

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President of the United States of America  
*By email and by hand to the US Embassy in Berlin*

**Your Middle East Mission**  
**An Open Letter from the International Plum Village Community**  
**of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh**

19 October 2023

Dear Mr President,

At this time of war, the world looks to the United States to use its influence in the Middle East to bring about an immediate halt to the killing and violence there, and to speed the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

From long experience, Mr President, you know that conflicts – no matter how intractable – are best resolved when peace negotiations – no matter how complex – can move forward. There can be no end to the suffering in the Middle East if things continue as they are.

It is our belief that, as the Buddha said, hatred cannot respond to hatred; only love and compassion can respond to hatred. And as our teacher Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh said in a lifetime of peace advocacy during and after the Vietnam War: “There is no way to peace, peace is the way.”

During an historic visit to Vietnam in 2016, President Obama hailed how the former enemies had transformed their relationship, quoting the words of our teacher: “In true dialogue, both sides are willing to change.” Vietnam and the US are proof of that, as reinforced by your recent visit to Hanoi.

As Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh’s students, today we issue an open invitation for people to sit together for peace in the Middle East, Ukraine, and other war zones. We also offer a meditation, and teachings to support all who wish to cultivate

understanding, compassion, tolerance and peace in themselves, their families, their communities, and nations. Kindly refer to pages 3 to 6.

We respectfully invite you, Secretary Blinken, and your entire team to sit with us whenever, wherever you can as there is no time to lose. It is our fervent hope that you will succeed in initiating true dialogue in the Middle East between all who yearn for peace and are willing to change.

Yours sincerely,



*Bhikshu Thích Chân Pháp Ấn*  
Elder Monk



*Seal of Plum Village*



*Bhikshuni Thích Nữ Chân Không*  
Elder Nun



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## **AN INVITATION TO SIT TOGETHER FOR PEACE**

*From the International Plum Village Community of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh*

19 October 2023

The Buddha, a peace worker amidst the violence and conflicts of his time, said that hatred cannot respond to hatred; only love and compassion can respond to hatred. He called this an eternal truth, an eternal law.

The current conflict in the Middle East is a response to a long, complex, and troubled history. It is so painful to see what is happening there, especially to civilians on both sides. We appeal to all combatants to put an immediate stop to killing and acts of violence. This is difficult but there is no other way. There can be no solution, no end to the suffering if things continue as they are.

Our teacher Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh, who experienced decades of war in Vietnam and dedicated his life to peace, has said that man is not our enemy. “Our true enemy is hatred, ignorance, fear and the seed of violence deep in our consciousness.”

From a Buddhist perspective, the wars in the Middle East, Ukraine and beyond are a collective manifestation of human consciousness; of the collective destructive energy that exists within humanity. This destructive energy is a fundamental cause of human suffering. As members of the human family, each of us has a duty to recognize suffering within us, and a responsibility to transform “the seed of violence” into the reality of peace.

We can begin by resolving daily conflicts in ourselves, our families, our relationships with friends, our societies. The whole world needs to practice being peaceful. It is always possible to live together. It is always possible to sit down and discuss reconciliation so that a solution can be found. We need a global community of individuals living in this awareness to address the world’s problems and crises.

At this difficult time, it is important to take root in ourselves and calm our emotions. We invite our Israeli, Palestinian, Ukrainian friends, and all who suffer in conflict zones, to sit with us so that, together, we may cool anger and hatred, stop harmful actions, open our hearts, generate compassion, and radiate the powerful energy of peace.

Our beloved Israeli and Palestinian friends urgently need the support of the international community – of each of us. They need to know that the whole world shares in their suffering and sorrow, that we send our love and pray for their safety and wellbeing. This is a time for the entire human family to manifest our capacity for wisdom, compassion, tolerance, and peace.

As our teacher says: “There is no way to peace, peace is the way”.

All our ancestors and descendants are counting on us to build a peaceful life on Earth.

*With love and trust,*



*Bhikshu Thích Chân Pháp Ấn  
Elder Monk*



*Seal of Plum Village*



*Bhikshuni Thích Nữ Chân Không  
Elder Nun*

# **A Guided Meditation to Cultivate Stability, Radiate Compassion**

*(Abridged)*

***At this painful time for the world, we offer a meditation to help us cultivate solidity and stability, so we may open our hearts, radiate compassion, and support all who suffer from war and other disasters. The great energy of compassion can cool down anger, hatred, and violence.***

We begin by sitting up straight and gently following our inbreath and our outbreath. We relax our body and gradually focus our attention on our lower abdomen, gradually sinking the energy down to our lower abdomen, which is our energy center and root.

Allowing the energy in my body to sink down to my lower abdomen, I breathe in.

Visualizing roots extending beneath my body into the Earth, I breathe out.

Deeply connected to the Earth, I breathe in

Allowing the energy to sink deeper into the Earth, I breathe out.

Feeling even more stable, more solid, more peaceful, I invite all who are suffering in war zones to sit with us.

I invite all Israelis and Palestinians to sit with us, now, in stability and solidity.

We take root deeply into the Earth, so that anger, hatred, sadness, depression, and hopelessness cannot move us.

With solidity, we do not let this war blow us away, nor turn us into its victims.

Man is not our true enemy. Our true enemy is the hatred, violence, and ignorance within us.

I am deeply connected to the Earth. I am very stable and solid.

I now invite friends from Ukraine, Russia, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and all troubled places on Earth, to sit with us.

I invite friends from places destroyed by earthquakes, fires, floods, and other disasters to sit with us.

We shall sit together solidly and stably, our roots connected deeply into the Earth, so these difficulties cannot blow us away or make us victims.

I am solid as a mountain, free from all hatred, free from all violence.

I allow the energy of compassion from my heart to flow out to embrace myself and all who are going through trauma, violence, and death.

May the energy of compassion embrace all of us on Earth to help us heal and transform our difficulties.

May the great energy of compassion help to cool down the hatred, the anger, the violence, so that all friends in the war zone can be protected.

The Buddha taught: "Hatred cannot respond to hatred; only love and compassion can respond to hatred. This is the eternal truth, the eternal law."

It is always possible to live together. It is always possible to sit down and discuss reconciliation so that a solution can be found.

May everyone on Earth open their heart, so that everyone can see the light, the light of God, the light of goodness, of beauty and truth.

We continue to cultivate our solidity and our stability, so that we can offer support right now to all who suffer from conflict between humans and with nature.

The only way out is our peace, our solidity, our stability.

With this energy, we offer help; we support them.

We embrace them with all the compassion in our hearts.

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*We also offer related teachings and practice. From pp 7 to 20 are:*

- *Dharma talks and the extended version of the guided meditation by Bhikshu Thích Chân Pháp Ấn at a retreat in Tyrol, Austria, for "Cultivating Compassion in a Time of War"*
- *An Open Letter Calling For Peace, issued by the International Plum Village Community on 2 April, 2022, as the war in Ukraine began to unfold*
- *Cultivating a Culture of Peace - Our Community's Commitment and Prayer on New Year's Eve 2021, issued as the world struggled with fear and loss during the Covid-19 pandemic*

*Online are:*

- *A Cloud Never Dies, a biographical documentary recounting Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh's life's work for peace*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRObW9noiVk&ab\\_channel=PlumVillage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRObW9noiVk&ab_channel=PlumVillage)
- *Teachings offered by Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh during retreats at Plum Village Monastery, France, inviting Israelis and Palestinians to practice mindfulness together*  
<https://plumvillage.org/articles/peace-between-palestinians-and-israelis>
- *Teaching tours by Plum Village monastics to Israel and Palestine*  
<https://plumvillage.org/articles/touching-peace-in-palestine>  
*More groups of Israelis and Palestinians have since been invited to practice together in Plum Village*

**Extracts from a Dharma Talk by Bhikshu Thích Chân Pháp Ấn<sup>1</sup>**  
**At a Retreat for “Cultivating Compassion in a Time of War”**  
**Tyrol, Austria, 12 October 2023**

With the outbreak of war in the Middle East, these past few days have been disturbing for the whole world. It's very painful to see the killing on both sides. I ask myself: “Is it possible for humans to have peace?”

As humans we are very fortunate in the sense that we have awareness, we're able to think logically, rationally. But, still, we allow our emotions to control us, and often we are unable to overcome painful feelings. Our behavior can be destructive for ourselves and others. Is being peaceful possible? Is it possible to offer peace to ourselves and to other people around us?

Almost 30 years ago, at a retreat in the US with our teacher Thay<sup>2</sup>, I shared that because of the deep suffering of the Vietnam War I had depression for years. Friends asked if I wished the war in Vietnam had happened somewhere else in the world. I said that it didn't really matter because whether the war was in Vietnam or somewhere else, it was a collective manifestation of human consciousness, the collective destructive energy within humanity.

When we are angry, we contribute to this collective destructive energy. When we suffer fear, anxiety, depression, and sadness, we contribute to this collective energy. Many of us, like those caught up in the current conflict, are suffering deeply but we don't know we are suffering. Then we spread our suffering. We cause ourselves suffering and we will cause other people suffering.

That's why, in his Enlightenment, the Buddha discovered the Four Noble Truths, or the truth as perceived by the Enlightened or Noble One. And what did the Enlightened One perceive? Enlightened people realize that they suffer. They recognize that, as human beings, we suffer and that they themselves - the enlightened people - are suffering. When we are *really* aware of this, we begin to wake up and feel we have to do something about this suffering. Often, however, we do not wake up. We don't see that we're in a state of suffering. The enlightened person wakes up to the fact that he or she is suffering – that's very important.

In Buddhism, to know that we are in a state of suffering is enlightenment. We all suffer, regardless of whatever conditions we have. We do not feel satisfied. We sit and, in a few minutes, we want to change our position. We have to move to reduce a sense of unease within us.

Take the analogy of a lake. We see that most fish move all the time. The few that stay stationary are enlightened ones. But most fish are not enlightened so they keep moving. Where are they going? The lake is so small. Only the fish that keep moving feel the boundary of the lake. The fish that stays still does not, so he's liberated, he's free.

The Buddha, the Enlightened One, woke up to the root of our suffering. And what is that? We are a dynamic living system which means that often we are in a state of movement and

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<sup>1</sup> Elder Monk in the International Plum Village Community of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh

<sup>2</sup> Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh

perturbation. There is some disturbance in our body, our mind all the time. As a dynamic system, we want to reach some kind of harmony, some kind of balance within us. We seek a balanced, harmonious state. The Buddha called it craving. The root of suffering is craving, craving for stability, for... something.

In the Plum Village tradition, we invite a bell of mindfulness to sound at various intervals. It is a technique or practice that helps us to return to the state of the stationary fish. We are moving, the bell sounds, and we stop. We come back to our inbreath and outbreath. We learn to be at peace with our breathing. “Aware of my inbreath, I breathe in; aware of my outbreath, I breathe out. It is so wonderful to breathe in; it is so wonderful to breathe out.” After a few breaths taken with awareness, we calm down our physiological and mental craving.

Our breathing has two cycles: the in-cycle and the out-cycle. As human beings, we have two parts to the autonomic nervous system that regulates our physiology. The in-cycle of breathing activates the *sympathetic nervous system*. We take in oxygen, and we are ready for action; ready for running or whatever. The sympathetic nervous system activates a part of us called “*doing*”. The out-cycle of breathing activates our *parasympathetic nervous system*. That is the part of our nervous system that helps us relax. It activates a part of us that is *being* – just being there, relaxed. So, we have the in-cycle and the out-cycle, plus our awareness of breathing.

The physiological craving within us comes from a disharmony or “dis-synchronization” between these two aspects of our breathing – either too much of the sympathetic, or too much of the parasympathetic. When we shine the light of awareness on these two cycles, something amazing happens. The energy of love that comes out of this awareness begins to embrace the inbreath and the outbreath. The cycles begin to synchronize with each other, to come into balance and harmony. We begin to have a sense of well-being within us.

The more we train ourselves to be aware of our inbreath and outbreath, the more our feeling of uneasiness – that we are lacking something, that we need to search for something to secure our happiness and well-being – begins to calm down, begins to transform. Peace is the feeling that comes when we have a deep sense of well-being within us, when we feel rooted in the here and the now. So, is being peaceful possible? According to the Buddha, yes. But we need to train ourselves. It is not something that is given to us automatically. We have the *potential* to be peaceful. But we need to make it a reality.

Thay has said: “There is no way to peace, peace is the way”. Peace is not a state we reach, but a training, a way of living in which we learn to harmonize our two cycles of breathing so that, physically, we can sense that the two parts of our nervous system are synchronized.

With the outbreak of war early last year between Russia and Ukraine, and now war in the Middle East, there is an urgency for us to practice peace. The whole world needs to practice being peaceful. The problems and crises of the world cannot be solved by one group of people. It requires a global effort. The whole world needs to practice being peaceful. It’s so crucial at this time of war that the Buddha’s teaching is communicated to people around the world because states of being unstable, out of harmony, being disturbed are always present



within us. We need to practice calming them. The Buddha said that it's possible to do so when we know how to cultivate the energy of awareness. It is also called the energy of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is the capacity of being fully present for what is going on within and around us here and now. Often, the disharmony between our inbreath and outbreath gives rise to disharmony between our body and mind. Just like our inbreath and outbreath, they are not synchronized. Our body is here, and our mind is travelling somewhere else. There is this tension within us. Our body says: "Please come back." But our mind says: "Wait a minute, there is something more interesting out there." The body says: "I'm in pain." The mind says: "Don't worry. I'll come back later."

It's the same in our relationships. The disharmony between our body and mind gives rise to disharmony in our environment, our family, our society, our nation, other nations, and in the whole world. That's how it works. From a very small disturbance within our body and our mind, it radiates out and manifests bigger, bigger... to different relationships and, ultimately, to the whole world. Sometimes our beloved ones suffer very deeply but we are not there, we are not mindful. Our mind is somewhere else. We do not pay attention to the suffering going on in our family with our partner, our son, our daughter. We are not there for them. We are busy with different projects, business. Individual disturbances gradually spread out to become a collective disturbance that gives rise to collective suffering.

If we wish to change the situation, the Buddha advises us to start by training our mindfulness. First, learn to come back and to establish harmony in our breathing: "Aware of my inbreath, I breathe in; aware of my outbreath, I breathe out. Coming back to my breathing, feeling my breathing and feeling very happy with my breathing. Letting my mind calm down and releasing all the tension in my mind." Then: "Aware of my body; feeling my body and letting go all of the tension in my body..." We practice like this all day.

Sometimes we want to live only for ourselves. We are not sensitive towards other people and their needs. This changes when we learn to establish harmony in our breathing. The energy of mindfulness helps to create harmony in our body and our mind. Then, we begin to radiate compassion and learn to embrace our environment – our friends, our family, our society. That is what the whole world needs to learn now. We need to embrace each other, to love each other and bring each other up to humanity's next stage of evolution. Our existence is much more meaningful when we can exist with other people around us. It would be so beautiful if Israelis could live together peacefully alongside the people of Gaza. And it would be so beautiful if the people of Gaza could live peacefully alongside the Israelis.

Like a garden with many flowers, life needs variety, variation, completeness. We need to train ourselves in that way of thinking. And that's called mindfulness. It's the energy that does not exclude anything. It's the energy that embraces everything and is happy with everything. It's what the word "mindFUL" means. Literally, the mind is "full". Many times, our mind is fragmented, divided. We live in a world of division. The practice is to make our mind full, to be complete, to be whole. With this type of mind, we do not exclude anyone.

We learn to embrace everything. When we practice this way, our mind is full and becomes very peaceful.

According to the Avatamsaka Sutra, the mind of the Buddha expanded out and embraced the whole cosmos – multiple universes, infinite universes. That is the scale of the Buddha's mindfulness. Because of that, according to the Avatamsaka Sutra, the Buddha remained at his place of enlightenment – Bodhgaya in India. He remains there for infinite time (in other words, he didn't go around teaching the Dharma). The full mindfulness of the Buddha – this aspect of the Buddha – is called the dharmakaya, or the absolute body of the Buddha. It is everywhere, it does not move, it is there from the beginningless of time and will continue to be there until the end of time. The Buddha's energy of mindfulness is complete, is full, is expansive, is immense, is great and extends to the whole universe. So, his "absolute body" (dharmakaya) remains. The Buddha continues to be in this absolute concentration for infinite time. He doesn't move.

There is another aspect of the Buddha's body that goes round India to teach, and that's called the "nirmanakaya" or responding body; the body that is responding to the needs of living beings. So, the Buddha manifests in the form of a human and goes round and teaches. But, according to the Avatamsaka Sutra, there are infinite nirmanakaya bodies teaching the Dharma in different Buddha lands, different Buddha world systems. There is an infinite number of Buddhas.

We, too, have our dharmakaya: the degree of our mindfulness, the outward expansion of its energy. The more we practice mindfulness – when our mind is full and expanded – the energy of mindfulness becomes greater and greater, and we have the capacity to embrace all differences; we have the capacity to include everything in our lives. We don't want to eliminate anyone; we don't discriminate against anyone.

The constant movement of the fishes I mentioned earlier is like a craving for our idea, our opinion, our perspective to be fulfilled. We have a certain idea about life, and we want everyone to follow our idea. We have an opinion, and we want everyone to follow our opinion. The fish moves so that the opinion can be fulfilled. We want to force other people to follow our opinion, our idea. So, the fish within us is moving to force other people to follow our own way of life. But with the practice of mindfulness, it's okay. We let the other person be the way he or she is. We allow them to be themselves. We allow them to live. We allow them to manifest, and we allow co-existence between us and that other person. It's possible to have different perspectives and to live together. It's possible to have different opinions and to live together. That is mindfulness.

With the great degree of mindfulness he reached, the Buddha has the capacity to embrace everyone. He made a very beautiful declaration: "The world can be at war with me, but I have stopped all war. I am not at war with anyone." In other words, the Buddha is saying: "I am not in conflict with anyone in the world. My mind is completely empty. I'm completely at peace. I am peace." The Buddha was able to reach this state because of practicing in a way that allowed his mindfulness to grow infinitely.

**Extracts from a Dharma Talk by Bhikshu Thích Chân Pháp Ấn<sup>3</sup>**  
**At a Retreat for “Cultivating Compassion in a Time of War”**  
**Tyrol, Austria, 13 October 2023**

The practice of mindfulness (“smṛti” in Sanskrit) will help us be fully aware in any situation we experience. And if we continue to cultivate the energy of mindfulness, it will lead to the energy of collectedness (“samādhi” in Sanskrit).

When we practice mindfulness, we learn to have “an object of being mindful”. The nature of our mind is always moving. And because of that mobility, when anything happens, we can be carried away very easily because there is no stability, no root. Our mind just wanders from one object to another object. So, the practice of mindfulness helps us come back to ourself and learn to *be* with an object for a certain time. This practice will help us cultivate stability and solidity within us.

When something untoward happens, right away we are angry, or we are sad, we feel depressed. This is because our mind catches an object, and we lose ourself. There’s no stability - just like a tree without strong roots, when the wind blows, the whole tree is uprooted and blown over. But a tree with strong roots holds firm even in a strong wind. Thanks to its root system, the tree can be stable and solid. It will not blow over.

Often in daily life we listen to something, see something or are in contact with something and right away are blown over because we don’t have roots. For example, our partner says something. He or she just says it out of habit energy without an intention to hurt us. But when we hear it, we receive it, right away we are blown over like a tree. We suffer throughout the day. “Why did he/she say that to me?”. And our mind keeps focused on what he/she said. We lose our root.

The practice of mindfulness helps us re-establish our root system. Where in our body can we take root? The Buddha said that there are four areas in which we can establish our mindfulness, our roots. Mindfulness can be established by being aware or mindful of these four areas.

**Our first root** is our body. We focus on being mindful, aware of our body, all the time. When we walk, we know we are walking; when we sit, we know we are sitting; when we are standing, we know we are standing. When we put on a robe, we know we are putting on a robe. When we walk forward, we know we are walking forward; when we walk backwards, we know we are walking backwards. Whatever our physical posture – standing, sitting, lying, moving – we are fully aware of that and focus on these aspects. It’s a training because when we focus that way, it can become our habit energy.

So, we take root in the body. When someone says something, instead of paying attention to it and being blown over, we continue to remember this practice of mindfulness of the body. We listen, yes, but the content of what we hear does not blow us over. We’re still aware of our body. That is the training. For example, right now I’m giving a Dharma talk, but I also practice being mindful of my body. I don’t let the content of my talk carry me away. I’m fully

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<sup>3</sup> Elder Monk in the International Plum Village Community of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh

aware of my body position, fully attentive to how I move my body and I continue to return to my body when I'm giving the talk. The talk is part of my existence, but another part of my existence is being aware of my body. And that is the first area for establishing mindfulness. It's so important because if we cannot take root in our body, then we don't know what is going on with our body.

Often there is disharmony between the body and the mind. The body is here, but the mind is somewhere else. Because of that, sometimes we don't know what is happening to our body, we don't know what is happening to our mind because we are split. And when there is disharmony in the body and the mind, there is disharmony in the community between the family and the environment and it extends out to disharmony in the whole world.

When our partner makes that remark which blows us over, what happens is that all the negative energy within us will grasp onto this expression by our partner and we create a virtual world, a reality that might not exist. All the memories we have of living with this partner come into reality right now. All the anger, the sadness from our parents comes into this moment, all the negative energy of our culture and history comes into this moment and we see a reality that is not as it is. There is a lot of exaggeration; we create a lot of illusions.

What our partner says might be as small as a peanut. But right away our mind grasps onto this peanut and it grows into a melon – within a few minutes – and we live in the reality of the melon, while the true reality is only a peanut. It happens like that. Yes, there's suffering, we should not deny it. But we should see the suffering as it is and not blow it into something much bigger. That is very important. Otherwise, things will get worse. The situation will become very bad. So, our partner says: "How come you are not kind to me today?", and then, after that one small sentence, we begin to retaliate: "How can you say that to me? I'm always kind to you. Remember when we were just married (could be 30 years ago)..." and then we bring in our kindness at the time of the wedding or later. "Ten years ago I did this, five years ago I did that..." You bring everything in to defend that you are kind to her/him. And you lose yourself. The Buddha called this confusion or delusion, or ignorance.

When we are not so mindful and lose ourself, we fall into this confusion. We create a reality based on something that's very small. The practice of mindfulness is to learn to see things as they are. When the suffering is as small as a peanut, then we say to ourself: "Oh, that suffering is just peanut suffering." We may feel pain or sorrow after our partner's remark, but we come back to our inbreath and outbreath; we feel our body, we feel the unpleasant sensation from what he or she said, and we embrace it with love. My partner has said: "How come you are not kind to me today?" I hear that, I recognize it and I embrace it with all my love and care, before I act, before I express myself. The practice is to return and to embrace what I feel right now. I do not do anything yet. I learn to take root. That is the practice of mindfulness. We learn to go back and embrace the body.

**The second root** is our feeling or sensation - the bioenergetic field in us. Feeling is the second root in which we learn to establish our mindfulness: "I'm fully aware of what I'm feeling; the sensation within me. And I embrace it with love." Do not be blown over by the

situation. Come back and take root. Recognize the suffering and stay stationary. In a previous talk, I gave the analogy of a fish that stays stationary in a lake. There lake ripples around it, but the fish is immovable. Other fish move constantly around the lake, following the ripples. But, like the fish “practitioner”, we remain stable and solid.

**The third root** in which we can establish our mindfulness is our emotions, or mental formations. We embrace with our love and care all the pain and the sorrow we’ve felt. We do not let our suffering spread, we learn to hold it with our love because the moment our suffering spreads out, it’s difficult to retract. It’s difficult to correct what has been damaged. For example, when our partner said: “How come you are unkind to me today?” we begin to explode, we begin to say negative things and the relationship is damaged. We cause a wound in the relationship that will be very difficult to fix later. In our normal daily relationships, we need to learn to embrace the fire within us - the fire of anger, depression, sadness, and fear – and not let this energy explode. That is very important. So, emotions or mental formations are the third root in which we need to establish our mindfulness.

**The fourth root** is our perception about life. Our perception is that there is this “me”, I am “separate” from the universe. And we always defend this “me”, this “I”, regarding this “I” as the most noble thing in the world, and ourself as the center of the whole universe. But this “I” is only a construction of our mind. Our existence depends on other people. We cannot exist by ourself. Coming back to the example of our partner who says: “How come you are unkind to me today?” We try to defend ourself; to represent ME, MYself as something noble. Perhaps our partner doesn’t mean to condemn us completely as a person. Language can be very misleading. He or she may just be expressing a small irritation, a small frustration. But we identify this with the totality of who we are. We see it as a comment that we are *totally* unkind and so we defend ourself.

Perceptions are such that, in any relationship, nobody is completely right; nobody is completely wrong. We see this in the wider world, too. In any conflict, each side has its own perspective. It is partially true to a degree, and partially false to a degree. If we act with our mind, our rational thinking, it becomes impossible to resolve differences equitably because there is no complete truth on either side. We are unable to find a way to co-exist. But if we approach the same problem differently – that is, with our heart – we are able to recognize that we each have needs for security, peace, and a way to make a living. We can come to a resolution. For sure it will not be a perfect resolution but at least we can co-exist.

Even at the level of families - in relationships with our partner, our parents, our son or daughter - we often find it hard to practice that way. We fall into the trap of using our mind, our rational thinking, to look for what is right and wrong. We use our logical mind to judge a situation. As a result, we see that not many couples can maintain their relationship for 30, 40 or 50 years. Perhaps they love each other very much at the beginning and want to share their lives. But after five, 10 or 15 years, their relationship is broken. They cannot go further because they can only look at the other person with their mind. When we come back to the heart, embracing the heart, we begin to develop this energy of mindfulness.

The energy of mindfulness gives rise to the energy of compassion. Only with compassion can we live together and accept each other. With our mind it's very difficult to accept each other, but with our heart it's much easier. So, when we take root in the four aspects of our existence – body, feelings, emotions, and perceptions – we calm down the violence within; the fire within us. It's a holy, healing energy. There is so much pain within our body. There's so much pain within our feelings. There's so much pain in our emotions and perceptions. When we come back and embrace it all with our love and care, the energy of compassion begins to heal us. That is the only way that we can live with another person. Without that energy, the other person is always doing things we cannot accept with our rational mind.

So, learn to cultivate the energy of mindfulness. Take root in the four aspects of our existence that make up our being. It should be a training. Each of us has the potential to live a life of mindfulness. Each has the potential to develop compassion and a life of mindfulness. The Buddha assured us of that. He called this potential the "Buddha nature". It's the potential within us that can give rise to the energy of compassion. But we need to develop this potential. We need to practice in order for us to be able to live together peacefully.

I've seen many couples going through deep suffering who still live unhappily with each other. We don't have to live that kind of life. We can live together peacefully, harmoniously, accepting each other and supporting each other to grow and develop. It's possible to do that. I've seen couples whose relationship is broken because one partner does not practice cultivating this energy of mindfulness, of compassion within him or her. That person causes a lot of pain in the relationship. Each of us is responsible for ourself and for the other. Each of us has to be responsible for our own part. In any conflict, it's not only one side that errs. Mistakes are always made by *both* sides. Conflict arises because of confusion, delusion, ignorance on both sides. It's never only on one side.

If we come back to ourself, learn to take good care of ourself, embrace ourself with love, embrace the wound within ourself so that this rationality can calm down, then we'll be able to see many things. That's why it's called *mindfulness*. "Full" means the mind is not fragmented. We have a fuller perspective, view about things. So, come back to ourself, embrace ourself deeply with love and compassion. From conflicts within families to conflict between peoples and countries, humans need to learn our lesson and stop all destructive or violent acts. We need to calm ourself and embrace our pain, our sorrow, with deep love. From this deep love and healing for ourself, we can help others to heal.

We are all suffering today with the Palestinians and Israelis. They need support from the international community and from each of us. As humans, we are all responsible for war, wherever it breaks out. We have the duty and responsibility to cultivate compassion in our hearts, deep compassion. We can begin by resolving conflicts in ourselves, in our families, in our relationships with friends, in our societies and in our countries. We have a duty, and responsibility to do that. For our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren to have a future, it's very important that we all practice.

The world seems to be getting into more and more difficulty, with an ongoing war in one region and now, renewed conflict in the Middle East. This collective manifestation of human consciousness is a signal that we all need to return to ourself and ask: “Do we have peace in our family?”; “Do we have peace in our relationships with our parents, our son, our daughter, our partner, our society?” Without peace in all these relationships, this difficult energy will one day spill into the collective consciousness and manifest here or there.

The way out is not by talking or by reasoning but by the practice of mindfulness to cultivate the energy of compassion within so we each can help the overall situation. We all have a responsibility and duty to practice. It is so urgent. We need to return to the fundamentals of who we are and take root in the four aspects of our existence. From a Buddhist perspective, I believe that is the *only* way out.

# **A Guided Meditation to Cultivate Stability and Radiate Compassion**

*(Extended)*

**Offered by Bhikshu Thích Chân Pháp Ấn<sup>4</sup>**

**At a Retreat for “Cultivating Compassion in a Time of War”**

**Tyrol, Austria, 12 October 2023**

Gently coming back to my body and my mind, I enjoy my inbreath and my outbreath.

Gently coming back to my breathing, recognizing this is my inbreath, I breathe in.

Recognizing this is my outbreath, I breathe out.

It is so wonderful to return to my breathing, and to enjoy my breathing.

It is so wonderful to breathe in, it is so wonderful to breathe out.

Allowing my inbreath to become deeper, I breathe in.

Allowing my outbreath to become slower, I breathe out.

Deeper inbreath; slower outbreath.

Gently shifting my attention to my lower abdomen, allowing the energy in my body to sink down to my lower abdomen, I breathe in.

Allowing my outbreath to relax my whole body, I breathe out.

Sinking the energy, relaxing the body.

Sinking the energy down deeper, relaxing the body deeper.

Visualizing thousands of roots extending down from my body into the Earth

Deeply connected to the Earth, I breathe in.

I am very stable and solid, I breathe out.

I am connected deeply into the Earth. I am very stable and solid.

Allowing the energy to sink deeper into the Earth, feeling even more stable, more solid.

Deeper roots into the Earth, more stability, more solidity.

With this solidity and peacefulness, I invite all who are suffering in war zones to sit with us.

I invite all Israelis and the Palestinians to sit with us now, in stability and solidity.

Allowing ourselves to take root deeply into the Earth, so that all that anger, hatred, sadness, depression, hopelessness cannot not move us.

I am deeply connected to the Earth and invite all Palestinian and Israeli friends to sit with us, now, in stability and solidity.

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<sup>4</sup> Elder Monk in the International Plum Village Community of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh



With solidity, we do not let this war blow us away, nor turn us into its victims.

Man is not our true enemy. Our true enemy is the hatred within us; the violence, the ignorance within us.

I am deeply connected to the Earth. I am very stable and solid.

I now invite friends from Ukraine, Russia, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and all troubled places on Earth to sit with us.

I invite friends from places impacted by earthquakes, floods, and other disasters to sit with us.

We shall sit together solidly and stably, our roots connected deeply into the Earth, so that these difficulties cannot blow us away or make us victims.

I am solid as a mountain, free from all hatred, free from all violence.

I allow the energy of compassion flow out from my heart to embrace myself and all who are experiencing trauma, violence, and death.

May the energy of compassion embrace all of us on Earth to help us heal and transform our difficulties.

May the great energy of compassion help to cool down the hatred, the anger, the violence, so that all friends in war zones can be protected.

The Buddha taught: "Hatred cannot respond to hatred; only love and compassion can respond to hatred. This is the eternal truth, the eternal law."

It is always possible to live together. In God's house there are many mansions.

It is always possible to sit down and discuss reconciliation, so that a solution can be found.

May everyone on Earth open their heart, so that everyone can see the light, the light of God, the light of goodness, of beauty and truth.

This is a meditation for our practice during this difficult time on Earth. We continue to cultivate our solidity and our stability, so that we can offer support right now to all who suffer from conflict between humans and with nature.

The only way out is our peace, our solidity, our stability.

With this energy, we can offer help. We support our friends who are suffering, we embrace them with all the compassion in our hearts.

We will now gently come out of our meditation.

Coming back to feel my physical body, I breathe in.

Relaxing my physical body, I breathe out.

Feeling the physical body, relaxing the physical body.

Aware of my inbreath, I breathe in.

Aware of my outbreath, I breathe out. In, out.

## An Open Letter Calling for Peace

02 April 2022

*Dear Human Family,*

Watching the tragedy of war continue to unfold daily in Ukraine, we open our hearts to the suffering of people young and old. As an international community of Engaged Buddhism in the Plum Village tradition, we observe the war with pain and alarm.

In our Buddhist community, every Christmas we listen with great joy to the sound of Russian church bells, and we open our hearts to the rich spiritual heritage of Russia and Europe. Our teacher, the venerable Vietnamese monk Thích Nhất Hạnh, has said that “A bell is always a bell; whether it’s Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, or Buddhist, it is still a bell.” Listening to the bell, no matter what our cultural or religious roots are, we can have a deep encounter where we touch peace and a shared spiritual dimension. We all yearn for peace. We all need peace.

Our community’s own roots lie in the tradition of Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam, where more than three million people died in a war that lasted nearly 20 years and some two million fled as refugees. We know from our teacher that war is never a solution. It leads only to division and hatred that can last for generations.

Our teacher worked tirelessly for peace in Vietnam by never choosing sides. Instead, he appealed to adversaries to look deeply into each other’s pain, anxiety, and existential fear, and to consider the war’s horrific toll on all victims. Forced into exile, he became a spiritual leader of a global movement for peace, reconciliation, and disarmament.

We believe our teacher’s universal message of peace can offer hope at this pivotal time for Ukraine, Russia, and humanity. History shows us that war can be transformed into peace; survivors can heal despite their wounds. In the name of our teacher, Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh, and his great love, compassion, and wisdom, we his students call for an immediate ceasefire, to end the bloodshed in Ukraine. We send our love and support to negotiators on both sides. May they listen deeply to each other and create the conditions for peace.

The Buddha tells us that our true enemy is not to be found in others but in our own fear, anxiety, and sorrow, our anger, greed, ignorance, and hatred. War is made possible by dualistic and discriminative thinking, and by the idea that only by eliminating our so-called

enemy can we have peace and security. But as the Buddha said, hatred cannot resolve hatred. Only understanding and love can transform hatred.

As our teacher has said, when there is peace in ourselves, there will be peace in the world. If we succeed in achieving an end to the war in Ukraine and a lasting peace, the whole world will benefit, for as a human family we are interconnected and interdependent. We pray, too, that precious global resources can be redirected from war to where they are most needed, namely, to tackle disease, poverty, hunger and malnutrition, human trafficking – including exploitation of vulnerable children – environmental stress, and climate change.

Our world needs a culture of peace. Our human family needs to accelerate to a higher stage of evolution; to a “cosmic” spirituality and ethic that can unite all peoples and nations, removing separation and discrimination. In this spirit, as a community of Engaged Buddhism, we renewed our commitment on New Year’s Eve 2021 to practice mindfulness for peace on earth. Below, we share with our love this solemn vow.

The work of peace is the work of great and noble beings. As a human family, for the sake of the Ukrainian people, the people of Russia, and soldiers on both sides, our most urgent task is to invest all our energy and skills in exploring every viable option for peace at this time of great danger for humanity.

All our ancestors and descendants are counting on us.

*With love and trust,*



*Bhikshu Thích Chân Pháp Ấn*  
Elder Monk



*Seal of Plum Village*



*Bhikshuni Thích Nữ Chân Không*  
Elder Nun

## **Cultivating a Culture of Peace**

*Our Community's Commitment and Prayer on New Year's Eve 2021*

***Dear Beloved Ancestors, Dear Beloved Mother Earth,***

Over the past two years, uncertainty, anxiety, and loss arising from the COVID-19 pandemic have raised levels of fear, anger, and violence in our human family. Contemplating the possibility for such suffering and violence to continue, and to proliferate on an even larger scale, we commit anew to cultivating peace in ourselves and in the world. Following the spirit of the Buddha's insight into the Noble Truth of suffering, we aspire to practice the following mindfulness training for peace on Earth.

### **A Mindfulness Training for Peace on Earth**

Aware of the suffering caused by the potential for our human family to destroy itself and - through unmindful or reckless actions - extinguish all life on Earth, we are determined to nurture a culture of honouring the sacred web of life that sustains us. This we shall do by committing collectively to practicing mindfulness and leading lives of non-violence and peace, based on our insight into the interconnectedness, interdependency and interbeing of all forms of life on Earth.

We shall practice collectively (as well as individually) in ways that stop all acts and behaviours contributing to the destruction of our human family, other species from the animal and plant kingdoms, and our planet. These destructive actions include the development and production of arms such as nuclear and biochemical weapons, and advanced technologies for waging war in cyberspace and space. The destructive actions we seek to end also include the misuse of social media and other media to manipulate human minds and emotions in ways that generate confusion, mistrust, anger, hatred, and violence within our human family, and cruelty to other species from the animal and plant kingdoms.

We shall channel humanity's collective energy, material wealth and spiritual resources towards positive, wholesome actions that help people learn about, understand, and trust each other; that nourish our existence as one human family among many species, and that protect our sacred Mother Earth.

With openness and humility, we shall learn to embrace each other culturally, politically, socially, and equitably. We shall respect diversity of ethnicity, gender, age, and religious or other beliefs so we may build and nurture on Earth a human family that is at peace with itself, with all living beings and with the planet.