

2003

Welcome to the Order of Interbeing
Aspirants Group Letter
Patricia Hunt-Perry
Dharmacarya, Newburgh, NY

Dear Ones,

Welcome to the first meeting of our aspirant group, today, Monday 20 October 2003.

The Core Community honors your clear commitment to live the way of love, understanding, and compassion inspired by the teachings and form of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. We are happy to support you in your determination to nourish wholesome seeds in yourself and in society for the benefit of yourself and society and in your commitment to deepen your capacity and skill in the practice of mindfulness in all aspects of daily life.

The intention of this process is to nourish a deepening of the aspirant's willingness and capacity to transform suffering; practice mindfulness, understanding, and compassion in daily life and community, and to dwell happily in the present moment (the 7th of the 14 Mindfulness Trainings.).

It can be helpful to start this process with attention to *shamatha* practice (see Chapter Six in *The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings*). While there are books to read and practices to become comfortable with (to offer to ourselves and others), please remember that there is no "curriculum" for becoming an Order member. The process is one of ripening, not achieving, and is not goal oriented. The Third Door of Liberation in our teachings is goallessness, non-attainment. The wave does not need to attain becoming water.

It is helpful to remember that the ripening process is different for each individual and there is no judgment, failure or success in the length of time. Grapes ripen at different times than peaches, pears or strawberries. There is nothing to achieve, no hurry--the time it takes is the time it takes. The Charter of the Order of Interbeing suggests a minimum of one year after the dated letter of intention to receive the 14 Mindfulness Trainings. More often, the process takes two or three or even eight to ten years. It is also possible, that due to various causes and conditions, a person may continue as an aspirant without receiving the trainings and joining the Order in a formal ceremony, deepening their practice. It is also possible that someone may see because of causes and conditions that can emerge in life, that this is not the commitment that is appropriate at this time.

The aspirant process includes having two or three mentors and the regional Dharmacarya to help guide your process. We will select your mentors together. It is the responsibility of the aspirant to contact the mentors on a regular basis (usually every two to three weeks but at least once a month) and set up times for mentoring sessions in person or by phone.

Some mentors offer aspirant groups which we have found very helpful, so that is a very good choice if available to you. Mentoring can also be done with mentors on a one to one basis when causes and conditions warrant. Contact with the Dharmacarya at least every five weeks is also appropriate.

Be aware that receiving the 14 Mindfulness Trainings and joining the core community of the Order of Interbeing as a layperson includes a commitment to doing one's best to embody the practice of mindfulness, love, compassion and understanding in our daily lives and relationships, and helping to awaken bodhicitta (the mind of love) in ourselves and others. Other commitments include:

- practicing at least 60 days of mindfulness a year
- practicing with and offering sustaining energy to a Sangha (sanghabuilding)
- reciting the 14 Mindfulness Trainings with others every two weeks
- not using alcohol, as stated in the 5th of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and the 5th of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings
- attending a retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh at least once a year, if possible.
- connecting with the monastic community
- subscribing to the journal *The Mindfulness Bell*

Practicing at Centers: Happily we are within four or five hours of Green Mountain Dharma Center and Maple Forest Monastery. It is our regional center and it is very nourishing to your practice to spend a week or more a year there. It is very helpful to arrange a stay there with your sangha and we can explore going as an aspirant group—perhaps even combining with one or more aspirant groups to go together.

HERE ARE SOME AREAS FOR REFLECTION ABOUT YOUR PRACTICE AND NEXT STEPS. These will be areas which can nourish and focus our practice in the aspirant training.

1) *Individual Practice*, including daily life relationships (family, friends, workplace, sangha); transforming grief, anger and fear and other forms of suffering; reflecting on alcohol consumption, sexual responsibility, etc; 60 days of mindfulness; daily “formal” sitting and walking practice, etc;

Readings: Blooming of A Lotus; Present Moment, Wonderful Moment; Peace Is Every Step; Essential Writings; Anger; No Death, No Fear; The Miracle of Mindfulness.

2) *Sangha Practice*, including participating in and contributing to local sangha building, for example, offering instruction in sitting, walking, eating, hugging meditation; sounding the bell; singing and mindful movement practice. Practice with mindful communication and conflict transformation practices such as

4
Metta/Lovingkindness Practice; Beginning Anew; NonViolent Communication; Mindful Meditation; Shining the Light.

Readings: Teachings on Love; Touching Peace; Friends on the Path; Joyfully Together; Being Peace; A Basket of Plums (songbook and CD); Mindfulness Practice Center Manual; Pamphlets: How to Enjoy Your Stay at Plum Village; Sangha Practice.

3) *Study*, including study and practice of the sutras and books especially by Thich Nhat Hanh. You will need a copy of the Plum Village Chanting Book and Thay's commentaries on the following sutras: Full Awareness of Breathing (Breathe! You Are Alive!); Four Establishments of Mindfulness (Transformation and Healing); The Better Way to be Alone (Our Appointment with Life); and Heart of the Buddha's Teachings. *Other helpful study/practice books for a group:* Peace Is Every Step; Being Peace; Transformation at the Base; Call Me By My True Names (poetry); Old Path, White Clouds; Essential Writings.

4) *Service/Socially Engaged Practice*, including awareness, service, support for socially engaged meditation and action. *Helpful Texts:* the five and fourteen mindfulness trainings; Sr Chan Khong's book Learning True Love; Love in Action and The Raft Is Not the Shore by Thich Nhat Hanh; Be Free Where You Are (talk at a prison); Path of Compassion; Engaged Buddhist Reader. (Also: Turning Wheel Magazine from the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, and many books by other authors, for example, Joanna Macy)

5) *Wider Sangha Connection*. Please give yourself the gift of time at Plum Village, Deer Park Monastery, Green Mountain Dharma Center/Maple Forest Monastery. Please be aware that receiving the 14 Mindfulness Trainings also means joining the core community of the Order of Interbeing. It is helpful to understand the history and continuing changing of this Order. Deepen your willingness and capacity for "cross-cultural" communication: lay-monastic connection, English-speaking/Vietnamese-speaking and other languages/racial/ethnic group connection; elders-youngers connection, etc.

Readings: A Joyful Path; I Have Arrived, I Am Home; Stepping into Freedom; Finding Our True Home: Pure Land Is Here and Now; Journal: The Mindfulness Bell (subscribe—and read back copies!)

6) *History*—Please deepen your awareness of the history of Buddhism; Buddhism in Vietnam; the Order of Interbeing. *Readings:* Old Path, White Clouds; Master Tang Hoi; Hermitage in the Clouds; Stone Boy and Other Stories; A Taste of Earth; Learning True Love (Sr Chan Khong). Journal: The Mindfulness Bell (subscribe—and read back copies!)

7) *Root Traditions/Interfaith Understandings*—
Readings: Living Buddha, Living Christ; Going Home.

8) *Twelve Questions**—

Reading: The Mindfulness Bell, #21, April 1998, p 13. (See below) Many of these questions reflect the above topics, but may be an easier “gateway.” The first question is “Why do I want to receive the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings?” In revisiting this question from time to time, different responses may arise as to your deepest purpose, intention, motivation, and aspiration.

It is also helpful to live comfortably with impermanence and remember that “everything changes” includes changes in the Order of Interbeing itself, as well as this aspirant process. An historical perspective reminds us that the Order now has changed from ten or twenty years ago, and it will continue to change during the next ten or twenty years and more.

Peace and Joy,

Patricia Hunt-Perry

Chan Boa Chau

True Precious Continent

Calming Strength of the Heart