

From *Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh
(pp 89–91)

“Community of Mindful Living”

The foundation of a good community is a daily life that is joyful and happy. In Plum Village, children are the center of attention. Each adult is responsible for helping the children be happy, because we know that if the children are happy, it is easy for the adults to be happy.

When I was a child, families were bigger. Parents, cousins, uncles, aunts, grandparents, and children all lived together. The houses were surrounded by trees where we could hang hammocks and organize picnics. In those times, people did not have many of the problems we have today. Now our families are very small, just mother, father, and one or two children. When the parents have a problem, the whole family feels the effects. Even if the children go into the bathroom to try to get away, they can feel the heavy atmosphere. They may grow up with seeds of suffering and never be truly happy. Formerly, when mom and dad had problems, the children could escape by going to an aunt or uncle, or other family member. They still had someone to look up to, and the atmosphere was not so threatening.

I think that communities of mindful living, where we can visit a network of “aunts, uncles, and cousins,” may help us replace our former big families. Each of us needs to “belong to” such a place, where each feature of the landscape, the sounds of the bell, and even the buildings are designed to remind us to return to awareness. I imagine that there will be beautiful practice centers where regular retreats will be organized, and individuals and families will go there to learn and practice the art of mindful living.

The people who live there should emanate peace and freshness, the fruits of living in awareness. They will be like beautiful trees, and the visitors will want to come and sit under their shade. Even when they cannot actually visit, they only need to think of it and smile, and they will feel themselves becoming peaceful and happy.

We can also transform our own family or household into a community that practices harmony and awareness. Together we can practice breathing and smiling, sitting together, drinking tea together and mindfulness. If we have a bell, the bell is also part of the community, because the bell helps us practice. If we have a meditation cushion, the cushion is also part of the community, as are many other things that help us practice mindfulness, such as the air for breathing. If we live near a park or a riverbank, we can enjoy walking meditation there. All these efforts can help us establish a community at home period from time to time we can invite a friend to join us. Practicing mindfulness is much easier with a community.

“Mindfulness Must Be Engaged”

When I was in Vietnam, so many of our villages were being bombed. Along with my monastic brothers and sisters, I had to decide what to do. Should we continue to practice in our monasteries, or should we leave the meditation halls in order to help the people who were suffering under the bombs? After careful reflection, we decided to do both—to go out and help people and to do so in mindfulness. We called it engaged Buddhism. Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what is the use of seeing?

We must be aware of the real problems of the world. Then, with mindfulness, we will know what to do and what not to do to be of help. If we maintain awareness of our breathing and continue to practice smiling, even in difficult situations, many people, animals, and plants will benefit from our way of doing things. Are you massaging our Mother Earth every time your foot touches her? Are you planting seeds of joy and peace? I try to do exactly that with every step, and I know that our Mother Earth is most appreciative. Peace is every step. Shall we continue our journey?