

Where did the Mindfulness Trainings come from? They had to come from somewhere. There are three major causes and conditions that permitted their emergence. The first is the awakened mind of the Buddha; the second is the great skill of the Buddha as a teacher; the third is Thich Nhat Hanh's insightful rewording of the Five Wonderful Precepts of the Buddha. In a language that would appeal to the consciousness of the 21st century, the Buddha's mindfulness trainings were renewed, in tune with modern historical, socio-economic and cultural developments. So when we study and penetrate deeply into the mindfulness trainings we touch all three conditions, in particular the awakened mind of the Buddha. At the same time we also touch our potential to be similarly awakened.

With the Five Mindfulness Trainings the Buddha communicated in a very precise way the ethical and moral basis of practice; of how to be with ourselves, with others and with the planet and society at large. To be in touch with the Buddha's awakened mind enables us to take refuge in the Three Jewels – the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha - in a very deep way. Once we grasp the extraordinary qualities and understand the power of the energy created by the mindfulness trainings then something deep and very wholesome stirs in our hearts. From this initial experience the seeds of awakening are nurtured within store consciousness and distance is created between ourselves and all negative actions. Taking refuge in this deep manner is the basis of all dharma practice, which enables the practitioner to transform the energy of past negativity and step onto the path of liberation and create no further harm.

Contrast this understanding of taking refuge in the Buddha with the current mindset of the politicians, corporate executives and terrorists making the decisions that shape our world. They do not have awakened minds. Their minds are scarred, filled with ignorance, greed and vengeance, their hearts held hostage to corporate, ideological and electoral agendas. They all follow the same script, seeking similar justifications to advocate the use of violence. Trapped in history they offer no means of re-creating our world. The Buddha does, as his mindfulness trainings provide a different road map for peace, a different view of politics, conflict resolution and planetary care. The implications of the Buddha's teachings apply fully to the aftermath of 9/11. Our world needs guidelines like these to live by. Embracing the Buddha's awakened mind in the trainings is taking refuge in the Buddha. Extending it to our society and environment is the foundation of Engaged Buddhism.

Taking refuge allows us to transport our everyday reality with its disasters, joys, ups and downs, into the loving embrace of teachers such as the Buddha. Their teachings provide instruments for practitioners to travel from the Historical dimension of daily life and be refreshed by touching deeply the Ultimate dimension of the awakened mind of the Buddha and other fully enlightened beings. Such awakened teachers are able to reflect the Ultimate dimension of Nirvana, the Kingdom of God, The Pure Land, yet they also refer to the Historical dimension of the everyday realities of their times and culture.

Taking refuge in the Dharma, practices, sutras and trainings brings to mind the pivotal exchange between Ananda and the Buddha. As the Buddha was preparing for his bodily death his faithful attendant Ananda put a number of questions to the Buddha on behalf of the monastic community. The Buddha had repeatedly encouraged his disciples not to take refuge in the person of the Buddha, but in the island of mindfulness within the self where the diligent practice of the mindfulness trainings would reveal their Buddha nature. Still Ananda had to ask: “Who will our teacher be when you are gone?” to which the Buddha replied “The Mindfulness Trainings,” adding “They are your teacher even while I am alive.”

Taking refuge in the Sangha brings the Buddha and the Dharma to life. Without the Sangha the Buddha and Dharma cannot evolve to be relevant to the suffering of our times, which is quite different from the times of the Buddha. In the latter part of his ministry the Buddha took great care to reconstitute himself in terms of the sangha, so that if you wanted to truly touch the Buddha and Dharma you had to do so in the Sangha. Thich Nhat Hanh has repeatedly referred to sangha building as the noblest profession in the 21st century and in his dialogue with Daniel Berrigan in *The Raft Is Not The Shore* they talk about sanghas as communities of resistance to all that is unmindful. This insight is vital for the new century and may provide one answer to the present political landscape in America, in that building inclusive sanghas right across America may provide an instrument for constructive dialogue, intelligent dissent and resistance to initiatives that fly in the face of the mindfulness trainings. For the trainings allow us to remain steady, lucid and compassionate in the midst of adversity. Yet I personally encounter obstacles within myself. Across North America there are many instances of children being abused and murdered at the hands of parents and guardians. This deeply distresses me. Teenagers volunteering as suicide bombers in the Middle East could well leave me stunned. If I did not have my practice to stay steady and look deeply, I could easily be overwhelmed. But I *do* have my practice of meditation, and I do take refuge in the Five Mindfulness Trainings on a daily basis. I am convinced more than ever before that the world needs a universal code of ethics. The Five Mindfulness Trainings fill this void. For me they are a guide and protector in moments of doubt, so that I see clearly and can take care of my own internal garbage.

This is the only way to deal with the potential terrorist that lurks deep within everyone’s consciousness. To unravel the insidious internal knots caused by generations of ancestral habits, created from ignorance, vengeance and separation – this is the work of the new revolutionary of the 21st century, transforming terror and violence first within themselves and then within the world. It is not a political or intellectual exercise, nor a matter of compromised treaties or ceasefires. It is an internal transformation of consciousness at the very core of our being. It takes mindfulness to do this and the Five Mindfulness Trainings provide the starting gate, a guidance system and a deep well of internal ethics to live by. This is why I do my very best to live by these trainings.

There is an energy to the trainings that comes directly from the awakened mind of the Buddha, which is continued through us. So that when a sangha collectively and diligently practices the five mindfulness trainings, an extraordinary energy emerges that uplifts everyone who is suffering. When I think about taking refuge in the Sangha I smile

with quiet joy. My home sangha - the Pine Gate sangha founded in 1997 - has matured so that it operates very much as an organism. There are so many leaders in the sangha choosing to walk the Bodhisattva path and be of support to everyone else. We take one another's hand and willingly walk together through the early part of the twenty first century. From our engaged practice in the city of Ottawa – for peace, the environment and schools – there emerges so much confidence and clarity. The experience of the fruits of practice transforms our wider community as we become more skilful and aware that we are infusing mindfulness throughout our city. We have that lucidity and confidence as a consequence of the joy that emerges from experiencing for ourselves the fruits of mindfulness practice. They are all spiritual friends – *kalyanamitra* – and they help me grow in awareness so that I may become more embedded in my true nature by taking refuge in the awakened aspect of my mind. The Buddha's reply to Ananda's question is no longer a theory but a reality for sangha members.

Taking Refuge in the trainings and three jewels is a joyful path. A vital part of the joy is engaged practice with a sangha, as that leads to new leadership, responsibility and care for the wider community. It is in the Sangha that the Ultimate dimension of the Buddha and Dharma truly comes alive, as the feedback is from direct experience with dharma friends. As sangha members feel the fruits of practice from taking refuge, their awareness grows as their suffering is transformed. The sangha becomes a safe haven, a community of resistance where participants are free to explore deeply the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that is within. Using breath consciously, living the mindfulness trainings fully, practicing the guidance of the sutras enables the awakened mind of the Buddha within us to be touched. And so we transform. At this instant the existential realities of the sangha in the Historical dimension, by creating a Pure Land for transformation, cross over into the Ultimate dimension. The waves recognize that they are water. This is not a concept but a reality based on the experience of sangha practice. This is why I believe it will be sanghas creating Pure Lands that provide the basis for the next Buddha to manifest, with each sangha operating organically as a cell in the new manifestation of Divinity on Earth. This is a statement of practice and is our greatest gift. We can offer our teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, gifts of great wealth or of property for monasteries and centres, but these gifts pale beside the gift of offering to our teacher our deep practice of the mindfulness trainings. This enables us to live authentic lives and be free, at the same time ensuring that a future is possible. There are many ways to talk about the Five Mindfulness Trainings. They can be applied to personal spiritual growth, global ecology, the post 9/11 world and so on. With each focus we rest in the awakened mind of the Buddha, which is also there within each one of us. Our practice and actualization of the mindfulness trainings in daily life defines us as true revolutionaries for the 21st century for we can transform both global terror and environmental degradation.

Thich Nhat Hanh does not see a way out for our modern civilization other than practicing the Five Mindfulness Trainings – or something like them. The trainings are not there for us to be in judgement of others, to bludgeon people with a misplaced self-righteousness. They are an internal compass to the heart of every individual, so that we wake up to love and compassion, and take heed of the directions in which the Mindfulness Trainings guide us. Practicing the trainings with an open heart strengthens and develops our compassion and loving kindness, and builds our awareness of interconnectedness as we

move in the direction of the trainings' intention. Practicing the trainings nourishes "boddhicitta", the "Mind of Love." Thich Nhat Hanh refers to their practice as the medicine for our times, as the hope for the future. They provide protection and enable us to distinguish that which is good for ourselves, our minds and world and that which is not. It is not necessary to be perfect in the practice – that is not possible. But it is possible to move in the direction of responsible and ethical living and make a difference to our society and environment. By doing this, then we can transform global terror and environmental degradation. We created the present situation, yet there is a clear way of transforming our creation. If there is "this", the actualization of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, then there is "that", a balanced and peaceful world.

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