

Phum Village

December 23, 2023

Ceremony to honor Thay on the second anniversary of his transformation

Composed by Dharmacharya Jack Lawlor (True Direction)

Guidance on the Aspiration/Spirit of the Ceremony

One of the greatest spiritual teachers of our age, of any age, Thich Nhat Hanh, experienced transformation two years ago on January 22, 2022 at the age of 95. For decades, he selflessly shared the Buddha's way of peace, understanding and love with us in accessible and effective ways.

We at first felt a bit disorientated, a bit lost. But what better way to transform these feelings into the calm and centering energy of mindfulness, and to evoke Thay within us, and within each other, than to spend the next 90 minutes sharing mindfulness practices based on mindful, attentive breathing?

Ceremony Contents

Time: approximately 90', not including options

- Introductory words by facilitator (5')
- Slow, mindful reading of "The Discourse on Love"

- Instruction in meditation (5')
- Silent sitting meditation (10'-20')
- Reading excerpts from "The Art of Living" (5')
- The "Five Awarenesss" verses adapted from the Plum Village chanting book (5')
- Chant "The sutra of the insight that brings us to the other shore" (optional)
- Mindfulness of our Teacher (3')
- Words of Gratitude (20')
- "Contemplation on no-coming, no-going" from the Plum Village chanting book (5')
- Optional Poems by Thay
- Closing words (5')

Introductory words by facilitator (5')

Our community has gathered today to generate the energy of mindfulness, peace and compassion, in order to offer the merit of our practice and togetherness to our dear beloved Teacher, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, who we often refer to as "Thay".

The life of our Teacher continues in the life of his students and spiritual descendants. According to the teachings of the Buddha, the peace and joy of the student are the peace and joy of the teacher and spiritual ancestors. The calm, clarity, and peace we can generate today are both a manifestation of Thay's love and our expression of our spiritual support and love for him.

We will begin with 3 sounds of the bell [B B B] and a reading of the *Discourse on Love*, one of the Buddha's 2,600 year old teachings that resonates within us as if it were written yesterday.

The sound of the bell is the voice of the Buddha, calling us back to our true home. It invites us back to the practice of mindful breathing, assisted by the little breath poem, also known as a gatha, stating:

*"Listen, listen this wonderful sound (accompanying our in-breath),
Bringing us back to our true home (accompanying our out-breath)."*

There will be several opportunities this evening to enjoy the practice of bowing. For ease, let's bow from the waist rather than full prostrations on the ground. We bow to each other as a manifestation of our respect for one another, evoking the qualities of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha in one another and in ourselves.

[B B B]

Slow, mindful reading of "The Discourse on Love"

As we share this sutra, please reflect on how it beautifully depicts Thay's lifelong generosity for the benefit of all beings.

Discourse on Love

Someone who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech. They will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let them not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones.

(And this is what they contemplate:)

May everyone be happy and safe, and may all hearts be filled with joy.

May all beings live in security and in peace — beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, invisible or visible, near or far away, already born, or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility.

Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of

anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. Let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. Our love will know no obstacles. Our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

Free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing Perfect Understanding, those who practice Boundless Love will certainly transcend Birth and Death.

[B]

The life of our Teacher is a manifestation of the essence of the Discourse on Love. Throughout his life, Thay watered and nourished the bodhicitta of so many people, their heart and mind of love, what is best in them. May Thay's efforts skillfully continue through us, through our Sanghas, as Thay's continuation.

Instruction in meditation (5')

Dear friends, now is the time to slow down, relax, and enjoy the freedom of sitting meditation centered in the practice of mindfulness of the breath.

Our root Teacher, Thay, always suggested that we begin our practice of sitting meditation by enjoying some "mouth yoga": that is, to smile!

Then, let's enjoy a few gentle cleansing breaths to be in touch with the full capacity of the lungs. Too often when we're tense we only breathe from the uppermost part of the lung. So please find a gentle way to come into contact with the lungs, perhaps by either visualizing we're inflating a pliant toy balloon within our lungs, or enjoying some exhalations that are a bit longer than our

usual exhalations. This is the only time we'll try to influence either the length or rhythm of the breath.

From this point on, let's simply merge our attention into the sensation of breathing. Find a place where we can become intimate with the breath: through our nostrils, across our lips, or in that wonderful but slight movement of the diaphragm muscle between our lungs and the stomach that enables us to enjoy "belly breathing". Sense and feel each inhalation. Sense and feel each exhalation. Experience the wonderful turning movement when an inhalation becomes an exhalation and vice versa. Merge your attention in the breath. Be curious and attentive. Be alert to the length of each in-breath and each out-breath. When distractions arise, simply smile at them, accept them, breathe in and out through them, watch them arise, abide for a while, and change, and then once again return to the breath. While remaining centered in the breath, simply observe what is arising, abiding, and changing in your body, your emotions, and in your mind.

If you are sitting on the floor, it is most comfortable to sit with your back upright, your chin tucked in, your eyes half-opened and out of focus, with shoulders relaxed and the limb of one leg extended before the other leg in a "Burmese" posture. Rest your hands atop your thighs and sit on the front third of your meditation cushion. If you chose to sit on a chair, these principles are the same, but sit with your legs shoulder-length apart with your feet on the floor, sitting upright and not in reliance on the backrest of your chair.

[B B B]

Silent sitting meditation (10'-20')

[B]

Reading excerpts from "The Art of Living" (5')

"We have a tendency to think that we have a separate self that is born at one moment and must die at another, and that is permanent during the time we are alive. As long as we have this wrong view, we will suffer; we will create suffering for those around us, and we will cause harm to other species and to our precious planet.

We are not limited to our physical body, even when we are alive. We inter-are with our ancestors, our descendants, and the whole cosmos. We don't have a separate self, we are never really born, and we never really die. We are interconnected with all life, and we are always in transformation.

Can you see how you are continued in your parents, in your brothers and sisters, in your teachers and friends? Can you see the continuation body of your parents and loved ones? We don't need to get old or die in order to see our continuation body. We don't need to wait for the complete disintegration of this body in order to begin to see our continuation body, just as a cloud doesn't need to have been entirely transformed into rain in order to see her continuation body. Can you see your rain, your river, your ocean?

Each one of us should train ourselves to see our continuation body in the present moment. If we can see our continuation body while we're still alive, we'll know how to cultivate it to ensure a beautiful continuation in the future. This is the true joy of living. Then, when the time comes for the dissolution of our physical body, we will be able to release it easily.

So, the shortest answer to the question, "What happens when I die?" is that you don't die. And that is the truth, because when you understand the nature of the person who is dying, and you understand the act of dying, you will see there is no such thing as death anymore. There is no self that dies. There is only transformation.

When we practice mindfulness, we can get many kinds of relief. But the greatest relief and peace comes when we are able to touch our nature of no birth and no death. This is something doable. It's something possible. And it gives us a lot of freedom. If we are in touch with our cosmic body, our God body, our nirvana body, then we are no longer afraid of dying. This is the cream of the Buddha's teaching and practice. There are those who can die happily, because they have touched this insight."

The “Five Awarenesss” verses adapted from the Plum Village chanting book (5')

We are aware that all generations of our ancestors, including our spiritual ancestors, and all future generations are present in us.

[BELL AND BOW FROM THE WAIST]

We are aware of the expectations that our ancestors, including our spiritual ancestors, our children and their children have in us.

[BELL AND BOW FROM THE WAIST]

We are aware that our joy, peace, freedom and harmony are the joy, peace, freedom and harmony of our ancestors, including our spiritual ancestors, our children and their children.

[BELL AND BOW FROM THE WAIST]

We are aware that understanding is the very foundation of love.

[BELL AND BOW FROM THE WAIST]

We are aware that blaming and arguing never help us and only create a wider gap between us; that only understanding, trust and love can help us change and grow.

[TWO SOUNDS OF THE BELL, BOWING FROM THE WAIST]

Chant “The sutra of the insight that brings us to the other shore” (optional)

Avalokiteshvara
while practicing deeply with
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore,
suddenly discovered that
all of the five Skandhas are equally empty,
and with this realisation
he overcame all Ill-being.

“Listen Sariputra,
this Body itself is Emptiness
and Emptiness itself is this Body.
This Body is not other than Emptiness
and Emptiness is not other than this Body.
The same is true of Feelings,
Perceptions, Mental Formations,
and Consciousness.

“Listen Sariputra,
all phenomena bear the mark of Emptiness:
their true nature is the nature of
no Birth no Death,
no Being no Non-being,
no Defilement no Purity,
no Increasing no Decreasing.

“That is why in Emptiness,
Body, Feelings, Perceptions,
Mental Formations and Consciousness
are not separate self entities.

“The Eighteen Realms of Phenomena
which are the six Sense Organs,
the six Sense Objects,
and the six Consciousnesses
are also not separate self entities.

“The Twelve Links of Interdependent Arising
and their Extinction
are also not separate self entities.

“Ill-being, the Causes of Ill-being,
the End of Ill-being, the Path,
insight and attainment,
are also not separate self entities.

“Whoever can see this
no longer needs anything to attain.

“Bodhisattvas who practice
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore
see no more obstacles in their mind,
and because there
are no more obstacles in their mind,
they can overcome all fear,
destroy all wrong perceptions
and realize Perfect Nirvana.

“All Buddhas in the past, present and future
by practicing
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore
are all capable of attaining
Authentic and Perfect Enlightenment.

“Therefore Sariputra,
it should be known that
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore
is a Great Mantra,
the most illuminating mantra,
the highest mantra,
a mantra beyond compare,
the True Wisdom that has the power
to put an end to all kinds of suffering.

“Therefore let us proclaim
a mantra to praise
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore:

Gate, gate, pāragate, pārasaṃgate, bodhi svāhā,
Gate, gate, pāragate, pārasaṃgate, bodhi svāhā,
Gate, gate, pāragate, pārasaṃgate, bodhi svāhā!”

Mindfulness of our Teacher (3')

Dear brothers, sisters, siblings, it is time to bring to mind our Teacher, Thay, and to send him our energy of loving kindness and compassion. Let us sit and enjoy our breathing for a moment, allowing Thay to be present with us now.

[TEN BREATHS IN SILENCE]

Words of Gratitude (20')

We now have [20' – 30'] for us to express our love and gratitude to Thay for his life and the teachings he has given us, and how they have helped us heal, transform, nourish happiness, and practice reconciliation. Through not only his words but also his every action, Thay has taught us how to practice mindfulness, concentration and insight which give rise to compassion and understanding, benefitting all beings and the Earth herself. If you would like to contribute, please bow in and wait until your bow is returned. Everyone will have a chance to contribute.

[B]

“Contemplation on no-coming, no-going” from the Plum Village chanting book (5')

This body is not me.
I am not limited by this body.

I am life without boundaries.
I have never been born,
and I have never died.
Look at the ocean and the sky filled with stars,
manifestations from my wondrous True Mind.
Since before time, I have been free.
Birth and death are only doors through which we pass,
sacred thresholds on our journey.
Birth and death are a game of hide-and-seek.
So laugh with me,
hold my hand,
let us say good-bye,
say good-bye, to meet again soon.
We meet today.
We will meet again tomorrow.
We will meet at the source every moment.
We meet each other in all forms of life.

[B]

Optional Poems by Thay

"Interbeing", by Thich Nhat Hanh

The sun has entered me.
The sun has entered me together with the cloud and the river.
I myself have entered the river,
And I have entered the sun
With the cloud and the river.
There has not been a moment
When we do not interpenetrate.

But before the sun entered me,

The sun was in me --
And the cloud and the river,
Before i entered the river,
I was already in it.
There has not been a moment
When we have not inter-been.

Therefore you know
That as long as you continue to breathe.
I continue to be in you.

"Contemplating Limitless Life", by Thich Nhat Hanh

I see that this body – made of the four elements – is not really me,
and I am not limited by this body.

I am the whole of the river of life, of blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors, that has been continuously flowing for thousands of years and flows on for thousands of years into the future. I am one with my ancestors and my descendants. I am life manifesting in countless different forms. I am one with all peoples and all species, whether they are peaceful and joyful or suffering and afraid. At this very moment I am present everywhere in this world. I have been present in the past and will be there in the future.

The disintegration of this body does not touch me, just as when the petals of the plum blossom fall it does not mean the end of the plum tree. I see that I am like a wave on the surface of the ocean. I see myself in all the other waves, and I see all the other waves in me. The manifestation or the disappearance of the wave does not lessen the presence of the ocean.

My Dharma body and spiritual life are not subject to birth or death. I am able to see my presence outside this body, even in the present moment. Eighty or ninety years is not my life span. My life span, like that of a leaf or of a buddha, is immeasurable. I am able to go beyond the idea that I am a body separate from other manifestations of life, in time and in space.

Mother earth in me.
Smiling to the most beautiful planet in our solar system.

I am a child of the sun.

I am a star.

I am my ancestors.

Playing my part in the immortality of my ancestors.

Smiling to the stars and galaxies in me.

Playing my part in the immortality of stars and cosmos.

Nothing is created. Nothing is destroyed.

I am free from being, free from nonbeing.

Closing words (5')

We would like to thank everyone for coming together to offer your presence today and for generating such a peaceful, loving energy. We are very fortunate to share such an inspiring teacher, to have found this path to follow, and a wonderful sangha to take refuge in.

Please remember that the Buddha encouraged his disciples from his death bed to take refuge in the teachings. Remember how Thay was always centered in mindfulness of the breath, and that all of his magnificent teachings are based in this daily form of engaged practice. Remember how Thay urged us to go as a river, to go as a loving sangha, as friends on the path, and how the next Buddha will be a sangha.

We hope that we can all continue to keep alive this energy of peace, mindfulness and connection in our personal practice, to bring peace, compassion, love and understanding to our families and communities, and continue to offer our energy to our beloved Teacher. Let us now sing together the song "No Coming, No Going":

No coming, no going,
No after, no before.
I hold you, close to me,
I release you to be so free.
Because I am in you and you are in me.
Because I am in you and you are in me.

[We can also invite everyone to practice hugging meditation after the closing bells / closing verse after a brief explanation of this practice.]

Ceremony courtesy of Dharmacharya Jack Lawlor, True Direction

Lakeside Buddha Sangha

2023 July 11

Keep Reading



New buds on ancient trees



*Sweeping the ground of
enlightenment*



Peace is the walk



Arrived