so that we have harmony and peace inside—will bring us a lot of power. That power cannot be seen in terms of weapons, technologies, and soldiers.

Imagine a family of ten people. If two brothers were fighting each other, what would the other members of the family think and do? The two brothers are really angry at each other, they could even kill each other because their anger is so great. You cannot stand there and allow your brothers to kill each other. You know that at least one person might die. If a member of your family is killed, you suffer as a family. But the two brothers are mad at each other, they don't have any lucidity, and they are carried away by their anger and desire to hit and kill.

Suppose there is another member of the family who tries to take sides, to be with one brother against the other. Then another member of the family takes the side of the other brother. Standing outside and observing, we see that joining one brother against another is not wise. I think sensible people would come and try to separate the two brothers, hold them, and prevent them from fighting. When you hold them fast, very strongly, you can feel their energy of resistance—they don't want you to hold them. They want to be free in order to kill the other person.

What is the community of nations doing in this situation? They don't seem to be doing anything. They seem to leave everything to the United States of America. America is a big brother in the human family. He has the tendency to do everything by himself and does not allow other members of the family to come and help. He wants to take care of Iraq alone; he wants to take care of the Middle East alone. I think the United Nations have to come together as a family of nations and discuss how to end the violence in the Middle East right away.

The UN could dispatch troops from many countries to play a peacekeeping role and to prohibit the fighting. This is urgent; it is an emergency act. It causes so much despair to see other members of the family sitting by, not doing anything, allowing one country to take care of things. When something goes wrong in the family, the whole family has to come and help. That is why our brothers and sisters in the Middle East must allow this to happen. They have to allow the whole human family to come and help them. They should not resist such a move. The Americans and others have to

wake up to that fact.

The UN could convene a general assembly and obtain the vote that the problems of Iraq and the Middle East should be taken care of by the community of all nations. The Security Council could meet day and night in order to decide how to stop the atrocities in the Middle East right away—there are many means. My insight is that we should invest in the United Nations and allow it to become a real peacekeeping organization. As it is now, it does not have the authority and means to do it.

Many of us suffer a lot because we feel helpless. We feel that we cannot do anything to stop the atrocities in the Middle East, because there does not seem to be any role our countries can play, even if they are represented in the United Nations. As citizens we have to speak out. Whether you are a Jew or a Muslim, whether you are a Buddhist or a Christian, you need to say that we should behave like a family and should allow the family to take care of us.

THE REAL ENEMY

You may notice I have not said the word “forgiveness” anywhere in this book. I think everyone is a victim. If you are not a victim of this, you are a victim of that. For example, when you have anger and despair in you, you are a victim of your anger and despair, and you suffer very deeply. Building a wall or dropping a bomb can make you suffer, that is true, but having anger and despair makes you suffer also—maybe more. We may be the victims of others, and we may be the victims of ourselves. We tend to believe that our enemy is outside of us, but very often we are our own worst enemy because of what we have done to our body and our mind. Some people find themselves in a very difficult situation but they are not victims of despair and anger, and that is why they don’t suffer as much as other people in the same situation. Since they are not victims of their anger and despair, they are lucid, and they can do something in order to change the situation.

The people in the government are victims also—victims of their own anger, frustration, and their idea of how to have peace and safety. They are victims of the idea that punishment will force the other side not to continue its

violence. They still believe that violence and punishment are the kinds of action they must take to prevent the other side from continuing its resistance. That is why helping them remove these obstacles in their minds not only helps them but helps everyone. I propose that we look deeply in order to identify our true enemy. For me, our true enemy is our way of thinking—our anger and despair.

Both Israelis and Palestinians are victims, even their governments are victims of these ideas and emotions. The practice recommended in Plum Village is not to destroy the human being, but to destroy the real enemy that is inside the human being. If you want to help someone with tuberculosis, you kill the bacteria, not the person. All of us are victims of the bacteria called violence and wrong perception. While we are in Plum Village we have the opportunity to sit down together, locate the real enemy, and discuss how to remove it. When you still have a lot of anger, fear, and despair, you are not lucid or calm, and you are not able to undertake the right action that can bring real peace.

In 1966, I went to America on a speaking tour to try to tell the American people about the suffering in Vietnam. One day I was speaking to a big crowd in New York, and a young American man stood up and shouted at me, “Why are you here? You should be in Vietnam fighting the American imperialists.” In his mind he wanted the Americans to be defeated in Vietnam. He wanted me to hold a gun and kill American soldiers. But to me, American soldiers in Vietnam were also victims. The real enemy was not the American soldiers, but the policy made in Washington. I smiled at the young man, who was very angry, and I said, “Well, I thought that the root of the war is here in Washington, and that is why I have come.”

If I can say anything to you, it is to invite you to look deeply and recognize the real enemy. That enemy is not a person. That enemy is a way of thinking that has brought a lot of suffering for everyone. This is an opportunity for us to sit down, be calm, and do just that—identify the real enemy and seek ways to remove it.

 PERSONAL VOICES

My Brother Is Silent: An Israeli's Story

I am not here as a representative of the Sharon government. I am here as a mother, a grandmother, a daughter, and a sister to my brothers. The first time I shared the story of my family was here in Plum Village. The story of my family is related to the story of the conflict between the Jews and the Arabs in Israel for almost seventy years. In 1921 and 1929 there were riots and pogroms in Hebron and Jerusalem and the large shop that my father ran was completely burned down and almost all of the property was destroyed. In 1936 my brother-in-law was a member of the Haganah, the Israel Defense Forces. He died in 1936, leaving my sister with two young children and no support—it was very difficult. In the war of 1948 I lost my mother and two brothers within five months. One of my brothers left a baby and that baby was later wounded in the war of 1967. In 1983 one of the most horrible and difficult things happened to us. In this terrible war, a cousin of mine was sent as a soldier on a military operation that I think was not just, and he died—he froze to death.

In recent years, when my grandchildren are going to military service, it is very difficult for me. My young grandson went to the military authorities and told them, “I am willing to do anything, but I do not want to carry a gun. I do not want to hold a gun in my hand.” He came home still in uniform, but humiliated and very hurt. He still had many friends in the army but they sent him home. They didn’t want him, and they were unwilling to give him any other position because he refused to hold a gun. One time I was with a few friends of his. It was very difficult for them. I heard that one of his friends had committed suicide while in military service. I told my grandson, “I am proud of you; do not feel humiliated. You were courageous enough to say that you were not going to hold a gun. It was not right for you, and you have protected yourself. You have defended other people as well, and you are worthy of respect. Thank you.”

When my grandson came home humiliated, his younger sister went to school and wrote this poem:

My brother is coming back from the army and he is silent.

You ask him a question and he is silent,

You give him a hug and he is silent,

You give him a kiss and he is silent,

You give him silence and he cries.

6

Peace Is Possible

I WAS SIXTEEN years old when I became a novice monk. I knew I wanted to be a monk when I was younger, but my parents didn't like the idea. I had to spend four years persuading them. I tried to be very kind, obedient, and sweet, and finally I got their permission.

I wanted to be a monk because I believed that the practice of meditation and Buddhism could bring me peace, help me transform my suffering, and could also help my country. Vietnam was under French occupation at the time. There was a Vietnamese government but it didn't have any real power. The French government held all the power in the north, the center, and the south.

I had learned that during Vietnamese history there were times when Buddhism had been able to help defeat the Chinese invasions. The Chinese invaded the country several times and Buddhism had helped build the country, unify the people, and chase away the invaders from the north. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Buddhism was practiced very deeply in Vietnam, and there was a king who became a Buddhist monk. All the members of the Cabinet took the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and the people also practiced the trainings—they were not divided—that is why they were able to defeat the Mongolians, who were very strong. The Mongolians occupied China and many other countries, even in Europe, but they were defeated in Vietnam. When the Chinese came and occupied the country for many years, we were able to win our independence because we were united.

There was a lot of political suppression, social injustice, and corruption in Vietnam. The government used corrupt people to rule the villages. As a young person, I thought that Buddhism could help in the present situation. However, when I became a novice monk, I found that Buddhism was very old-fashioned. It had been a long time since people had renewed Buddhism, so it was not ready to provide the kind of practice and answers that could satisfy our personal and social needs.

THE VOICE OF THE RISING TIDE

I wanted Buddhism to help liberate and unite us, but the teachings did not give specific ways for us to practice so that

we could be in harmony, strong, able to free ourselves from the French, and abolish social injustice. I felt we had to renew Buddhism so it could help people today. I think this is true with Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as well. If they are not renewed, they will not provide you with a concrete practice that can unite you and help abolish social injustice and war.

I was a kind of revolutionary monk, but I did not look like a troublemaker. The first thing we did was to publish a newsletter at the Buddhist Institute to express our ideas about why we needed to renew the teaching and practice of Buddhism—that Buddhism could give us answers to our social, family, and political issues. At that time we did not have photocopy machines, we didn't have even a mimeograph machine. Each student monk wrote an article and then we bound it to make one newsletter. The title of the magazine was the *Voice of the Rising Tide*. We wanted to be the rising tide—we were very ambitious. It was passed hand to hand and everybody in the Buddhist Institute read it. They were excited because the ideas were new, refreshing, and stimulating. Some of our teachers loved it, but other teachers felt we were dangerous, and they banned the magazine.

Finally, we saw that the Institute was so old and difficult to change that four of us decided to leave. We left behind a letter demanding the reformation and renewal of the way of teaching and practicing. Our leaving was like a bell of mindfulness saying that if they didn't pay attention to our request, then many other people at the Institute would leave. We wanted to set up a new community where we could study, teach, and practice Buddhism the way we thought it should be.

The Institute reacted very strongly. They knew we wanted to start something new and they knew that because we were monks we would have to seek refuge in a temple. Therefore, three days after we left, the Institute sent a letter to all the temples asking them not to harbor us. This was a very strong reaction. We were just four young monks, and the Institute was very powerful.

It was very difficult. We did not have any money, but we had one Dharma sister who lived in the south, so we took

refuge in her house. Finally, our friends came and we asked them to help us build a small temple in the countryside where we could begin our practice. We had a lot of energy and goodwill. We were not looking for money, power, or fame; we were looking for the kind of Buddhism that could help us to change society.

Five years later, I went back to the Institute. Since I had left, I had published a number of books and magazines on the actualization and renewal of Buddhism in the fields of economics, education, politics, and humanity. We had also established a community. After one year the Institute began to change, because it saw that it needed to change, and that if it didn't then other people would abandon the Institute and join us. It began to offer studies in philosophy, comparative religion, and science.

Our teachers at the Institute had spoken about peace, compassion, nonself, and the happiness of living beings, but many of them did not do anything. They had a big self. They spoke of helping society but they didn't do anything to help the poor and oppressed—no concrete action, just teaching and talking. At that time, many young people in Vietnam were joining the Communists and other political parties like the Kuomintang. There were dozens of political parties trying to organize to fight the French and force them out of the country, trying to establish social justice, and fight poverty and ignorance. When you are young you want to do something for your country.

VIOLENCE IS NOT OUR WAY

At one time I was tempted to join the Communist Party because I had noticed that the monks did not do anything, they just talked, and the Communists were trying very hard, and many of them were dying on the battlefield. Naturally, you respected them and wanted to join them. They were trying to do what they believed in. But we were lucky enough to have elders who taught us that the way of violence is not our way. That is why, in the end, we did not join the Communist Party.

Many people of my age joined these political parties with a very beautiful heart. They were determined to do something for their people and their country, and their beginner's mind

was so pure and fresh. But a few years after they joined a party, they changed, because each party had its own structure and wanted to eliminate the other parties. When you operate within a political party, you have to listen to its orders. The party can tell you to do this or that. If the party wants you to kill someone, you have to kill him, even if he is your brother. The Communists wanted to decimate the Kuomintang, and brothers turned against each other. They were of the same country and people, with the same ideal of serving the people, yet their hands were smeared with the blood of their own brothers. I realized that my path was the path of nonviolence.

The war machine is horrible. If you get into it, you will be crushed, and you will have to crush the lives of others. That is why I urge young people not to join violent revolution. It does not mean that you have to sit and do nothing—you can do a lot, and you can succeed, too. Buddhist practice can help if it has been renewed. It is the same with Christianity, Islam, or Judaism. The practice should help us be more peaceful and remove our anger, suspicion, and fear, otherwise we will not be able to accomplish anything. It is the practice that can help us be together as a group, not suspicious of each other, but treating each other like brothers and sisters. You can only succeed in your revolution if you do that. I have seen many groups very eager to do something. They agree about everything intellectually, but they do not continue for long because they are divided. There is a lot of anger in each of them, and that is why they cannot operate as a group or a Sangha. As individuals they can be very talented, but when they operate as a group they are not strong, because each of them has different ideas and ways of doing things. That is why they have not yet arrived at anything.

If you are a group of Israelis or Palestinians, and you don't know the practice, you remain divided. You are weak, frustrated, and cannot do anything special. You need some kind of practice to make you into a real group of brothers and sisters. I have the conviction that the practice in Plum Village can help you to transform your group. We are not talking about theory, we are talking about practice that is

effective. If there is harmony, brotherhood, and mutual understanding, you will become a wonderful instrument for peace and independence. If you remain deeply divided, you cannot go anywhere. These are the hard facts.

I know many of you are ready to die for the cause of your people. You know that dying and causing other people to die is something you can do. They have demolished your home, they have built a fence separating you from your fields, they have surrounded you, they do not allow you to go anywhere, and you have seen your brother, your sister, your aunt, and your mother killed. You are frustrated and overwhelmed by despair. You want to use your life to do something; you want to punish them. You know that you will die with your bomb and that you will also cause the death of others, including innocent people and children. You have done it several times. They have done it with tanks, guns, bombers, airplanes, and missiles; you have done it with small bombs attached to your body.

They are afraid of dying, and you do not want to die either. Yet the deepest desire to live, to be free and safe, has not been realized. You continue to punish each other because of the fear, anger, and despair in all of you. If you know how to organize a group that is peaceful and can flow together like a river—even if the group is small—then you can have peace in your country and your people, and the action you take can be entirely nonviolent.

A PATH OF NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

Suppose a group of Palestinians came together and organized a fast somewhere visible, say in New York or Paris. This will be difficult, because many of you are not allowed to travel and cannot afford to travel. You will need outside support and help for your plan. You could say, “We will fast until we get a country for our people and, if necessary, we will die right here in New York on the steps of the United Nations.” Many of you have died—hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands. You would need only one hundred people to take part in a nonviolent struggle, but you are not ready to do that. Are you capable of going to New York as a group, with everyone speaking the same kind of language and performing the same kind of action? If you had such a group

you would have millions of people around the world supporting you. They would help you organize the fast on the steps of the United Nations. Many doctors would come and take care of you; many people would bring you water; and many others would sit with you to show their support.

Then, a group of one hundred Israelis could organize themselves and come and sit nearby—not to protest but to fast and support the Palestinian group, saying, “We want to support them, for them to have a country of their own. We want our government to stop bombing and occupying the land.” The Palestinians have to state their path of nonviolent revolution very clearly. They have to renounce violence and call upon their people to stop all acts of violence. Mr. Arafat cannot do that, because his own people do not listen to him. He knows that every time an act of violence is committed, the other side will get angry and retaliate. The people are so angry that they don’t listen to their leader any more. If you are divided, you will not be able to act effectively for your people and your country. That is why the spiritual dimension has to be there. You have to restore unity, harmony, and brotherhood among yourselves. This is crucial for the success of a revolution.

Within your group, there must be five or ten people who can articulate your position very well. You can say, “Now we are stopping all acts of violence. We want peace. We are committed to not use violence again. Now they do not have a reason to bombard and kill us anymore. In the past they had the excuse that because we were killing them, they had to punish us. Our people are no longer committed to violence. We have stopped all acts of violence, and we are representing our people here. We want a peaceful solution and a country to live in. The United Nations and the world should satisfy our request.”

The Israelis can practice in the same way. They can call on their government to stop all violence against the Palestinians and ask the United Nations to meet in an emergency session to discuss the situation. Not much may happen for the first twenty or thirty days, but when those who are fasting show no signs of giving up, I am sure they will take action. You will help the world to wake up, and you will force the United

Nations and other countries to do something.

We must use our intelligence. We need a strategy based on understanding, compassion, and nonviolence. If you think that not enough people in other countries will support you, you are wrong. There are many countries who would like to help you. The Israelis too, must act to end the violence. Both sides have a lot of fear, despair, discrimination, and anger—our real enemies. In Plum Village we remind each other that our real enemies are not human beings—they are division, hatred, suspicion, anger, and despair. And as we recognize and identify them, we try to transform them and remove them from ourselves and others. The teaching and practice are very clear.

If you have time to sit down and discuss these ideas and insights, this will bring you to a path of action and understanding. You would have to prepare for this kind of action for at least a year. Each of you has to practice a little more not to be overwhelmed by your anger and hate, so that you can work with others in harmony. When one hundred of you can come together and think, act, and speak in the same way, you are ready to start. You will act for your country, your people, and for all of us.

If you are united as a people, and harmonious among yourselves, then gradually you will gain more. If you remain divided and full of anger, you cannot do much. The same is true for our Israeli friends. If you want to live in peace, if you want your leadership to go in the direction of reconciliation, if you want to help your Palestinian brothers and sisters, you have to do the same. You have to come together as a group, with peace, brotherhood, and harmony.

THE FIVE MINDFULNESS TRAININGS¹⁰

One of the most helpful practices I can offer you is the Five Mindfulness Trainings. The Five Trainings help you to reorganize your life so that you do not continue to be the victim of your anger, division, and hatred.

The First Training is how to protect life—our life and the lives of others.

The Second Training is about being generous and consuming less in order to help other people who are in need.

The Third Training is about practicing right sexual conduct, because sexual misbehavior destroys our family, makes us suffer, and makes our children suffer.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training is about how to listen to another person and not get angry—listening deeply, with compassion—and talking to the person in such a way that he or she can hear you.

The Fifth Training is about consuming. We consume a little less, and we consume only good things. What we eat and drink may destroy our body and contain a lot of toxins—these toxins will also affect our mind. We refrain from watching television programs and from reading magazines and books that water the seeds of violence, hate, craving, and fear in our mind. We help protect our children as well, because they consume a lot of poisons every day—craving, anger, violence, and fear.

The practice of the Five Trainings is crucial in building up a group that can be an instrument for peace. If you try to build a community of peace without the Five Trainings, I doubt that you will succeed. I am sure there is the equivalent of the Five Trainings in your own tradition. Go home and recognize them and put them into practice.

We have to rely on ourselves, not too much on other people; they are so busy. I propose you form a combined group, working together for one year, to build a community who agree on how to live together as brothers and sisters in the same land. One year is the minimum required to work on that and to prepare for nonviolent action. The whole year would be devoted to building that group, who would speak the same kind of language and be committed to the practice of nonviolence.

I would love to see you organize your group. You need a powerful spiritual strength in order to create such a group in such a short time—a group that can organize a People's Peace Conference and sign a People's Peace Treaty. If you are really motivated by the desire to serve your people, this is the path. I tell you this with my heart, not my mind. The nonviolent way is the only way. You will win the hearts of so many people in the world by acting nonviolently. Abandon violence and you will succeed.

Political leaders in Palestine and Israel have this kind of wisdom, but it is still just a seed. We have not watered that seed enough so that this wisdom can be translated into action. Palestinian leaders have asked several times for people to refrain from violent action. Yet people cannot do it because they are so angry and desperate. The Israelis are also angry and desperate. Both sides experience the same kind of suffering.

I see the path quite clearly. If you want to live, live in a beautiful way, with a lot of meaning, and surely you will be successful. Living for the sake of compassion, understanding, and nonviolence is very beautiful. I tread this path and I will never renounce it. If I were in your situation, I would follow this path. I learned this lesson in my home country. Hundreds of thousands of people died in frustration, because they embraced the path of violence. They killed each other, brothers and sisters, and I don't want you to do the same.

Peace is possible. We are not talking vaguely, we mean concrete action. That action is directed to ourselves and to the world at the same time. It is a process of transformation, healing, and peace. The spiritual power of such action can change the world.

In Vietnam we staged nonviolent action and brought down a government—not with guns or bullets. We must rely on ourselves and organize ourselves so that we can perform the peace work of transformation and healing within our family, group, and community. Then such action can be taken. When the whole world focuses its attention on you, that action is very powerful. If Gandhi was able to succeed, you will also succeed. If you are committed to nonviolence and ask your own people to stop the conflict, your voice will be stronger than the voices of the world leaders who are creating violence. Many people in the world will support you, and you will be in the spotlight. To plan for that, you need a lot of time, a lot of practice, a lot of mindful breathing, and a lot of mindful walking. Then everyone will have to see you and listen to you. This is my hope.

Practices for Peace

- a. Mindful Walking
- b. Mindful Eating
- c. Deep Listening and Loving Speech
- d. Deep Relaxation
- e. Beginning Anew
- f. The Peace Treaty
- g. The Five Mindfulness Trainings

Mindful 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.*

WALKING MEDITATION is meditation while walking. We walk slowly, in a relaxed way, keeping a light smile on our lips. When we practice this way, we feel deeply at ease, and our steps are those of the most secure person on Earth. Walking meditation is really to enjoy the walking—walking not in order to arrive, just for walking, to be in the present moment, and to enjoy each step. Therefore you have to shake off all worries and anxieties, not thinking of the future, not thinking of the past, just enjoying the present moment. Anyone can do it. It takes only a little time, a little mindfulness, and the wish to be happy.

We walk all the time, but usually it is more like running. Our hurried steps print anxiety and sorrow on the Earth. If we can take one step in peace, we can take two, three, four, and then five steps for the peace and happiness of humankind.

Our mind darts from one thing to another, like a monkey swinging from branch to branch without stopping to rest. Thoughts have millions of pathways, and we are forever pulled along by them into the world of forgetfulness. If we can transform our walking path into a field for meditation, our feet will take every step in full awareness, our breathing will be in harmony with our steps, and our mind will naturally be at ease. Every step we take will reinforce our peace and joy and cause a stream of calm energy to flow through us. Then we can say, “With each step, a gentle wind blows.”

While walking, practice conscious breathing by counting steps. Notice each breath and the number of steps you take as you breathe in and as you breathe out. If you take three steps during an in-breath, say, silently, “One, two, three,” or “In, in, in,” one word with each step. As you breathe out, if you take three steps, say, “Out, out, out,” with each step. If you take three steps as you breathe in and four steps as you breathe out, you say, “In, in, in. Out, out, out, out,” or “One,

two, three. One, two, three, four.”

Don't try to control your breathing. Allow your lungs as much time and air as they need, and simply notice how many steps you take as your lungs fill up and how many you take as they empty, mindful of both your breath and your steps. The key is mindfulness.

When you walk uphill or downhill, the number of steps per breath will change. Always follow the needs of your lungs. Do not try to control your breathing or your walking. Just observe them deeply.

When you begin to practice, your exhalation may be longer than your inhalation. You might find that you take three steps during your in-breath and four steps on your out-breath (3-4), or two steps/three steps (2-3). If this is comfortable for you, please enjoy practicing this way. After you have been doing walking meditation for some time, your in-breath and out-breath will probably become equal: 3-3, or 2-2, or 4-4.

If you see something along the way that you want to touch with your mindfulness—the blue sky, the hills, a tree, or a bird—just stop, but while you do, continue breathing mindfully. You can keep the object of your contemplation alive by means of mindful breathing. If you don't breathe consciously, sooner or later your thinking will settle back in, and the bird or the tree will disappear. Always stay with your breathing.

When you walk, you might like to take the hand of a child. She will receive your concentration and stability, and you will receive her freshness and innocence. From time to time, she may want to run ahead and then wait for you to catch up. A child is a bell of mindfulness, reminding us how wonderful life is. At Plum Village, I teach the young people a simple verse to practice while walking: “Yes, yes, yes” as they breathe in, and, “Thanks, thanks, thanks” as they breathe out. I want them to respond to life, to society, and to the Earth in a positive way. They enjoy it very much.

After you have been practicing for a few days, try adding one more step to your exhalation. For example, if your normal breathing is 2-2, without walking any faster, lengthen your exhalation and practice 2-3 for four or five times. Then go back to 2-2. In normal breathing, we never expel all the

air from our lungs. There is always some left. By adding another step to your exhalation, you will push out more of this stale air. Don't overdo it. Four or five times are enough. More can make you tired. After breathing this way four or five times, let your breath return to normal. Then, five or ten minutes later, you can repeat the process. Remember to add a step to the exhalation, not the inhalation.

After practicing for a few more days, your lungs might say to you, "If we could do 3-3 instead of 2-3, that would be wonderful." If the message is clear, try it, but even then, only do it four or five times. Then go back to 2-2. In five or ten minutes, begin 2-3, and then do 3-3 again. After several months, your lungs will be healthier and your blood will circulate better. Your way of breathing will have been transformed.

When we practice walking meditation, we arrive in each moment. When we enter the present moment deeply, our regrets and sorrows disappear, and we discover life with all its wonders. Breathing in, we say to ourselves, "I have arrived." Breathing out, we say, "I am home." When we do this, we overcome dispersion and dwell peacefully in the present moment, which is the only moment for us to be alive.

You can also practice walking meditation using the lines of a poem. In Zen Buddhism, poetry and practice always go together.

I have arrived.

*I am home
in the here,
in the now.*

I am solid.

I am free.

In the ultimate

I dwell.

As you walk, be fully aware of your foot, the ground, and the connection between them, which is your conscious breathing. People say that walking on water is a miracle, but to me, walking peacefully on the Earth is the real miracle. The Earth is a miracle. Each step is a miracle. Taking steps on our beautiful planet can bring real happiness.

—from *The Long Road Turns to Joy* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax

Press,
1996) and *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment* (Parallax
Press, 1990)

Mindful Eating

A FEW YEARS AGO, I asked some children, “What is the purpose of eating breakfast?” One boy replied, “To get energy for the day.” Another said, “The purpose of eating breakfast is to eat breakfast.” I think the second child is more correct. The purpose of eating is to eat.

Eating a meal in mindfulness is an important practice. We turn off the TV, put down our newspaper, and work together for five or ten minutes, setting the table and finishing whatever needs to be done. During these few minutes, we can be very happy. When the food is on the table and everyone is seated we practice breathing: “Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile,” three times. We can recover ourselves completely after three breaths like this.

Then, we look at each person as we breathe in and out in order to be in touch with ourselves and everyone at the table. We don’t need two hours in order to see another person. If we are really settled within ourselves, we only need to look for one or two seconds, and that is enough to see our friend. I think that if a family has five members, only about five or ten seconds is needed to practice this “looking and seeing.”

After breathing, we smile. Sitting at the table with other people, we have a chance to offer an authentic smile of friendship and understanding. It is very easy, but not many people do it. To me, this is the most important practice. We look at each person and smile at him or her. Breathing and smiling together are very important practices. If the people in a family cannot smile at each other, the situation is a very dangerous one.

After breathing and smiling, we look down at the food in a way that allows the food to become real. This food reveals our connection with the Earth. Each bite contains the life of the sun and the Earth. The extent to which our food reveals itself depends on us. We can see and taste the whole universe in a piece of bread! Contemplating our food for a few seconds before eating, and eating in mindfulness, can bring us much happiness.

Having the opportunity to sit with our family and friends and enjoy wonderful food is something precious, something

not everyone has. Many people in the world are hungry. When I hold a bowl of rice or a piece of bread, I know that I am fortunate, and I feel compassion for all those who have no food to eat and are without friends or family. This is a very deep practice. We do not need to go to a temple or a church in order to practice this. We can practice it right at our dinner table. Mindful eating can cultivate seeds of compassion and understanding that will strengthen us to do something to help hungry and lonely people be nourished.

In order to aid mindfulness during meals, you may like to eat silently from time to time. Your first silent meal may cause you to feel a little uncomfortable, but once you become used to it, you will realize that meals in silence bring much peace and happiness. It is like turning off the TV before eating. We “turn off” the talking in order to enjoy the food and the presence of one another.

I do not recommend silent meals every day. I think talking to each other is a wonderful way to be in touch. But we have to distinguish among different kinds of talk. Some subjects can separate us, for instance if we talk about other people’s shortcomings. The food that has been prepared carefully will have no value if we let this kind of talk dominate our meal. When instead we speak about things that nourish our awareness of the food and our being together, we cultivate the kind of happiness that is necessary for us to grow. If we compare this experience with the experience of talking about other people’s shortcomings, I think awareness of a piece of bread in your mouth is a much more nourishing experience. It brings life in and makes life real.

I propose that during eating, you refrain from discussing subjects which can destroy the awareness of the family and the food. But you should feel free to say things that can nourish awareness and happiness. For instance, if there is a dish that you like very much, you can see if other people are also enjoying it, and if one of them is not, you can help him or her appreciate the wonderful dish prepared with loving care. If someone is thinking about something other than the good food on the table, such as his difficulties in the office or with friends, it means he is losing the present moment, and the food. You can say, “This dish is wonderful, don’t you

agree?” When you say something like this, you will draw him out of his thinking and worries, and bring him back to the here and now, enjoying you, enjoying the wonderful dish. You become a bodhisattva, helping a living being become enlightened. I know that children, in particular, are very capable of practicing mindfulness and reminding others to do the same.

The verses which follow can help us practice mindfulness while eating.

Looking at Your Empty plate
My plate, empty now,
will soon be filled
with precious food.

I am aware that when many people on this Earth look at an empty plate, their plate will continue to be empty for a long time. I am grateful to have food to eat, and I vow to find ways to help those who are hungry.

Serving Food
In this food,
I see clearly the presence
of the entire universe
supporting my existence.

This verse helps us see the principle of dependent co-arising, as we see that our life and the lives of all species are interrelated.

Contemplating Your Food
This plate of food,
so fragrant and appetizing,
also contains much suffering.

This gatha has its roots in a Vietnamese folk song. When we look at our plate, filled with fragrant and appetizing food, we should be aware of the bitter pain of people who suffer from hunger. Every day, 40,000 children die as a result of hunger and malnutrition. Every day! Such a figure shocks us every time we hear it. Looking at our plate, we can “see” Mother Earth, the farm workers, and the tragedy of hunger and malnutrition.

We who live in North America and Europe are accustomed to eating grains and other foods imported from the Third World such as coffee from Colombia, chocolate from Ghana,

or fragrant rice from Thailand. We must be aware that children in these countries, except those from rich families, never see such fine products. They eat inferior foods, while the finer products we eat are put aside for export in order to bring in foreign exchange. There are even some parents who, because they do not have the means to feed their children, resort to selling their children to be servants to families who have enough to eat.

Before a meal, we can join our palms in mindfulness and think about the children who do not have enough to eat. Slowly and mindfully we breathe three times and recite this gatha. Doing so will help us maintain mindfulness. Perhaps one day we will find ways to live more simply in order to have more time and energy to do something to change the system of injustice which exists in the world.

Beginning to Eat

With the first taste, I promise to offer joy.

With the second, I promise to help relieve
the suffering of others.

With the third, I promise to see others' joy as my own.

With the fourth, I promise to learn the way
of nonattachment and equanimity.

This verse reminds us of the Four Immeasurable Minds (Sanskrit: *Brahmaviharas*)—loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. These are said to be the four abodes of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. During the time we eat the first mouthful, we might like to express our gratitude by promising to bring joy to at least one person. With the second mouthful, we can promise to help relieve the pain of at least one person. After the fourth mouthful, we get in touch with the food and its deep nature.

Finishing Your Meal

The plate is empty.

My hunger is satisfied.

I vow to live

for the benefit of all beings.

This verse reminds us of the Four Gratuities—to parents, teachers, friends, and all organic and inorganic species that support and enrich our lives.

—from *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment* (Parallax Press,

1990)

Deep Listening & Loving Speech

IN MANY American Universities, there is a course called Communication Skills. I am not certain what they teach, but I hope it includes the art of deep listening and loving speech. These should be practiced every day if you want to develop true communications skills. There is a saying in Vietnamese, “It doesn’t cost anything to have loving speech.” We only need to choose our words carefully and we can make other people very happy. The way we speak and listen can offer others joy, happiness, self-confidence, hope, trust, and enlightenment.

Many people in our society have lost the capacity of listening and using loving speech. In many families, no one can listen to anyone else. Communication has become impossible. This is the biggest problem of our time. Never in human history have we had so many means of communication—television, radio, telephone, fax, e-mail, the worldwide web—yet we remain islands, with little real communication between family members, individuals in society, or nations. There are so many wars and conflicts. We have to find ways to open the doors of communication again. When we cannot communicate, we get sick, and we suffer and spill our suffering on to other people. We pay psychotherapists to listen to us, but psychotherapists are just human beings who have problems also.

One day in Karma Ling, a meditation center in the French Alps, I told a group of children that they should go to a friend or a parent every time they feel pain within themselves to communicate about it. Children suffer like adults. They also feel lonely, cut off, and helpless. We have to teach them how to communicate when they suffer so much.

Suppose your partner says something unkind to you, and you feel hurt. If you reply right away, you risk making the situation worse. The best practice is to breathe in and out to calm yourself, and when you are calm enough, say, “Darling, what you just said hurt me. I would like to look deeply into it, and I would like you to look deeply into it, also.” Then you can make an appointment for Friday evening to look at it together. One person looking at the roots of your suffering is good, two people looking at it is better, and two people

looking together is best.

I propose Friday evening for two reasons. First, you are still hurt, and if you begin discussing it right away, it may be too risky. You might say things that will make the situation worse. From now until Friday evening, you can practice looking deeply into the nature of your suffering, and the other person can also. While driving, you will also have a chance to look deeply into it. Before Friday night, one or both of you may see the root of the problem and be able to tell the other and apologize. Then on Friday night, you can have a cup of tea together and enjoy each other. If you make an appointment, you will both have time to calm down and look deeply. This is the practice of meditation. Meditation is to calm ourselves and to look deeply into the nature of our suffering.

When Friday night comes, if the suffering has not been transformed, you will be able to practice the art of Avalokiteshvara—one person expressing herself, while the other person listens deeply. When you speak, you tell the deepest kind of truth, using loving speech, the kind of speech the other person can understand and accept. While listening, you know that your listening must be of a good quality to relieve the other person of his suffering. A second reason for waiting until Friday is that when you neutralize that feeling on Friday evening, you have Saturday and Sunday to enjoy being together.

Loving speech is an important aspect of practice. We say only loving things. We say the truth in a loving way, with nonviolence. This can only be done when we are calm. When we are irritated, we may say things that are destructive. So when we feel irritated, we should refrain from saying anything. We can just breathe. If we need to, we can practice walking meditation in the fresh air, looking at the trees, the clouds, the river. Once we have returned to our calmness, our serenity, we are capable again of using the language of loving kindness. If, while we are speaking, the feeling of irritation comes up again, we can stop and breathe. This is the practice of mindfulness.

Compassionate listening has one purpose: to help the other person suffer less. You have to nourish the awareness that no

matter what the other person says, you will keep calm and continue to listen. You do not judge while listening. You keep your compassion alive. The other person may be unjust, may say inaccurate things, blame, attack, or judge. Yet you maintain your energy of compassion so that your seed of suffering is not touched. Practicing mindful breathing while listening is very helpful. "Breathing in, I know that I am listening in order to make this person suffer less. Breathing out, I remember the person in front of me suffers very much." We have to train ourselves to be able to sit and listen for forty-five minutes or one hour without becoming irritated. Avalokiteshvara is a person who has that capacity and practices the art of deep listening.

We don't want our seeds of suffering to be watered while we are listening. This is why we have to practice. The amount of time we spend practicing mindful walking, breathing, and sitting is important. We have to help ourselves before we can help anyone else. The first time we try compassionate listening, we may realize that our limit is only fifteen minutes. After that point, we may feel too weak to continue. Then we have to say, "Darling, shall we continue later? Now I need to do some walking meditation." We have to renew ourselves before continuing. It is important to know our limit. If we don't know our limit, we will fail in our attempt to help other people.

I have attended meetings where a person, whom no one had listened to, was unable to talk. We had to practice mindful breathing for a long time. We sat attentively, and he tried again and again until finally he could tell us of his pain. Patience is the mark of true love. If you truly love someone, you will be more patient with him or her.

The practice of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva is to listen very deeply to every kind of sound, including the sound of pain from within and from without. Listening to the bell, the wind, the water, the insects, and all living beings is part of our practice. When we know how to listen deeply and how to breathe deeply in mindfulness, everything becomes clear and deep.

—from *Teachings on Love* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1998) and

The Path of Emancipation (Parallax Press, 2000)

Deep Relaxation

STRESS ACCUMULATES in our body. The way we eat, drink, and live takes its toll on our well-being. Deep relaxation is an opportunity for our body to rest, to heal, and to be restored. We relax our body, give our attention to each part in turn, and send our love and care to every cell.

Deep relaxation can be practiced at home at least once a day. It may last for twenty minutes or longer and can happen in any room. One person leads. Even young family members can practice and learn how to lead a session of total relaxation for the whole family.

If you have trouble sleeping, deep relaxation can help. It may allow you to sleep. But even if you remain awake, the practice can nourish you and allow you to rest. It's very important to allow yourself to rest.

Deep relaxation is so vital, it should happen everywhere. If you are a school teacher, you can master the techniques and invite your students to practice it before class or half way through the class, in a sitting position or a lying position. This helps both teachers and students be less stressed. If you are a doctor you can master the techniques and help your patients. If your patients know the art of mindful breathing and total relaxation, their capacity for healing themselves will increase and the process of healing will take place more quickly.

Even members of Congress can practice total relaxation and mindful breathing. We want our elected representatives to be relaxed in order for them to be able to make the best decisions they can. This is not a sectarian or religious practice.

When we do deep relaxation in a group, one person can guide the exercise using the following cues or some variation of them. If you are leading, speak slowly, pausing often, to allow people time to hear and respond to your words. When you do deep relaxation on your own, you may like to record the exercise below to follow as you practice.

DEEP RELAXATION EXERCISE

Lie down on your back with your arms at your sides. Make yourself comfortable. Allow your body to relax. Be aware of the floor underneath you. Allow your body to sink into the

floor.

Become aware of your breathing, in and out. Be aware of your abdomen rising and falling as you breathe in and out, rising and falling.

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your eyes. Breathing out, your eyes relax. Allow your eyes to sink back into your head. Let go of the tension in all the tiny muscles around your eyes. Our eyes allow us to see a paradise of form and color. Send love and gratitude to your eyes. Allow your eyes to rest.

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your mouth. Breathing out, allow your mouth to relax. Release the tension around your mouth. Your lips are the petals of a flower. Let a gentle smile bloom on your lips and release the tension in the hundreds of muscles in your face. Feel the tension release in your cheeks, your jaw, your throat.

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your shoulders. Breathing out, allow your shoulders to relax. Let them sink into the floor. Let all the accumulated tension flow into the floor. We carry so much in our shoulders. Now, let them relax.

Breathing in, become aware of your arms. Breathing out, relax your arms. Let your arms sink into the floor, first your upper arms, then your elbows, your lower arms, your wrists, hands, and fingers. Move your fingers a little if it helps the muscles relax.

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your heart. Breathing out, allow your heart to relax. We have neglected our heart for a long time by the way we work, eat, and manage anxiety and stress. Our heart beats for us night and day. Embrace your heart with mindfulness and tenderness.

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your legs. Breathing out, allow your legs to relax. Release all the tension in your

legs, begin with your thighs, then your knees, your calves, your ankles, your feet, and your toes. Relax all the tiny muscles in your toes. You may want to move your toes a little to help them relax as you send your love and care to your toes.

Breathing in, your whole body feels light, like a flower floating on the water. Breathing out, you have nowhere to go, nothing to do. You are as free as the cloud floating in the sky.

[Let yourself relax here for ten minutes or more. In Plum Village we often play music or sing during this part.]

Bring your awareness back to your breathing, to your abdomen rising and falling.

Following your breathing, become aware of your arms and legs. You may want to move them a little and stretch. When you feel ready, slowly sit up.

When you are ready, slowly stand up.

Please feel free to incorporate into the above exercise awareness of other parts of the body: the hair, scalp, brain, ears, neck, lungs, each of the internal organs, the digestive system, pelvis, and any other part of the body that needs healing and attention.

Beginning Anew

AT PLUM VILLAGE we practice a ceremony of Beginning Anew every week. Everyone sits in a circle with a vase of fresh flowers in the center, and we follow our breathing as we wait for the facilitator to begin. The ceremony has three parts: flower watering, expressing regrets, and expressing hurts and difficulties. This practice can prevent feelings of hurt from building up over the weeks and helps make the situation safe for everyone in the community.

We begin with flower watering. When someone is ready to speak, she joins her palms and the others join their palms to show that she has the right to speak. Then she stands, walks slowly to the flower, takes the vase in her hands, and returns to her seat. When she speaks, her words reflect the freshness and beauty of the flower that is in her hand. During flower watering, each speaker acknowledges the wholesome, wonderful qualities of the others. It is not flattery, we always speak the truth. Everyone has some strong points that can be seen with awareness. No one can interrupt the person holding the flower. She is allowed as much time as she needs, and everyone else practices deep listening. When she has finished speaking, she stands up and slowly returns the vase to the center of the room.

We should not underestimate the first step of flower watering. When we can sincerely recognize the beautiful qualities of other people, it is very difficult to hold on to our feelings of anger and resentment. We will naturally soften and our perspective will become wider and more inclusive of the whole reality. When we are no longer caught in misperceptions, irritation, and judgment, we can easily find the way to reconcile ourselves with others in our community or family. The essence of this practice is to restore love and understanding between members of the community. The form that the practice takes needs to be appropriate to the situation and people involved. It is always helpful to consult with others who have more experience in the practice and have gone through similar difficulties in order to benefit from their experiences.

In the second part of the ceremony, we express regrets for anything we have done to hurt others. It does not take more

than one thoughtless phrase to hurt someone. The ceremony of Beginning Anew is an opportunity for us to recall some regret from earlier in the week and undo it. In the third part of the ceremony, we express ways in which others have hurt us. Loving speech is crucial. We want to heal the community, not harm it. We speak frankly, but we do not want to be destructive. Listening meditation is an important part of the practice. When we sit among a circle of friends who are all practicing deep listening, our speech becomes more beautiful and more constructive. We never blame or argue.

In the final part of the ceremony, compassionate listening is crucial. We listen to another's hurts and difficulties with the willingness to relieve the suffering of the other person, not to judge or argue with her. We listen with all our attention. Even if we hear something that is not true, we continue to listen deeply so the other person can express her pain and release the tensions within herself. If we reply to her or correct her, the practice will not bear fruit. We just listen. If we need to tell the other person that her perception was not correct, we can do that a few days later, privately and calmly. Then, at the next Beginning Anew session, she may be the person who rectifies the error and we will not have to say anything. We close the ceremony with a song or by holding hands with everyone in the circle and breathing for a minute. Sometimes we end with hugging meditation.

—from *Teachings on Love* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1998)

and *Joyfully Together* (Parallax Press, 2003)

The Peace Treaty

IN PLUM VILLAGE, we have the text for a peace treaty. Many couples have come forward and signed a peace treaty in the presence of the whole Sangha. It reads like this: “Dear one, I promise that from now on, every time I get angry I will not say anything, I will not do anything. I will not be tempted by the desire to punish, because I know punishing will only make you suffer. And if you suffer, you make me suffer. I will go home to myself, taking refuge in the island of myself, going to my true home in order to look deeply and see what I have done to create suffering like that. I will ask you, ‘Why have you done such a thing to me? Why have you said such a thing to me that makes me suffer? Please explain, please help. I don’t want to punish you. I want you to explain why you have done such a thing, why you have said such a thing, and I will listen to you.’ Please darling, you do the same. When you suffer because of what I have said or done, please don’t punish me. Please give me a chance. Ask me why I have done so, why I have said so.”

Father and son, partner and partner, mother and daughter have to be reconciled and sign a peace treaty—that is a daily practice, “Dear one, I promise that from now on I will not water the seeds of anger and jealousy in you. I promise only to water the seeds of joy, understanding, and happiness in you. Please do the same. You know that I have a lot of anger and jealousy. Please don’t water the seeds of jealousy and anger in me every day. If you do, I will suffer, and you will have to suffer with me, also.” This is a practice, not a statement.

When we get angry, we don’t look like a beautiful flower. We look more like a bomb ready to explode. Hundreds of muscles in our face tense up. Because so much suffering arises when we become angry or upset, we at Plum Village drafted a “Peace Treaty” which couples and individuals can sign in the presence of the Sangha to increase the likelihood that we will deal with our anger well. This is not just a piece of paper; it is a practice that can help us live long and happily together. The treaty has two parts—one for the person who is angry and one for the person who has caused the anger. When we get angry or when someone is angry at

us, if we follow the terms of the Peace Treaty, we will know exactly what to do and what not to do. A copy of the Peace Treaty is at the end of this section.

According to the first article, we agree that when we are angry we will refrain from saying or doing anything that might cause further damage or escalate the anger. When we know we are angry, we impose on ourselves a kind of moratorium on speech and actions.

In the second article, we agree not to suppress our anger. At the proper time, we will express something, but not immediately. The minimum waiting period is the time of three conscious breaths. If we do not wait at least that long, it may not be safe to express our feelings about our anger.

In the third article, we agree to practice breathing with our anger and taking refuge in the island of ourselves. We know that anger is there. We do not suppress it and we do not deny it. We take care of it by producing mindfulness of breathing and embracing it in the loving arms of mindfulness. We sit quietly or we walk, perhaps in nature. If we need a half hour, we take a half hour. If we need three hours, we practice breathing for three hours.

The Buddha told his students, "My friends, do not rely on anything outside of yourselves. Be an island unto yourself, and take refuge in the island of yourself." During difficult moments when we do not know what to do, this is a wonderful exercise to practice. If I were in an airplane about to crash, this is what I would practice. If we practice well, our island will have trees, birds, a beautiful stream, and land that is very solid. The essence of a Buddha is mindfulness. Mindful breathing is the living Dharma, better than any book. The Sangha is present in the five elements that comprise our "self": form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness. When these elements are in harmony, we have peace and joy. When we practice conscious breathing and produce mindfulness in ourselves, the Buddha is there. If we go back and discover the Buddha within us, we will be safe.

According to the fourth article of the treaty, we have up to twenty-four hours to calm ourselves. Then we must tell the other person we are angry. We do not have the right to keep

our anger any longer than that. If we do, it becomes poisonous, and it may destroy us and the person we love. If we are used to the practice, we may be ready to tell him in five or ten minutes, but the maximum is twenty-four hours. We can say, "My dear friend, what you said this morning made me very angry. I suffered very much and I want you to know it."

According to the fifth article, we end with this sentence, "I hope that by Friday evening both of us will have had a chance to look deeply into this matter." Then we make an appointment. Friday evening is a good time to defuse all the bombs, big or small, so that we will have the whole weekend for our enjoyment. If we feel it is not yet safe for us to speak to him, if we do not feel capable of doing it in a calm way and the deadline of twenty-four hours is approaching, we can use this "Peace Note":

Date:

Time:

Dear _____

This morning [afternoon], you said [did] something that made me very angry. I suffered very much. I want you to know this. You said [did]:

Please let us both look at what you said [did] and examine the matter together in a calm and open manner this Friday evening.

Yours, not very happy right now,

[Your name]

If we use this note, we have to make sure the other person receives it before the deadline. We cannot just say, "I put it on your desk and you didn't look at it, so it's your fault." This is for our own good, because the moment we know that the other person has received the note, we already feel some relief. It is best to tell him directly in a calm voice, but if we think we will not be able to do it calmly, we can fill out a peace note and hand it to him. But we have to make sure he

gets it before the deadline.

The sixth article tells us not to pretend we aren't angry. We may have too much pride and do not want to admit our suffering. But we shouldn't say, "I am not angry. There's nothing to be angry about." We must refrain from hiding the truth. If we are angry, that is a fact. This is an important part of the Peace Treaty. Pride should not be an obstacle that destroys our relationship. We are committed to each other, we support each other, we are a brother or sister to each other. Why should we be so proud? My pain must be his pain. My suffering must be his suffering.

According to the seventh article, while we are practicing sitting, walking, breathing, looking deeply, and living our daily life mindfully, we should focus our attention on: 1) Recognizing the ways we have not been mindful or skillful in the past. 2) Seeing how we have hurt the other person in the past and acknowledging to ourselves, "I have the habit energy of getting angry and hurt very easily." 3) Recognizing that the main cause of our anger is the strong seed of anger in our store consciousness that has the habit of manifesting itself. The other person is not the main cause of our suffering. We have friends who do not get angry so easily. The seed of anger is in them also, but apparently their seed of anger is not as strong as ours. 4) Seeing that the other person is suffering also, and because of this, he behaved in an unskillful way, watering the seed of anger in us. We acknowledge that he was not the main cause of our suffering. He may have been the secondary cause, or perhaps he was misperceived by us to be the secondary cause—perhaps he did not mean to hurt us at all. 5) When some people get angry, they naively believe that if they say something strong to another person and make him suffer, they will feel some relief. This is not a wise thing to do, but many people do it. So we have to see that the other person may only be seeking some relief from his own suffering. 6) Seeing that as long as he continues to suffer, we cannot be truly happy. When someone in a community is unhappy, the whole community is unhappy. For us to stop suffering, we have to help the other person stop suffering. We all have to find skillful ways to help that person. Only when he overcomes his suffering will

happiness in the community be authentic.

The eighth article tells us that if, during the process of looking deeply we realize our unskillfulness and lack of mindfulness, we should apologize right away. We should not make the other person feel guilty any longer. There is no need to wait until Friday evening. If we find out that we got angry because we have the habit energy of responding too quickly or because of some misunderstanding, we have to go to the other person and say, "I'm sorry, I was unmindful. I got angry too easily and without any basis. Please forgive me." He will be relieved. It is best to stop the cycle of suffering as soon as possible.

The ninth article tells us that if, by Friday, we feel that we are not calm enough to talk about the matter, we should postpone the appointment for a few more days or another week. If we are not calm, it is not yet time to talk about it. We need to practice for a few more days.

In the second part of the Peace Treaty, there are five articles concerning the one who has made the other person angry. According to the first article, when we see that the other person is angry, we should respect her feelings. We shouldn't say: "I haven't done anything, and you're angry." A feeling has a life span—a moment to be born, some time to stay, and then it will die down slowly. Even if we see that her anger is not founded at all, that she is completely wrong, we don't press her to stop being angry right away. We help her, or we leave her alone so that her anger can die down naturally.

According to the second article, after she has told us that she is suffering, we should not press for an immediate discussion. If we do, everything can be destroyed. We abide by the treaty and accept the Friday evening appointment. In the interim, we have a chance to look deeply at the situation. "What did I say? What did I do to make her angry?" While sitting, walking, and breathing, practice looking deeply. This is true meditation.

According to the third article, after we have received a peace note, we should respond right away that we will be there on Friday evening. This is important, because if she knows we have received it, she will get some relief.

The fourth article tells us to practice breathing, taking refuge in the island of ourselves, in order to see three things: 1) We have the seeds—the habit energy—of unkindness and anger. We have made the other person unhappy before. We acknowledge that, even if now we do not see our fault in her suffering. We should not be too confident that we are not responsible this time. 2) We may have been suffering, and we thought that by saying something strong to her, we would get relief. This is the wrong kind of relief, and we have to recognize that seeking that kind of relief is unwise. We shouldn't hope to suffer less by making another person suffer. 3) We look deeply and we see that her suffering is our suffering. If we do something to help her stop suffering, we will also benefit.

The fifth article tells us that if we can apologize right away, we should not wait. We can pick up the telephone and call right away, without attempting to justify or explain anything we said or did. A straightforward apology can have a powerful effect. We just say, "I am very sorry. I was not mindful or understanding." There may be no need to wait for Friday.

The Peace Treaty is a mindfulness practice. Please study it deeply and prepare carefully for the occasion to sign it. You may like to add more articles to make it more relevant to your situation. The best way to sign it is in a meditation hall, with the witness and support of your community. But if you are not near a meditation hall, you can sign it wherever you are. Unless you are committed to practicing it, it is better not to sign. If you sign and practice according to the Peace Treaty, you and your partner will benefit, and all of us will also benefit from your skill in dealing with anger. Be harmonious and happy!

PEACE TREATY

In Order That We May Live Long and Happily Together, In Order That We May Continually Develop and Deepen Our Love and Understanding, We the Undersigned, Vow to Observe and Practice the Following:

I, the one who is angry, agree to:

1. Refrain from saying or doing anything that might cause further damage or escalate the anger.
2. Not suppress my anger.
3. Practice breathing and taking refuge in the island of myself.
4. Calmly, within twenty-four hours, tell the one who has made me angry about my anger and suffering, either verbally or by delivering a Peace Note.
5. Ask for an appointment for later in the week (e.g., Friday evening) to discuss this matter more thoroughly, either verbally or by Peace Note.

I, the one who has made the other angry, agree to:

1. Respect the other person's feelings, not ridicule him or her, and allow enough time for him or her to calm down.
2. Not press for an immediate discussion.
3. Confirm the other person's request for a meeting, either verbally or by note, and assure him or her that I will be there.
4. Practice breathing and taking refuge in the island of myself to see how:
 - a. I have seeds of unkindness and anger as well as the habit energy to make the other person unhappy.
 - b. I have mistakenly thought that making the other person suffer would relieve my own suffering.
 - c. by making him or her suffer, I make myself suffer.
5. Apologize as soon as I realize my unskillfulness and lack of mindfulness, without making any attempt to justify myself and without waiting until the Friday meeting.

6. Not say: “I am not angry. It’s okay. I am not suffering. There is nothing to be angry about, at least not enough to make me angry.”
7. Practice breathing and looking deeply into my daily life—while sitting, lying down, standing, and walking—in order to see:
 - a. the ways I myself have been unskillful at times.
 - b. how I have hurt the other person because of my own habit energy.
 - c. how the strong seed of anger in me is the primary cause of my anger.
 - d. how the other person’s suffering, which waters the seed of my anger, is the secondary cause.
 - e. how the other person is only seeking relief from his or her own suffering.
 - f. that as long as the other person suffers, I cannot be truly happy.
8. Apologize immediately, without waiting until Friday evening, as soon as I realize my unskillfulness and lack of mindfulness.
9. Postpone the Friday meeting if I do not feel calm enough to meet with the other person.

We Vow, with Lord Buddha as Witness and the Mindful Presence of the Sangha, to Abide by These Articles and to Practice Wholeheartedly. We Invoke the Three Gems for Protection and to Grant Us Clarity and Confidence.

Signed,

The _____ Day of _____
in the Year _____ in _____

—From *Touching Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1992)
and *Teachings on Love* (Parallax Press, 1998)

The Five Mindfulness Trainings
FIRST MINDFULNESS TRAINING

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

SECOND MINDFULNESS TRAINING

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I will practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

THIRD MINDFULNESS TRAINING

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

FOURTH MINDFULNESS TRAINING

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that

can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

FIFTH MINDFULNESS TRAINING

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

—from *For a Future to Be Possible*
(Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1993, 1998)



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For a worldwide directory of Sanghas practicing in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, please visit www.iamhome.org.

[1](#)

Plum Village is a monastery and practice center in south west France established by Thich Nhat Hanh.

[2](#)

See Practices for Peace: Mindful Walking, p. 123.

[3](#)

See Practices for Peace: Mindful Eating, p. 127.

[4](#)

See Practices for Peace: Deep Listening and Loving Speech, p. 133.

[5](#)

See Practices for Peace: Deep Relaxation, p. 137.

[6](#)

See “The Discourse on Taking Refuge in Oneself” in Thich Nhat Hanh, *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2000), p. 272.

[7](#)

See Practices for Peace: Beginning Anew, p. 141.

[8](#)

See Practices for Peace: Peace Treaty, p. 145.

[9](#)

Master Lin Chi was a ninth century Chinese Zen master. He founded his own school of Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism. In Japan it is called Rinzai, in Vietnam it is Lam Te.

[10](#)

See Practices for Peace: The Five Mindfulness Trainings, p. 155.

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