



Hidden Mountain Record

2026 | No. 3

GARDEN

HIDDEN MOUNTAIN RECORD

The Annual Deer Park Monastery Newsletter

ISSUE 3 – 2026

Clouds pour across blue.

The lush mountain

rises to catch

the sun as it rises

and we turn to meet it:

Earth's ancient turning

the moon in its orbit,

the tide rising—

the Dharma wheel turns,

and joy is here.

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Review of the Year 2025

Following the Pravāraṇā Ceremony on January 12, marking the end of the 2024 Rains Retreat, on Saturday, January 18, we held a ceremony and blessing to honor the completion of the new monks' residence in Solidity Hamlet and express our deep gratitude to everyone who made it possible. The event included a blessing of the land and a prayer by Diane Little Eagle, who traveled from Alaska to offer her indigenous wisdom and prayers.

The next day, on January 19, the community gathered to honor the third anniversary of Thầy's passing with deep gratitude for the healthy, happy sangha that is his living legacy. Brother Pháp Dung gave a Dharma talk called "Be the Good News" in the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall, which was attended by friends in person and via a YouTube livestream.

"One day, Thầy shared with us that he practices to see every one of us, his students, as someone new that he doesn't know. I tried to do that; it's very hard... It's so hard to unlearn [our habits of knowing]."

From January 28–31, the monastery joyfully celebrated the Lunar New Year (Tết) with traditional festivities such as Kieu Oracle readings and room visits to the newly constructed monks' residence in Solidity Hamlet.

In February, eight monks and nuns from Deer Park Monastery and Plum Village, France—Brothers Pháp Dung, Minh An, Minh Lượng, and Minh Nhân, and Sisters Túc Nghiêm, Bội Nghiêm, Phú Nghiêm, and Trai Nghiêm—embarked on a pilgrimage and tour of the land of the Buddha in India. They participated in a two-week pilgrimage led by Plum Village Dharmacharya Shantum Seth and his team at BuddhaPath and led Days of Mindfulness and retreats in Delhi and Dehradun, organized by Ahimsa Trust, Plum Village's representative in India.

Meanwhile, at Deer Park, we joyfully broke ground on the Happy Farm, continuing the sustainable farming tradition first cultivated in Plum Village, France. This living practice expresses our aspiration to live in harmony with Mother Earth, nurture mindful agriculture, and weave practice into each act of tending the land. The farm opened to community volunteers during the inaugural "Nourish the Soil" event on March 8—attended by sixty friends—and went on to yield an abundant harvest of a thousand pounds of zucchini, along with many other vegetables.

From March 21–28, the Most Venerable Thích Phước Tịnh and Brothers Pháp Hoi and Pháp Dung traveled with Sister Abbess to Plum Village to support three novice brothers—Brothers Minh Định, Brother Nhất Hưởng, and Brother Nhất Ấn—to

receive full ordination as bhikṣus in the Still Water Great Precepts Transmission Ceremony. The Plum Village website states: “In the pure and majestic Ordination Ground, the precept aspirants respectfully presented themselves before the Triple Gem to receive the precepts from the Venerable Masters. From this sacred moment, the young brothers and sisters officially became sons and daughters of the Buddha. Receiving the alms bowl and donning the Buddha’s robe is one of the greatest honors in the life of a monastic. The Venerable Elders elevated the precept aspirants to a noble position: becoming bhikṣus (Khất sĩ nam) and bhikṣuṇīs (Khất sĩ nữ), officially joining the Buddha’s Sangha.” During this Great Ordination, the sangha joyfully welcomed

nineteen bhikṣus and twenty-one bhikṣuṇīs in total from our centers around the world.

Following this ceremony in Plum Village, the sangha joyfully welcomed sixty-four new Dharma teachers, both monastic and lay, including a number of our local lay Dharma teachers such as Judy Nakatomi, Peter Kuhn, Brad Wiscons, and Meena Srinivasan.

On March 25, monastics and lay practitioners participated in the Thích Nhất Hạnh (TNH) Center for Mindfulness in Public Health Symposium at Harvard University, helping to bridge mindfulness and modern research.

From April 1–7, monastics from across the US visited Dartmouth College for a transformative gathering of mindfulness practitioners, students, scientists, and



curious newcomers for Zen and the Art of Mindful Living: Mindful Week at Dartmouth for the third year in a row. The TNH Center for Mindfulness in Public Health at Harvard co-sponsored The Buddha The Scientist 2025 Retreat and Symposium there. The TNH Center’s website reported: “Buddhist monastic Dharma teachers from the Plum Village tradition, who recently attended the Center’s symposium, traveled to Dartmouth to take part in this gathering. Their mission for this trip was to bring Thầy’s vision to life by sharing practical ways to integrate mindfulness into daily life to support well-being and foster collective solutions. Participants included students, trainees, faculty, staff, and lay practitioners. Participants from the [Harvard School of Public Health’s] Department of Nutrition included: Dr.

Frank Hu, Dr. Stephanie Smith-Warner, Nour Hammad, and Dawn DeCosta.

On April 5–6, a mindfulness retreat was held, led by monastics from Plum Village. The event concluded with a keynote address by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. On April 7, there was a full day of science talks and a trainee panel discussion. Talks included: Sara Lazar, PhD, Mass General Hospital; Harvard Medical School; Steven Leach, MD, Dartmouth Cancer Center; Eric Loucks, PhD, Mindfulness Center, Brown University; Jorg Matschullat, PhD, Irving Institute, Dartmouth College; Zaneta Thayer, PhD, Dartmouth College; and Elli Weisbaum, PhD, University of Toronto.

On April 11, New York City officially co-named West 109th Street “Thích Nhất Hạnh Way” at the intersection of Broadway,



where Thầy lived during his time at Columbia University in the 1960s. Forty monastics from Deer Park and Blue Cliff attended the co-naming ceremony, presided over by City Council Member Shraun Abreu, who represents Manhattan's 7th District. The ceremony was then followed by a walking meditation along Riverside Park attended by more than three hundred people arriving at Burke Library of Union Theological Seminary (UTS) and an exhibition of Thầy's biography, calligraphy, and books. Su Yon Pak, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of UTS, introduced the afternoon session of talks, stating, "We celebrate the legacy of our teacher, Thích Nhất Hạnh, a spiritual luminary whose teachings on peace, presence, engagement, and interbeing continue to guide and transform lives around the world... A newly dedicated street which bears his name will serve as a daily reminder for all who pass by to breathe, to walk mindfully, and to live in awareness of the present moment. Thầy taught us that peace begins within and radiates outward. With every step taken with mindfulness, he showed us how to transform ordinary ground into sacred earth."

This historic moment was then followed by the first of many "Hiking Zen" events (see details below). On April 13, two hundred people joined a mindful walk through the forests of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, followed by mindful movements and a mindful picnic.

Also in April, Deer Park launched its newly redesigned website—a seven-month labor of love that now serves as an online monastery and bookshop, inviting friends around the world to join our community through courses, teachings, and mindfulness practices inspired by Thầy. Later that month,

from April 27 to May 3, practitioners aged eighteen to thirty-five came together for our annual Wake Up Retreat.

On May 11, the sangha celebrated Vesak, honoring the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing. Soon after, from May 16–20, the Mindfulness As A Foundation For Health: Buddha the Scientist Retreat & Symposium took place at the University of British Columbia as part of the Plum Village Canada Tour. The hybrid symposium on May 20 was also livestreamed, extending its reach to thousands of practitioners worldwide. Around this time, authors Brother Pháp Lưu and Brother Pháp Xá announced the release of *Hiking Zen: Train Your Mind in Nature*, kicking off a series of book signings and mindful walking events that would take place over the next five months across Vancouver, Seattle, New York, and San Diego.

At the end of May, many of the original Wake Uppers who started the Wake Up Sangha seventeen years ago stayed at Deer Park for a joyful and heart-opening reunion to nourish our togetherness and plan the "Action Wake Up" program.

Through May and early June, Sister Đăng Nghiêm, Brother Mãn Tuệ, Sister Tĩnh Nghiêm, and Sister Trăng Hải Chiếu traveled to Seattle, the Bay Area, Texas, and Florida to host retreats and activities for young Vietnamese-Americans on the Viet Wake Up Tour.

From June 6–8, a transformational gathering unfolded in the heart of Mexico City led by Brother Pháp Lưu, Brother Minh An, and Brother Minh Nhân. The retreat—titled Raíces Profundas, Corazones Sin Miedo (Deep Roots, Fearless Hearts)—welcomed over eighty mindfulness practitioners for a weekend

of meditation, healing, and community connection.

Back at home, the monastics hosted our Vietnamese Buddhist friends for a special Vietnamese Day of Mindfulness, honoring the roots of our lineage and twenty-five years of Deer Park. The celebration included walking meditation up Yên Tử Mountain, total relaxation, and tea meditation in the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall.

During this year's annual Family Retreat (June 17–21), which again was oversubscribed, we announced the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing, a primary school opening in Fall 2026 that is dedicated to advancing Thầy's vision of nurturing kind, wise, and compassionate human beings. Rooted in Buddhist principles and applied ethics, the school will offer a holistic approach to education for children that integrates mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and ethical living.

The announcement and development of the new school opened the way for devoted friends to bring this vision to life by moving to Deer Park and establishing a new lay hamlet. We joyfully welcomed three new families who now reside just outside the monastery gates near the school, in what we call "Simplicity Hamlet"—kindred spirits committed to living peacefully and embodying Thầy's vision of a beloved, mindful community.

In July, Teen Camp (July 8–12) invited youth lay practitioners ages thirteen to eighteen to "Breathe and Shine" through five days of mindfulness, presence, and joyful connection in nature. With the skillful leadership of the monastics, more than twenty staff—including former teen campers themselves!—guided the teens in a practice

of letting go of their devices and tuning into themselves and those around them. Teen Camp this year was universally lauded as one of the most successful and joyful yet.

From July 20 to 25, Sister Đăng Nghiêm, Sister Thế Nghiêm, Brother Pháp Lưu, Brother Năm Sắc, Sister Thanh Nghiêm, Sister Trang Co Tich, and Sister Trang Mai Trang traveled to Rhinebeck, New York for the Riding the Waves of Life Retreat at the Omega Institute.

In August, the monastery was practically transformed into a little village during the *Tiếp Nhận Gia Tài* Vietnamese Retreat (August 6–10), a heartfelt gathering of deep connection and joy. Later in the month, the community partnered with sanghas in Los Angeles to offer an LA Day of Mindfulness (August 16) to nourish the sangha during a challenging time after the Palisades Fire. During this period, many sangha members were actively engaged in resistance networks to the illegal deportation of their neighbors, friends, and colleagues.

By early August, thanks to the incredible generosity of our community, we raised enough funds to complete the much-needed road repairs at Deer Park. The newly restored roads are now significantly smoother, safer, and more accessible for all who come to practice, visit, and volunteer.

As autumn approached, Deer Park hosted a visioning session with Executive Coach Heidi Connal on September 6 to explore the future of the Deer Park online experience. This was the third time over the past decade that Heidi has generously donated her time to help us deepen our efforts to nourish our online sanghas.

In preparation for the sixtieth anniversary of the Order of Interbeing next year, we

invited Plum Village practitioners around the world to host local “fire-building sessions” to shape our collective future. These dialogues will be used to gather valuable information and feedback from our global sangha to inform the upcoming Order of Interbeing Council, the first in three decades (to be held at Plum Village).

The Monastic Retreat took place from September 12–19, followed by Sun Day on the autumn equinox, September 21—a special Day of Mindfulness honoring the sun as a source of life and energy, while deepening the sangha’s commitment to solar power and mindful action for the planet.

From September 21 to October 16, Sister Hương Nghiêm, Brother Pháp Lưu, Brother Đức Trí, Brother Minh Nhân, Sister Mai Viên and Brother Niệm Thuần from Plum Village, France and Deer Park, along with lay Dharma teacher Denise Kato from São Paulo, Brazil traveled to Bogotá, Colombia for public talks to lead a three-day mindfulness retreat and host a six-day The Buddha the Scientist Symposium and Retreat—the first one conducted entirely in Spanish!

Back home, the Rising Tide Cohort of the Who is Thích Nhất Hạnh? online course began on October 11, guiding over 350 practitioners through Thầy’s life and teachings for the second year in a row.

On October 19, three aspirants of Deer Park Monastery were ordained as novice monastics of the “Juniper Family Tree” in a deeply moving ceremony in the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall. Supported by hundreds of monastics, family, friends, and lay practitioners, the aspirants took vows to transform their afflictions and bring

happiness to all beings. We welcome Brothers Nhất Xả, Nhất Chúng, and Nhất Uyển!

In mid-October, Parallax Press released *Reincarnation*, the first book in the new Zen Doors series, which distills and illuminates some of Buddhism’s most well-known yet often misunderstood teachings. Featuring fresh commentaries from the next generation of Zen teachers trained by Thích Nhất Hạnh, the series opens a doorway for bringing his timeless wisdom into daily life—with more volumes yet to come.

The 90-Day Rains Retreat began on October 26, which included a weekly Buddhist psychology course on Wednesday evenings taught by Brother Pháp Lưu. In November, the community honored our blood ancestors during the Day of the Dead Celebration (November 2) and gathered again for a Thanksgiving Day of Gratitude (November 27) to honor the land ancestors. On November 16, we hosted a special day of mindfulness for families interested in sending their kids to the new TNH School of Interbeing.

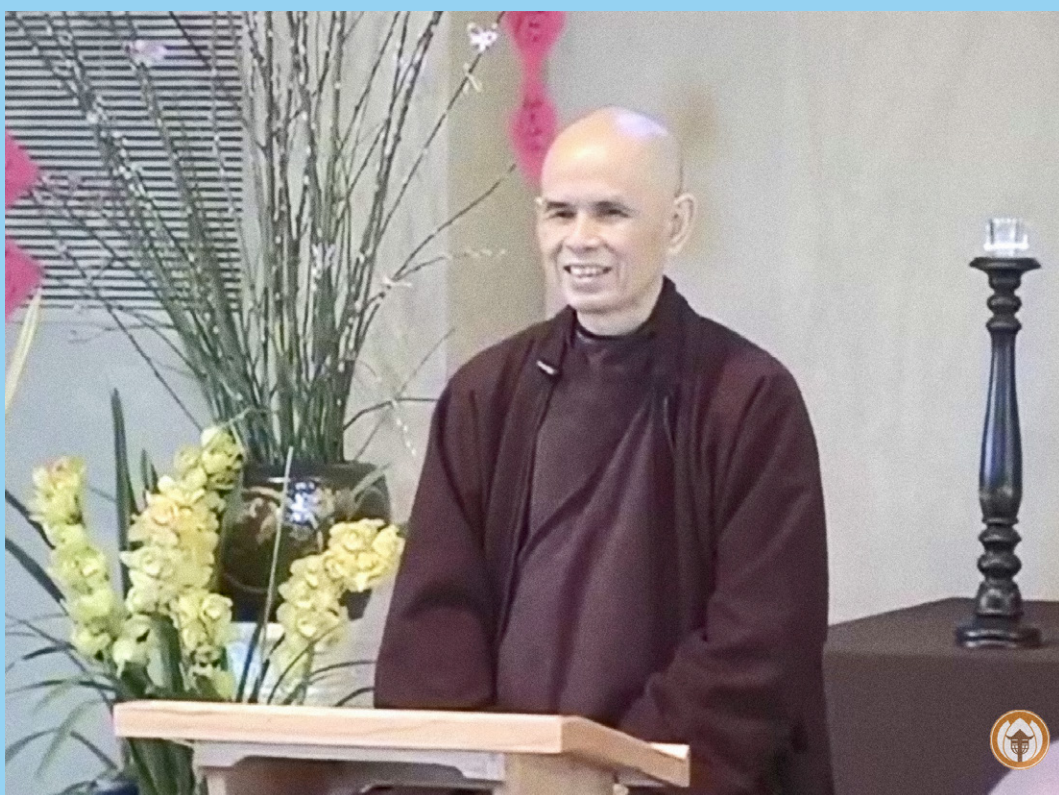
From December 12–19, the core team behind the new Action Wake Up program (which invites lay practitioners ages eighteen to thirty-five to commit to a fifteen-month practice period) met in person at Deer Park. The month concluded with a warm Christmas Eve Celebration (December 24) and a joyful New Year’s Eve Celebration (December 31).





Coming Back to Our True Home in the East and the West

THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH



At Deer Park in 2004, Thầy gave talks to the monastics comparing the Rule of St. Benedict to the Buddhist Vinaya, in an effort to understand how monastic culture can become deeply rooted in America and the West in general. There was an unforgettable moment in the middle of Thầy's monastic talk on March 2nd when a heavy storm rained down hail the size of golf balls. Thầy said, "The rain is so captivating. Why not go out and play? Stand up and go out to play." When the monastics returned to the meditation hall, Thầy continued his talk:

According to tradition, whenever a wonderful Dharma talk is given, heavenly maidens scatter all white flowers that rain down from the heavens.

There is a Korean woman whom Thầy knows very well, a professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York, right next to Columbia University. She is a Christian theology professor, but in her childhood, her mother used to take her to the Buddhist temple. So, even though she is a professor of Christian theology, she still feels at ease and comfortable whenever she returns to the temple—more comfortable than when she is in church.

During Thầy's trip to Korea in 1995, that professor, Professor Chung Hyun Kyung, accompanied Thầy and interpreted for Thầy very beautifully. Her knowledge of the Buddha's teachings is quite solid, and when she gives lectures, she quotes Thầy very often.

Though we are within the Buddhist tradition, living in a monastery, we are still searching. What we are searching for may be right in front of us, but we cannot grasp it, so we keep going around and around. We look for it in Zen, we look for it in Pure Land, we look for it in Vajrayana, we look for it in Theravada. We are already in the Buddha's path, yet we are still searching for the Buddha.

Thầy would like to remind you once again: very often, what we are searching for is already right here in our own pocket, already resting in the palm of our hand. Yet we keep wandering and looking for it elsewhere.

It is the same in Christianity. We may be living in a monastery or a convent, and still we are searching. There are priests and nuns who go out from their parish or convent seeking to learn meditation. Though we are trying to connect, to find a way to live together more comfortably, to have more conveniences in terms of culture, we are still searching.

To put it simply, in our lives we are not searching for conveniences; we are searching for our *true home*, our *true place of belonging*. So even as this [cultural] exchange [between East and West] is taking place, we are still searching. Vietnamese people, those of Asian descent, are still searching, and people from the West, from Europe, from America, are also still searching. We are searching for something much deeper than the ordinary comforts of daily life, the cultural conveniences. We are searching for our true home.

If we have Dharma doors that are truly effective, help us dwell peacefully, help us to arrive and be home, then we can transform our sangha, our community, into a Dharma

instrument. Because in that community, everyone has found their true home, everyone has already arrived, already come home.

In the end, we have found it: there is no need to run anywhere anymore. No need to chase after Theravada, no need to chase after Zen, no need to chase after Pure Land, *no need to run after anything at all*. Because what we are searching for is right here, clearly before our eyes; our true home is found *within our own being*. And this is the ideal image of a community that has arrived, has touched peace, happiness, dwelling in the present moment, has truly arrived, truly at home. And we see that everything in a community like that is embraced in the spirit of interbeing.

To arrive at this is a great success. Why? Because, thanks to this, we are able to go out into the world. Who are we doing this for? It is not just for ourselves, but for our homeland, our country, our people, and all of humanity.

When we have become a sangha—a community of practice—with mindfulness, with realization, with happiness, with brotherhood—when we have arrived, when we have truly come home—we are able to establish connection and communication within ourselves and with one another. Connection and communication are very important. There are some among us who cannot establish a connection with ourselves, who cannot embrace or accept ourselves. And when we cannot embrace and accept ourselves, we also cannot embrace and accept our ancestors within us. We have not truly come home, have not truly arrived, have not truly touched our roots, our ancestors. Before we can have a good connection and good

communication with another person, we must first come back and establish communication with ourselves and accept ourselves. There must be harmony, understanding, and compassion toward ourselves.

When we have that, establishing a connection with other sangha members becomes easy. Because of this, we become a community, a Dharma instrument, capable of accomplishing two things. On the one hand, we can go in this direction [toward the West]. On the other hand, we can go in that direction [toward the East]. Whichever way we go, we are able to walk that path.

For example, not only those with Western roots can go into Western society to share and to help transform [the suffering there]; those with Asian roots can also go to the West to share and to help transform [it]. When we have established communication with ourselves, and with our sangha, we can establish communication with people in society.

Communication in society is very lacking, and as a result people cannot find their true home. They come into conflict with others, even with their own spouse, their children, or their family. So, when we have become a sangha that is harmonious, happy, peaceful, rooted, and established in its true home, then we have the capacity to go out into society. Not only can the brothers and sisters of European or American origin enter Western society to offer the practice and help transform suffering, but our brothers and sisters of Asian origin can also go into the Western world to do the same work.

We have been learning [in this three-month Rains Retreat] to connect and to exchange. We are moving forward on two



fronts. On one side, we are exchanging and learning from each other culturally; on the other, we are searching for our roots, for our true origin. Because this has been successful, we are able to do this work. If you are a Westerner, if you are able to come home to yourself, arrive in the present moment, communicate with yourself, with your family, and with your society, then as a Westerner, you can also go to the East. You can go to Vietnam, to China, to teach, to help, to untangle the knots of suffering in life. So we can go in both directions.

When we are able to practice successfully—to come home, to arrive, to establish communication—then we can help our fellow Vietnamese people a great deal. At the same time, our elder brothers and sisters, and younger siblings of Western origin, can walk alongside us and enter Vietnamese society. They can go right into the temples, not only out into society, because even in our temples, people are still searching, still looking. Even after living in the temple for twenty or thirty years, some have still not

come home, have still not arrived. They are still searching.

So, our success within the sangha is fundamental. It is crucial and basic. Without this foundation, our aspiration to help others, to bring benefit to the world, can never truly be realized. That is why coming home, arriving, and touching our own roots is so important. We can do this right in the small circle of our own sangha. Every moment—setting the table, cooking a meal, speaking with one another, or working together—each is an opportunity for us to practice returning to our roots, to what we call our true home. That is why the seal of Plum Village is “I have arrived, I am home.”

This is an excerpt from a Dharma talk Thích Nhất Hạnh gave in Vietnamese on March 2, 2004 at Deer Park Monastery. The English transcript from the Plum Village Living Gems project has been lightly edited for clarity.

Living Peacefully in the Age of Technology



Dear brothers and sisters, dear sangha,

Today is another day to come back to ourselves. This is a new day. Some of you have come from afar, some just arrived, some registered a week ago, and some of us still haven't really arrived.

Today's topic is *coming back home*—coming back to ourselves in a society full of obstacles and distractions. We are touched by so many things out there, and sometimes we don't have a chance to rest.

Do you ever take a moment to stop, to question yourself, or to listen when you hear the words “come back” or “return”? What image comes to mind? I invite you to come back to your silence, to your heartbeat. When you hear “coming home,” what do you see? Is there a person waiting for you, or a place inside that feels like refuge?

We tend to run after many things. We look outside ourselves. This is something we should all reflect on every day—because society constantly pulls us outward. There's Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok—all these things that occupy our minds and time. They pollute our inner space.

So, is there a place we can return to? Coming back means returning to ourselves, being mindful of what's happening in the present moment.

Sometimes life pulls us in so many directions we don't even have time to take care of our feelings or transform them. Loneliness, despair, sadness arise, and before we can tend to them, we're swept away by the next thing.

I remember when I was young, a phone was fixed in the house—a rotary phone. Having one meant you were rich. It was just for communication. But now, the phone we carry with us doesn't always bring us closer together. Sometimes it makes us more distant.

Think about when we used to sit together at the table with family or friends—were we truly present for each other? Now everyone has a phone in their hand. The phone was once a tool for connection, but now it can make us feel apart.

Of course, technology has many benefits—it's convenient and gives us access to knowledge. Whatever we want to learn, we can just ask Google or ChatGPT. If you ask, “What should I do when I'm upset?” it might tell you: “Breathe deeply, go for a walk, or practice meditation.” And we might say, “Yes, that's true!” But reading advice isn't enough—we have to *practice* it.

In Plum Village and Deer Park, when you're upset, you walk, you breathe, you sit. These are living practices—not just information. Technology can be helpful, but if we forget mindfulness, technology can start living our life for us. We lose touch with the beauty of the present moment.

We consume so much—news, videos, comments, criticism. The internet pulls us into reactions and opinions, and we get lost. It affects how we talk to our

family, how we listen, and how we see each other. Even when we sit together, our minds may be somewhere else.

I used to do things very fast—always multitasking, opening one browser tab after another. I thought that made me productive. But one day, a sister said, “You do everything so fast. I can’t keep up.” My first reaction was, “Well, I finish quickly so I can do more!” But later, I reflected and realized—yes, I might finish faster, but for what? When I go too fast, I end up going alone.

If I slow down, I can walk with others. I can listen, smile, and feel the freshness of being together. Working as a community teaches me that slowing down is not wasting time; it’s deepening presence and understanding.

In our fast-paced world, we often lose genuine communication. Do we truly connect with our loved ones? Do we ask, “How are you feeling today?” and really listen? Many young people now feel lonely, anxious, or depressed. They can’t sleep, and they feel despair. Why? Because they’ve lost that inner space—the home within.

Like a phone battery that needs charging, we also need to recharge—to come back to our mind, body, and heart, and reflect on what we’ve consumed during the day. Is it nourishing, or is it polluting?

In the monastery, we love to drink tea together. When I first joined, I didn’t think much about it, but now I see the beauty in it. Preparing tea slowly—rinsing the leaves, letting them sit and “meditate,” then pouring the tea with mindfulness—brings peace.

But even while holding a cup of tea, our phone may ring. Messages, emails, sales notifications—they pull our attention. One hand holds the tea, the other holds the phone. Which will you choose?

Many of us end up choosing the phone—replying, scrolling, buying—and the tea grows cold. We lose the moment.

So I invite you: next time you drink tea or water, just be with it. Taste it fully. Even plain water can be sweet when you’re truly present.

Suffering or peace—it’s a choice. We can choose which one to practice.

BY SISTER THÊ NGHIÊM

This is an excerpt from a Dharma talk given by Sister Thê Nghiêm in the Ocean of Peace Mediation Hall on Aug 31, 2025 at Deer Park Monastery. It has been edited for clarity. You can find the full Dharma talk on the Deer Park Monastery YouTube channel.



LILAC SEASON

I invite you home to Deer Park, a land of poetry.
The broad hills patiently await you.
Spring arrives, lilacs overflowing in collective bloom,
Purple fills earth and sky—purple fills our dreams.
We walk together in joy on the path of the Sangha,
As the lilacs show their deep color along the hillsides.
The Pure Land is already here—what more is there to seek?
With each step we arrive, our hearts at ease.
Sunlight calls in the early morning, gathering us to return.
Lilacs burst forth, bright, filling the path.
The fragrance of the Way blends with our gentle footsteps;
Abiding here, we close the road of delusion.
I invite you to come here, poetic Deer Park,
The wide, open hills still welcome you.
Nourishing love with the breath,
We rediscover our kinship. We renew beautiful dreams.

BY SISTER HUỆ TRI

Some Hope and Faith for These Times



Dear respected teachers,
Dear noble community,

Today is July 6th, just after the Fourth of July. We're in the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall on our Sunday Day of Mindfulness. In two days, we'll welcome hundreds of teenagers to the monastery. There was some debate about whether to hold today's session since there's so much preparation, but somehow it slipped through. We're here. Maybe we won't even have lunch today, and that's okay. Sometimes it's good to go without the usual, to notice what happens.

At the monastery, our real nourishment isn't just food—it's *Dharma food*,

spiritual food. Sitting in the mist, watching the mountains, or walking in peace—these feed the spirit more deeply than any meal.

Listening to a Dharma talk is one kind of nourishment, but true Dharma food comes from your own practice—from walking meditation, breathing, and truly stopping. When you stop running, your spirit begins to eat again.

I grew up Buddhist, going to temple every Sunday with my family. But as a kid, I didn't understand much Vietnamese, especially the old temple language, so I didn't get much out of it. We'd listen, eat lunch, and go home. Often, my parents would take us to

Chinatown afterward for dim sum. That was my idea of Buddhism!

There was no real *practice*—it was cultural, devotional. You pray, you bow, you ask for help, and hope good things happen. That kind of Buddhism is beautiful, but limited. It's like asking a divine being to fix your suffering for you.

When I first met Thầy and attended a retreat, I discovered *practice Buddhism*—Buddhism of mindfulness and training the mind. That changed everything.

In the Buddha's time, many people renounced the world to meditate in the forest. Usually, it was something you did near the end of life, after career and family—but the Buddha, only twenty-nine, didn't want to wait. He wanted to understand his suffering while he still had strength to live and serve.

Through his own training, the Buddha discovered the Middle Way—not extreme denial, not indulgence. He realized suffering has a purpose. We don't need to escape it, but to understand it. When we understand suffering, we see its causes, and from that insight, we find peace.

The Four Noble Truths are simple: there is suffering, there is a cause, there is a way out, and there is a path. From understanding comes the Eightfold Path, a way to live with mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion.

When I started practicing, I had to learn everything again: how to eat, how to walk, how to breathe. In college, I used to eat fast food in minutes, rushing through everything. But in the monastery, I learned slow walking meditation, and it was difficult! When you're used to running, slowing down feels like losing your balance.

At first, I'd walk behind monks who were *too slow*, and it frustrated me. In my mind, I wanted to pass them, like driving in LA traffic! But that was my practice: to follow the slow monk, to stay behind, to breathe, to let go of impatience. Slowly, I began to enjoy it.

Over time, I realized rushing is a disease, not having enough time, always being pulled toward the future. Restlessness is deeply ingrained in our culture. We're constantly checking something: time, messages, phones.

Once, I practiced mindfulness while driving. I noticed at every red light, my right leg was tense, hovering over the gas pedal. I was anticipating the green light! So, I trained myself to relax, to put the car in park, to rest.

Mindfulness is using daily life as practice. Every red light, every moment, can be a bell of mindfulness.

Our challenge today is the same: our phones, our busyness, our craving to move. But when we recognize it, breathe, and return to the present, we reconnect with ourselves.

Mindfulness means being present with what is happening, with whatever we're feeling, without running away. That's the essence of practice. When we stop running from our suffering, we begin to transform it.

BY BROTHER PHÁP DUNG

This is an excerpt from a Dharma talk given by Brother Pháp Dung in the Ocean of Peace Mediation Hall at Deer Park Monastery. It has been edited for clarity. You can find the full Dharma talk on the Deer Park Monastery YouTube channel.

Finding Balance in Times of Chaos

Dear respected Thầy, dear friends,

We're at the summer solstice and it's the 21st of June 2025, our last day of the family retreat—Stable Heart, Clear Mind.

One way to test whether you have a stable heart is to give a Dharma talk to the children. Sometimes my heart goes in the direction of being not-so-stable, and I know then to come back to my breathing or invite the sound of the bell. I take refuge in my sister at the big bell, and we support each other and slowly hold the space together. For me, it's a great joy to have the kids here. One of the benefits of being a monk is that you get to be an uncle to many children—and you don't have to change even one diaper.

I wanted to talk a little bit today about balance, because balance is very important for our path as parents and as practitioners. The Buddha's Four Noble Truths—suffering, the cause of suffering, how to remove the causes and conditions that give rise to suffering, and the path to do so—are really about establishing balance in our mind. Happiness and suffering are not separate.

In Buddhist psychology, we talk about the mind as having two aspects: store consciousness, the field where all the seeds—emotions, feelings, thoughts from the past—are kept, and mind consciousness, where our emotions and thoughts manifest. When conditions are sufficient, a seed in store can manifest, like a flower in mind consciousness. When we hear or see something that touches our seed of anger, it blooms and takes over our mind, turning it into a hell realm. As the song says, “The realm of the mind is mine, I can choose where I want to be. Both heaven and hell I know equally well; the choice is up to me.” With mindfulness, we can choose what we water in our consciousness.

An emotion lasts maybe one or two minutes. If it's still there after that, it means we're continuing to feed it, with our thinking, judgment, or fear. With mindfulness, we can look and see how we are feeding our anger, jealousy, craving, or sadness. Fortunately, we also have other seeds—compassion, understanding, mindfulness—and through daily practice, we can strengthen them.

We often feel helpless and overstimulated. We drug ourselves through the day with caffeine, news, and endless input. There is no balance. No wonder we collapse at night, picking up our phone or remote to numb ourselves. We don't, however, have to be victims of fate or circumstance. Through mindful eating, walking, sitting, and breathing, we water wholesome seeds that restore balance.

That's the good news: we can change the qualities of our seeds. I came across an article called "Smartphones: Parts of Our Minds or Parasites?" from the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, May 2025, by Rachel Brown and Robert Brooks.¹ They argue that modern smartphones are not cognitive extensions but rather designed to manipulate users to serve corporate interests—more parasites than tools.

It made me reflect on how our devices can drain us, just like dodder—the parasitic orange vine that grows here in Deer Park—wraps around plants, sucking their energy. If it becomes too powerful, it kills its host. That's what smartphones can do to our attention if we're not careful.

Thầy (Thích Nhất Hạnh) once shared a story of a man riding a galloping horse. Someone asks, "Where are you going?" and the man replies, "Don't ask me, ask the horse." Technology is that horse, and we must ask, who's really in control?

As we build the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing, we ask: what kind of future do we want for our children and ourselves? Some schools ban smartphones not just at school but for the entire time students are enrolled. Those children still thrive, connected with nature and each other, alive without screens.

When I became a monk, I thought I'd left technology behind, but I soon found myself in the registration office using a computer. I once saw Thầy using a computer—moving the mouse slowly, then pausing, reading, then clicking again with full awareness. Watching him taught me about mindful interaction.

Many people struggle to follow their breath without controlling it. We're so conditioned by our devices to control everything within our field of vision—like a mouse pointer—that we've forgotten how to observe without interference. Mindful breathing is the opposite: allowing, not controlling.

Our relationship with technology challenges our inner balance. Even seeing someone with a new phone can water our seeds of craving. We become like an operating system wanting an update, a human software patch. But the real update we need is internal: to renew our store consciousness, to nourish seeds of awareness, and to unplug from the parasitic habits that drain our energy and attention.

Balance means remembering that we can choose which seeds to water. It means reclaiming our mind as our own.

BY BROTHER PHÁP LƯU

This is an excerpt from a Dharma talk during the Stable Heart, Clear Mind Family Retreat 2025 in the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall at Deer Park Monastery. It has been edited for clarity. You can find the full Dharma talk on the Deer Park Monastery YouTube channel.

¹ Brown, R. L., & Brooks, R. C. (2025). Smartphones: Parts of Our Minds? Or Parasites? *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2025.2504070>

Making Peace in the Circles of Life



I was in deep pain when I first ordained. One time, I was part of a group of the first sisters who could come and stay at the new building next to Thầy’s Hermitage, where our teacher stayed. During our week there, I remember climbing the big magnolia tree right in front of our teacher’s office. As I climbed, I saw these parasitic plants, and I started pulling and throwing them to the ground. I did that for hours, one plant after another. Restless energy and the angst inside me caused me to keep pulling the plants and throwing them down. Thầy must have been in his room, seeing me doing this, but he didn’t say anything.

That evening, we had a meal with Thầy. Everybody was eating peacefully and quietly. My tears kept rolling down. I was making soup with my tears. I couldn’t eat anything. Again, Thầy didn’t say anything.

But after dinner, Thầy said to me, “Follow me, my child.” We went to the small meditation room next to the kitchen, and Thầy signaled for me to walk with him. He practiced circumambulation—very slow walking meditation. And as we

walked, every one of our steps made an imprint on the thick, beige carpet. Thầy continued slow walking meditation in circles, and I was right behind him.

After a long while, what came to me was in all these footprints, I couldn't make out which ones were Thầy's and which were mine. Neither could I make out which steps were the beginning and which steps were the end. As we walked and walked, this became a deep lesson for me: Thầy's footsteps, my footsteps, no beginning, no end. It kept going and kept going. The insight helped me to not see my suffering as mine alone. Instead, I could see it as a continuation of my family, my ancestors, and all humanity. Just as with our steps on the thick carpet, we try hard to assert ourselves as individuals, to leave our imprint. Yet, while we each have this one life, we must also do our best to live beautifully, to live harmoniously with ourselves and with each other. This is our one chance to do our best in these endless circles.

I experienced this insight again at Central Park in New York recently. Many people run in Central Park, and you can see many people running through every entrance and exit: people of all ages, of all skin colors, of all ways of dressing, of all body types. Some run faster, some run slower, but they all keep running. Then when you reach the street, you see another group of people, another part of the swirling mass of humanity. There's no beginning, no end. It keeps going and going.

Again, I relived that experience of walking with Thầy over twenty years ago. I saw how we are so incredibly insignificant in this mass of humanity, in these waves of life. And yet, each of us is responsible for living the best way we can—by learning to be a soulmate to our suffering, to our trauma, to each other's suffering, and to each other's trauma. If we can just do that, our life will be meaningful and worthwhile. And if we were to die tonight, we would be at peace, because we have made peace with ourselves and with our life; because we have made peace with others who may have hurt us, or whom we may have hurt. We learn to make peace with what was, what is, and what will be.

Learning to make peace begins with every breath and with every step. Make peace in your own body, in your own feelings, with your in-breath, with your out-breath, one breath at a time. Make peace with your left foot, with your right foot, one step at a time. Make peace by saying to yourself, "I love you. It's okay. Help me to take good care of you. Help me to choose peace and choose harmony. Help me to be here and not check out, not try to escape. Just simply be here."

BY SISTER ĐẰNG NGHIỆM

This is an excerpt from a Dharma talk given by Sister Đàng Nghiệm at the Omega Institute on July 23, 2025. It has been edited for clarity.

THE HOME OF ĐẠI ẨN

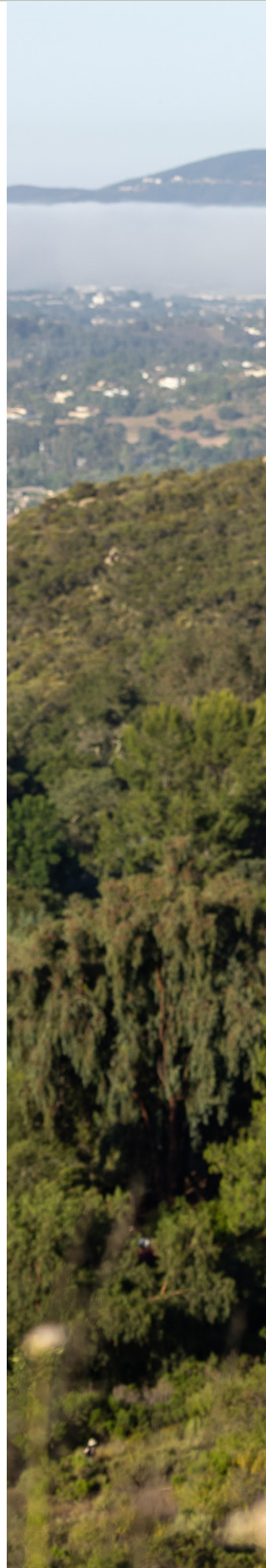
The sunrise is calling us to gather our steps on the path,
The late moon casting light on peaceful brown robes
Song of siblinghood alleviating the world's deep sorrow—
Great Hidden Mountain, vast and cozy, a loving home.

We cherish our elder brothers forging the path forward
our elder sisters tending home with care,
our young siblings planting each budding seed—
cherishing life, we come home to peace.

We cherish the elder brothers steadfast in his faith,
Our elder sisters pure, guarding the sea of love,
Our younger siblings guiding the stars over the ocean
cherishing life we light the moon over the mountain.

The sun sets in the breath, calming our hearts
The sun releases gently the sacred temple bells
Calling wandering souls to stop, lighting up the lamp of awareness
In the Great Hidden Mountain, the earth yields transformation by love.

BY SISTER TUYẾT NGHIÊM





What Had to Be Done Has Been Done¹

RETURNING TO NURTURE PEACE

*There is a place for peace to reside,
Where I can return and quiet the chaos.*

I thank these two lines of poetry for expressing my feelings about the Great Hidden Mountain, where I have enjoyed the peaceful days of a monastic life. There is a quiet corner where I choose to be with the joys and sorrows deep in my heart—this is the Small Hidden Mountain. It is truly comforting to have such a peaceful corner to retreat to, a place where I can calm the chaos and take care of what happens in my body and mind. A quiet corner is like a good friend. It is a place where I can return to myself, see myself, and cultivate wisdom, so that life becomes easier. This quiet corner is already within my soul, but it is easily accessible whenever I take a leisurely stroll up to the Small Hidden Mountain.

There are mornings on the peak of the Small Hidden Mountain that are truly beautiful. The late moon still hangs, and the sea of clouds covers the mountains and the town in white, before curling around and embracing the hill. On the stone peak of Tĩnh Thạch, I feel as if I'm sitting on clouds,

with peace nourishing the happiness deep within me. The clouds float slowly, covering the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall, and then touch the tea house in Solidity Hamlet. The sensation of sitting on clouds, watching the clouds drift by, is magnificent. At these precious moments, I savor the eternity of the present. I gaze attentively at the Great Hidden Mountain—Yên Tử Mountain, Phù Vân Stupa, the monks' quarters in Solidity Hamlet, the dining hall, the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall, the nunnery in Clarity Hamlet, Escondido Rock, and the Head Village house. My eyes smile and embrace these beloved images in my heart.

WHAT HAD TO BE DONE HAS BEEN DONE

In the blink of an eye, my three years at Deer Park Monastery have passed. I have bonded with this land with all my heart and soul. In many places of the Great Hidden Mountain, I have left behind many cherished memories. In my last days here, I enjoyed ringing the temple bell to offer my gratitude to those who came before me, the ancestors of the land who protected and

nurtured me during my time on this sacred ground.

One ancestor I have a deep connection with is Thầy Giác Thanh. Though he is someone I have never met, only known through stories, each time I sit quietly at Phù Vân Stupa, I remind myself to nurture the courageous, open, and free spirit of Thầy, as conveyed in the poem Thầy gave him:

*That you are a real gentleman is known
by everyone.*

What had to be done has been done.

*At the moment your stupa is raised on
the hillside,*

*The sound of children's laughter is
already heard.²*

I love the sense of fulfillment that comes from the thought “what had to be done has been done.” This message has inspired me not to miss my opportunities. Three phrases come to me when I sit quietly at Phù Vân Stupa:

“If I like it, I’ll do it,”

“If I love it, I’ll do it,”

“If I see it, I’ll do it.”

I deeply reflect on these three foundations for a free action: “Like, Love, See... then do it.” This mindset is truly relaxed and free, and I wish to be like this. Whatever I can do to bring happiness to myself or to the sangha, I do without hesitation. I have overcome the barriers of perfectionism, the fear of judgment, and the fear of failure to seize my opportunities, allowing me to act joyfully. Many of my desires and longings have been transformed into

actions, sharing sincerely, cultivating aspirations to build the sangha, and nurturing siblinghood. I smile when I think of the phrase “what’s worth doing, I have done.” I smile when I realize that I have grown and become stronger within, more courageous in the face of challenges.

THE BEAUTY OF SIBLINGHOOD

If anyone asks what I have gained from this time at Deer Park, I would answer that the most cherished thing is that I have built a siblinghood in my heart and on this land.

I have formed gentle bonds with the older nuns like Sister Sư Ngoại, the elder nuns, and the abbess, along with many other senior nuns. Clarity Hamlet has a unique characteristic that other practice centers may not have, which is the presence of the older nuns. As they age, they may lose some of their abilities and face more health challenges, but their commitment to participating in the schedule is truly admirable. This spirit has entered me, reminding me to remain strong and diligent, and to cherish the sangha. Each day that passes, I value and am grateful for the miraculous presence of these senior nuns. The older generation of nuns embodies great love and sensitivity. I am fortunate to receive this profound and subtle love.

During my time here, I have had harmonious comradeship with my fellow nuns. Perhaps my dreams would

not have been fulfilled if I didn't have companions. My fellow younger nuns give me a clear sense that "as long as we have each other, we have a future and side by side we help the world." Together, we climb mountains while laughing, sometimes teasing each other, but the understanding and love between us is full and profound. When working together, we are like a flock of migratory birds, taking turns to lead, complement, and support each other.

In these days, I have learned to be a friend to the younger nuns, letting go of the desire to change, correct, or guide them as I once did, and instead becoming a friend who simply observes and accompanies them. I see more clearly the seeds of demanding, expecting, and pushing within me that need to be transformed, and, in return, I've gained a little more freedom in how I care for my younger sisters. This has also helped me connect naturally and more nurturally with them.

I have also developed true reverence and support for the senior monks. Looking up to Solidity Hamlet, I feel truly happy as I see the dream of building the Western Buddhist path becoming clearer in the monks' village. Perhaps the key element contributing to this development and vitality is the cooperation and harmony of the elder brothers. The elder monks are always present for the younger monks, whether in the classrooms, in the meditation hall, on the volleyball court, or in the natural, carefree laughter that echoes through the mountains.

I have nurtured true love and trust with the younger monks, which I have perhaps noticed best while playing volleyball with my monastic brothers and sisters. If anyone has known me for a long time, they would know how bad I am at sports. I appear to play very poorly, but to be more accurate, I just don't know how to play. But I always show up! That playing field is a paradise of happiness for me, and also a kind of meditation hall for practice. I freely accept my lack of skill, turning it into a source of joy for my brothers and sisters. I laugh at my clumsy, awkward moments whenever I am afraid of the ball or miss a shot, but I laugh even more when my overly proud attitude surfaces after a lucky hit. I realize that this freedom is the most refreshing state because it frees me from the self-consciousness and embarrassment of playing poorly, an obsession that has accompanied me for many years. I allow myself to be myself.

Since I don't have the talent to play volleyball well, I invest in the talent of "creating joy" for everyone. "Don't laugh at me!" I shout, because everyone can't stop laughing when I am so goofy. But I've discovered that those are the most natural smiles, untainted by any controlling thought. I cherish those smiles.

TRUE BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD

After twenty years, I feel a true, deep, and very natural sense of brotherhood

and sisterhood in my heart. One younger nun once asked me, “Do you always feel that everyone is really your brother or sister?” Without hesitation, I answered with all my heart, “I truly feel that way with everyone at this moment.” In the past, I often worried about becoming emotionally entangled or facing misunderstandings about attachments. As a result, I used to be cautious and did not naturally connect with my brothers and sisters.

I still remember that Thầy gave me faith in the mission of building true brotherhood and sisterhood from the days when I was a novice. When he saw that I had fear and lacked the trust to build true brotherhood and sisterhood, Thầy personally taught me: “You have the right to have a soulmate.” And: “Gradually, you will know where the boundary of brotherhood and sisterhood is.”

It has been a long journey as I have taken each step to understand and transform myself. I have filtered my mind and heart until today, where I am still learning to master and practice mindfulness, keeping the purity and awareness each time I interact, so I can maintain the good, genuine, and pure nature of brotherhood and sisterhood. I am truly grateful to Thầy and the senior monks of Solidity Hamlet for supporting me in brotherhood. Thanks to the steadfast and persistent senior monks, I feel deeply respectful in my heart. I am grateful to the junior monks with their *bodhisattva* hearts, who practice precepts and etiquette

meticulously, who study diligently, live harmoniously, and whenever I visit, I feel so peaceful in my heart.

CHERISHING THE REMAINING DAYS

Perhaps because I have had the opportunity to move through many practice centers over the past twenty years, it is easy for me to live in appreciation of the present and let go of thoughts about the future. My heart is peaceful, free from attachment when I think about the day I will leave the Great Hidden Mountain because I have received so much happiness during my time on this land. I smile again at the memories that have been made, adding another homeland in my heart.

Oh, every road is beautiful, every place is a paradise, and each moment is a joy that becomes eternal. Just thinking about it brings so much happiness, and naturally I smile with satisfaction.

*Arriving is a joy,
Leaving is also a joy,
A beautiful life lived fully,
Steady and fragrant with the scent of
mindfulness.*

Đại Ân Sơn, Winter 2025

BY SISTER TUYẾT NGHIÊM

¹ Original title: Việc Đáng Làm Đã Làm

² <https://www.parallax.org/mindfulnessbell/article/in-memoriam-thay-giac-thanh/>

A Pilgrimage of Mindfulness to the Land of the Buddha

Deer Park & Plum Village Monastics Embark on a Journey Through India

Eight monastics from Deer Park Monastery and Plum Village in France—Brothers Pháp Dung, Minh An, Minh Lượng, Minh Nhân and Sisters Túc Nghiêm, Bội Nghiêm, Phú Nghiêm and Trai Nghiêm—recently returned from a five-week tour and pilgrimage of the land of the Buddha, India. There, they participated in a two-week pilgrimage led by Plum Village Dharmacharya Shantum

Seth and his team at BuddhaPath. In addition, they led Days of Mindfulness and retreats in Delhi and Dehradun, organized by Ahimsa Trust, Plum Village's representative in India.

Along the way, our dear monastic siblings had the opportunity to visit many sacred Buddhist sites. Among these were Bodh Gayā, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, and the Jeta Grove, the





place where the Buddha spent many Rains Retreats and offered many of the teachings we read in our chanting book today. It was a deeply inspiring and nourishing experience to come into contact with the Buddha as a real human being, our wise teacher, by visiting the places which were so important to him. Over the course of the two-week journey, we practiced together and connected with the Buddha within ourselves. Afterwards a large group of lay pilgrims received a transmission of The Five Mindfulness Trainings under a Bodhi tree in the Jeta Grove.

The monastics also had time to meet, listen to, and play with the locals—young and old, rich and poor alike. From young beggar children at the entrance to pilgrimage sites to heads of government departments and agencies in Delhi, everyone enjoyed coming in contact with, practicing with, and learning from Thầy through his monastic disciples. Events were organized

for students, teachers, and parents at various schools as part of the “Wake Up Schools” global initiative. Events were also held at locations far off the beaten track, such as a prison in Dehradun, where over six hundred incarcerated people were present to practice mindful breathing, walking, eating, and even singing “I Like the Roses”!

We are very thankful for the support of BuddhaPath and Ahimsa Trust for organizing this tour. In addition, we are grateful to our worldwide community for their unwavering support of our work to bring the Dharma to so many places all over the world, and to be in contact with our deep spiritual roots in the East.

May the merit of our practice spread outward to benefit all living beings on Earth.

With a deep bow and “Namaste.”

BY BROTHER MINH LƯỢNG

A Joyful Beginning

THE HAPPY FARM AT DEER PARK MONASTERY



Dear Friends,

As we step into the New Year we are happy to share some wonderful news: the establishment of the Happy Farm at Deer Park Monastery, a continuation of the beautiful tradition of Happy Farms in Plum Village, France. This initiative is a manifestation of our aspiration to live in harmony with Mother Earth, nourish sustainable agriculture, and cultivate mindfulness practice in our daily life around the farm.

With the support of the monastic community, this beautiful project is being brought to life by a dedicated team of long-term practitioners in Solidity Hamlet. In December 2024, our dear friend Mick McEvoy from Happy Farm France visited to advise our team on this endeavor. We have begun our first

mindful steps already with digging a well and preparing the soil for the farm beds.

ABOUT THE HAPPY FARM

The Happy Farm is a living expression of our love and respect for Mother Earth. Rooted in the principles of agroecology, it integrates regenerative and organic farming within our mindfulness practice community. More than just a farm, it is a living classroom where monastics, retreatants, neighbors, and volunteers can cultivate not only nourishing vegetables but also mindfulness, joy, and a sense of interconnectedness with the Earth.

The Happy Farm is nurtured by three essential elements: mindfulness practice, organic farming, and community building. The farm will also serve as a place of learning. Offering teachings

and hands-on experiences through our regular Sunday Days of Mindfulness, Saturday Community Service Days and eventually hosting annual farming retreats. We plan for the farm to be a living classroom supporting the new Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing, which will be located near the farm.

Our vision is to cultivate a space where mindfulness intersects with sustainable agriculture, nourishing the well-being of individuals, society, and the planet. By working on the land mindfully, we aspire to offer healthy organic food for our community, share the joy of sustainable living, and deepen our reverence for the Earth. We aspire to raise awareness of the interbeing nature of our personal health and diet with that of society and the planet by examining our methods of production and consumption.

We also aspire to connect locally with our neighbors through the farm, possibly establishing an on-site food stand to offer affordable, healthy vegetables. We hope to involve our neighbors and their families in helping with the farm in exchange for produce, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

GET INVOLVED

We warmly invite our local and global community to join hands and hearts in supporting this beautiful initiative. Here are some ways you can walk this path with us:

- Volunteer: Join us as a volunteer and engage in daily farming activities, learn about organic agriculture, and

practice mindfulness in action as a community.

- Participate in Retreats: Attend our retreats that incorporate farm work as a form of meditation, allowing you to reconnect with nature and yourself. Once we have our foundations established for the Farm, our long-term goal is to offer regular retreats on the farm. Stay tuned for more information.
- Donate: The monastery humbly functions on a needs basis relying on the generosity of friends near and far to bring this vision to life. Therefore, your financial contributions will help us with our initial establishment, to acquire the necessary tools, lay the required infrastructures for the farm, build a greenhouse, purchase seeds, and acquire the needed materials to sustain and grow the farm: deerparkmonastery.org/donate
- Spread the Word: We invite you to share this joy with others. May the seeds of mindfulness and loving action continue to grow, nourishing many hearts along the way. Sign up for our Deer Park newsletter, Coyote Tracks, where you'll receive regular updates on the progress of the Farm.

Link to Happy Farm: <http://ha.ppy.farm>

BY AARON SOLOMON

Rediscovering Healing Steps in Desolation Wilderness



When you walk reverently and solidly on this earth
and I do the same, we send out waves of compassion
and peace. It is this compassion that will heal
ourselves, each other, and this beautiful green earth.

—Thích Nhất Hạnh

Walking has deep healing power. A simple statement, but a profound truth highlighted perfectly in the above statement.

I experienced this in my own life this past summer on a five-day mindful hiking retreat in the Sierras. The purpose? To follow our beloved teacher Thầy's way, walking reverently through one of the most stunning places imaginable, with the intention of healing ourselves and this precious, sacred planet we call home. Today, healing is perhaps the most vital thing we can be striving for—both personal and planetary—so this seemed to be the perfect opportunity to engage with such a meaningful practice.

At the end of July, six of us from various walks of life (and one common love of our *bodhisattva* Mother Earth) met in Sacramento to begin our mindful hiking journey among the lakes, peaks, and passes of the Desolation Wilderness, southwest of Lake Tahoe. We departed our first full morning from Meeks Bay with about two hundred pounds of gear, including food for six days, bear canisters, and a handy (and ultralight!) copy of *Hiking Zen*. (Thanks to Thầy Pháp Lưu and Thầy Pháp Xả for writing and sharing this excellent guide to nurturing mindfulness in nature!)

Contrary to the name's suggestion, Desolation Wilderness is breathtakingly

beautiful: fast-flowing creeks, flower-filled meadows, and mountain lakes dot the sun-soaked landscape as far as the eye can see. Walking here, it's easy to feel that this is a sacred place. How could anyone tire of the sweeping views, the freshness of the water, or the crystalline sharpness of the alpine colors? I lost count of how many times one of us declared during a mindful break that we were in paradise. The beauty is barely comprehensible, and the practice of walking meditation was that we had nothing to do but enjoy the beauty. Nowhere to go except right where we were. Every moment we arrived.

As Thầy says, when we walk with the sole goal of getting from one place to the next, or when we're always rushing, rushing, rushing, we never fully arrive. We're immediately on to the next stop, and so in this way we're always mentally elsewhere and never fully present. This makes it difficult to appreciate our surroundings and feel gratitude for where we are; we're never actually *there*. We lose the sense that we're walking on sacred ground. Furthermore, we lose the truth that the sheer act of walking is, in so many ways, a sacred act. And getting in touch with the sacred is, for those of us on the spiritual path, our ultimate purpose. As Thầy so often reminds us: when we

fully realize our interconnection with the Earth, we will transform.

Walking in mindfulness heals us, because we naturally begin to walk with greater connection, greater clarity, and greater compassion. We walk with enlightened steps.

This truth first came alive for me exactly one year earlier at a critically difficult time in my life. The previous July, I joined my first mindful backpacking retreat with the Path of Happiness Sangha on Catalina Island. At that time, both personally and professionally, I needed something—I just didn't know what.

Within nine months in 2024, I lost both my father and grandmother, and in the grieving was attempting to hold my mother's and brother's grief as well. Meanwhile I was working three jobs to make ends meet, all in climate change and community organizing. I was attending to the dying planet for a living: as an environmental consultant, community organizer, and faith-based climate advocate, I was immersed in a reality of increasing catastrophes. I was also well aware that the devastation occurring at an alarmingly rapid pace was delicately interwoven with all other issues, in one giant web of hyper-sensitive economic, environmental, social, political, ethnoracial, and humanitarian crises.

I was a mess. I was drowning in an ocean of sorrow and burning in the fires of fury and helplessness. Meanwhile, the world around me burned, too.

In short, I needed much more than a vacation or a career change. I needed something fundamentally different. I also needed clarity on what to do next.

I needed help, and hope. I needed healing, but I wasn't sure where to even start because it wasn't just grief. I needed to slow down, but not just relax. I needed so many things, but so many of them were not working for me.

Come to find out, I needed walking meditation.

That week on Catalina Island, I found all of the above. After a week's journey doing nothing but walking, focusing on each step with compassion and peace, I discovered what I knew I needed but had not been able to access before. I found the clarity I'd been longing for, and even some stillness. I let go of my past, I let go of my anxiety, and, for a time, I even let go of my deeper—and far scarier—dread of the future. I found healing.

With my footsteps, I also touched the extraordinary truth that there is, in fact, nothing to find or chase after at all.

When I focused on walking, connecting my breath with my steps, my thoughts slowly faded. I experienced mental silence. I didn't *find* it; it happened to me. It's the strange paradox at the root of the practice: by not trying so hard to find or chase after peace, peace naturally arises. By simply noticing my walking, taking one step at a time and being with each footfall, I was able to make space for the peace that I so desperately craved. By being with my body and just observing my thoughts instead of chasing after them, I was able to slow in a way I'd never been able to before—not just physically but mentally too.

Eventually, I had a breakthrough. I realized that in my striving for peace—a ceaseless, 60-hour-a-week endeavor with Zoom call after Zoom call, endless

projects, and two or three big trips a month, all in the name of planetary healing—I was strangling my own existence. I was depriving myself of peace and instead subjecting myself to endless hours on the computer, lost hours of sleep in the news cycle, and a mental spinout jeopardized the very possibility of achieving what I wanted most: healing.

That week on Catalina Island, surrounded by thirty others who were also doing the same, singular thing—walking with compassion—I realized there was indeed another way forward. It began with my own two feet.

It began with me walking as if it were a sacred act.

By remembering that the ground itself is sacred, and that walking in compassion isn't the path to healing—it is the healing.

This came alive for me again in Desolation Wilderness this past July, as we meandered mindfully south along the Pacific Crest Trail. This time, we walked through areas that had been ravaged by the Caldor Fire in 2021. The fire damage was particularly evident at the beginning of our hike, leaving Meeks Bay, and at the end around Echo Lake and the chalet, which barely avoided annihilation. This devastation was juxtaposed by the sheer scope of the landscape's natural beauty. The lakes were crystal clear, the most azure water I've ever jumped in, yet the shores were scarred, blackened with dead junipers and pines. Paradise and yet, at one recent time, it was hell.

What to do with that paradox?

You walk. You walk mindfully. You don't try to hold it too tightly, or analyze it, or run from it.

You take one step, aware of the painful feelings, and you take another step, aware of the joyful and light feelings. Pain and pleasure, pleasure and pain. Agony and sorrow, ecstasy and awe.

It felt like the other paradox I'd been wrestling with last year: the harder I tried to hold on to the peace, or to find it, the more elusive it became. The harder I may try to hold on to the pleasure, the more agonized I will feel.

For me, the week-long journey through a burned, beautiful place is exactly like the journey we're all on through life—and in our practice. Certainly, it's the journey of my past year and a half, through family and climate grief. There have been tremendous agonies and losses, and yet there have been uncounted joys and pleasant surprises. I can't hold them both, and so the practice is to recognize and release. There is no way to hold all of the contradictions, anyway, so maybe that's not the point.

Instead, I simply walk with them. I take one step, aware that these challenges and joys are both sacred. I walk with compassion for both the planet and her beauty, and for my own life's trials and treasures.

I remember, with each breath and each step, that we are in fact walking on sacred ground. We may not be able to hold all these pains and pleasures, but our Mother Earth will.

BY LUKE HENKEL

¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, "Thich Nhat Hanh on How to Take a Mindful Walk," *Lion's Roar* (originally published in the July 2012 issue of *Shambala Sun*) <https://www.lionsroar.com/walking-meditation-thich-nhat-hanh/>

HAIKU FROM DEER PARK

thoughts rise, then
sink into ocean
of silence

*

wake-up call:
meditation hall's
smoke alarm

*

morning bird
echoed by chirping
smoke alarm

*

no chasing
in the here are now
I am home

*

turtle climbs
onto lotus leaf
they both sink

*

for Buddha
dying was just a
change of clothes

*

I listen
so you can fully
clear your heart

*

we all stop
and follow our breath
when phone rings

*

pepper tree:
perfect tent for my
morning nap

*

jaunty bird
dips her beak into
fallen plum

*

dozing in the sun
orange cat basks, belly up
every paw relaxed

*

her loving
way of washing spoons
makes me smile

*

we look like pilgrims
climbing toward Buddha's likeness
but we are Buddhas

*

fly hovers
around my nostril –
don't inhale!

*

rabbit fur
strewn along the path –
coyote feast?

*

floorboards gleam
as if moonlight came
from bamboo

*

pale, round, sinking moon
gave her gold back to the sun
to wash mountain's face

*

stop writing!
each step is a poem
free of words

BY NATASCHA BRUCKNER

“Take your time to cook from the heart. The food will taste better and feel healthier when made with the mind of love.”



Lemongrass Tofu

Looking forward to our upcoming online mindful cooking course, “Peace Is Every Bite,” here is a featured recipe shared by Sister Hộ Nghiêm (Sister Protection)

2 pounds firm tofu
2 teaspoons mushroom seasoning
salt to taste
½ cup tapioca flour
⅓ cup olive oil or oil with a high smoking point
1 tablespoon onion, diced
1 small Thai chili pepper (more or less to your spice preference), minced
6 stalks fresh lemongrass, sliced
¼ teaspoon sugar

DIRECTIONS

Cut each pound of tofu into 8 pieces (about 3.5”x1”x1”). Score each piece diagonally across the top with a knife a few times. Blot tofu pieces with paper towels, kitchen linens, or cheesecloth and set on cloths to dry for about an hour.

FOR THE SEASONING

Blend 1 teaspoon mushroom powder, ½ teaspoon salt (or to taste), and flour well in a bowl. Press tofu pieces into the seasoning mixture until well covered on all sides.

Heat the oil on medium-high (or medium, depending on your stove) in a large pan. Fry coated tofu pieces until a light golden yellow color (about 60 seconds on each side, longer at lower heat). Place fried tofu on paper towels to soak up excess oil. Sprinkle lightly with salt.

FOR LEMONGRASS TOPPING

Mix onion, Thai chili, lemongrass, ½ teaspoon salt (or to taste), 1 teaspoon mushroom powder, and sugar. Pulse ingredients together in a food processor until finely chopped. Sauté on medium heat in the remaining olive oil for a few minutes, stirring, until light gold in color. Taste and adjust seasoning as you prefer. Drain any remaining oil from the lemongrass topping.

Plate tofu pieces to be served, then spoon the lemongrass topping evenly over the fried tofu.

You may like to serve this dish with rice and steamed or sautéed vegetables (bok choy, broccoli, carrots, green beans, winter or summer squash...).

SERVES 4-6

NOTES ABOUT INGREDIENTS

If you can't find all these ingredients in your regular grocery store, they will be available in your local Asian markets. You can also find dried ingredients online.

MUSHROOM SEASONING/MUSHROOM POWDER

(*giá vị tinh rau cải*): A bit of a secret ingredient and a powerhouse in the Deer Park kitchens. Mushroom seasoning includes mushroom powder and other ingredients, such as salt, sugar, and spices. You could also use mushroom powder or umami seasoning. You can make your own mushroom powder by grinding dried shiitake or other dried mushrooms in a blender.

TAPIOCA FLOUR

You can substitute with a flour of your choice.

THAI CHILIS

Small but mighty! Preferably fresh but dried is okay. These peppers are quite spicy, so you may want to use less (or remove the seeds) to decrease the spice level or substitute a milder chili. They grow beautifully on the Happy Farm.

FRESH LEMONGRASS STALKS

While dried lemongrass may be easier to find, it doesn't quite work in this recipe. If available, look for fresh, long stalks that are not dried out. You could substitute frozen, chopped lemongrass, available at Asian markets. You might find the plant at a local nursery so you can grow your own (they are big, lush bushes at the end of the rows at the Happy Farm)!

Deer Park Announces the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing

Education that liberates
the heart and opens the mind



Dear Beloved Friends,

We hope this message finds you well and grounded in the energy of mindfulness.

Here at Deer Park Monastery, spring has graced the hills with gentle blooms, the white sage is budding, and the land is alive with bird song. Each day reminds us of the preciousness of life and the miracle of this present moment.

As Thầy often reminded us, “*The next Buddha may take the form of a Sangha.*”¹ In these times of great change and challenge, we are called more than ever to live this insight, not as a concept, but as a daily practice of building beloved communities rooted in presence, compassion, and interbeing.

In this spirit, we write to share our continuation of Thầy’s heartfelt aspiration:

to bring the Plum Village mindfulness practices into the field of education through the founding of the Thích Nhất Hạnh School of Interbeing.

This is not simply a school with a mission—it is a mission taking the form of a school. An offering that weaves together spiritual practice, holistic education, and deep care for the Earth and for one another. It is born from our collective aspiration to transmit the practice of mindfulness to future generations—not as a lesson plan, but as a lived experience within a loving and inclusive community.

We seek to reimagine school as a place of learning and growth that nurtures the mind, heart, and soul of each child—a true second home where they feel deeply loved and cared for. We envision a sanctuary where children grow up in a field of joy and belonging, and where their laughter, struggles, questions, and dreams are honored as sacred. A school that feels like home, not built on competition or conformity, but on presence, understanding, and the deep wisdom of our ancestors.

The school is set to open in fall 2026 starting with grades K-3, then blossoming gently over time until it reaches its full K-8 form. Nestled at the foot of the monastery, just across from the Happy Farm, it is part of a larger vision: a vibrant, multifold village rooted in mindful living, regenerative farming, intergenerational care, and daily spiritual practice. At the center is the monastery—the beating heart of this community. Surrounding the monastery is a future sanctuary for compassionate eldercare, a lay hamlet devoted to simple, low-impact living and community service, and now, a school: a human garden for

nurturing future generations. Learning will not be confined to the classroom, but will unfold throughout the village—in the community, on the farm, in the mountains among the boulders and chaparral, and within the monastery itself.

This is one of the most tangible ways we can carry Thầy's teachings into the future, especially in this moment, for this country, and in these challenging times. Hope is real, and it can be cultivated one child at a time. The good news: we can nourish hope within ourselves and then offer this hope to the world.

Please explore our emerging vision and learn how to get involved here: www.tnhschool.org

This is a sangha effort. Your support—whether through your presence, your sharing of this vision, your financial offering, or your involvement in person—is deeply cherished. Every contribution is a seed of love. With enough care and community, these seeds will blossom into a true refuge for generations to come.

“The best way to take care of the future is to take care of the present.”²

—Thích Nhất Hạnh

With deep gratitude and trust in the path,
Brothers Pháp Dung & Pháp Lưu
*On behalf of the Thích Nhất Hạnh School
of Interbeing and Deer Park Monastery*

¹Thích Nhất Hạnh, “Breathing into Form: Body Contemplation, Tâm & Quý, and the Art of Daily Mindfulness,” December 2, 1999, Plum Village, France, plumvillage.org/gems

²Thích Nhất Hạnh, “Becoming a Buddha in Los Angeles with Diana Eck,” January 18, 1993, Los Angeles, United States, plumvillage.org/gems

No Coming, No Going

This year, several monastics have left Deer Park to continue their practice and service at other Plum Village centers around the world, while we have also joyfully received brothers and sisters arriving from other monasteries.

In February, Sister Bội Nghiêm left for Plum Village, France.

In April, Brother Trời Định Tâm arrived from Blue Cliff Monastery in New York to support Deer Park.

A few months later in June, we welcomed Sister Huệ Tri from Vietnam while Sister Túc Nghiêm left to visit Plum Village for a few months until October when she returned to Deer Park.

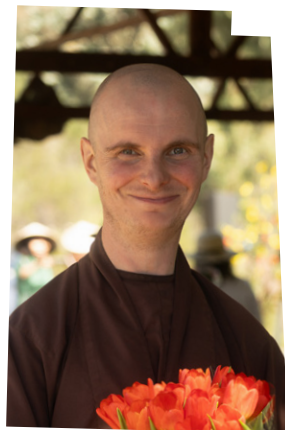
The next month in July, Brother Trời Đạt Nguyễn returned to Plum Village Thailand after two years of service at Deer Park. In the same month, Sister Trăng Sáng Soi arrived from the European Institute of Applied Buddhism to support Deer Park.

September was filled with new arrivals, including Brother Trời Nguyễn Ước coming to support Deer Park from Plum Village Thailand, as well as Sister Trăng Truyền Kỳ and Brother Trời Niệm Hoà from Plum Village, France.

In October, Sister Xướng Nghiêm departed for Trại Ân, Vietnam, returning to support activities of Plum Village around Cam Ranh. Sister Trăng Chùa Xưa also departed to support her family in Vietnam. In the same month, we welcomed Brother Trời Tỉnh Thức from Plum Village Thailand.

We also welcomed our new novices, Brother Nhất Xả, Brother Nhất Chúng, and Brother Nhất Uyển.

Though forms change, the Sangha body remains whole. Together around the globe we walk the same path of mindfulness, compassion, and understanding.





The Novice Ordination Ceremony can be viewed on the Deer Park Monastery YouTube channel.

WELCOME TO THE JUNIPER FAMILY

On October 19, 2025, three aspirants of Deer Park Monastery were ordained as novice monastics in a deeply moving ceremony in the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall. This included Mackenzie Guercio, Ronit Meduri, and Brendan Flanagan. Supported by the monastic and lay sangha, family, and friends, the aspirants took vows to live a celibate life, transform their afflictions, and bring happiness to all beings. In order to receive such an honor, the aspirants practiced and trained at the monastery throughout the year(s).

After an Incense Offering and Touching the Earth ceremony, the aspirants received the Ten Novice Precepts and had their hair clipped as a symbolic gesture of shedding their burdens. They were also presented with ceremonial robes, certificates of ordination, and Dharma names.

When the ceremony concluded, the novices had their heads fully shaved by elder siblings of the Juniper Family, and in some cases, family members. The special day ended with a formal lunch in the meditation hall and a deep sharing by the novices and their families.

Help us extend a warm welcome to our new siblings:

Michael “Mackenzie” Guercio: Brother Nhất Xả (One Release) 釋真一捨

Ronit Meduri: Brother Nhất Chúng (One Community) 釋真一眾

Brendan Flanagan: Brother Nhất Uyển (One Garden) 釋真一苑

BY SUE MAZINGO

CLOUD-AND-MOUNTAIN LOVE

Green mountains, day after day,
Stand watching white clouds drift.
So innocent, the love of cloud and mountain—
Meeting a little, then parting.

The mountain is faithful, steady, enduring,
Staying still through so many days and months.
The cloud is free, with endless appointments—
So the cloud keeps flying on and on.

Mountain and cloud live two different ways,
Like Day and Night within one day.
In peace the mountain still stands there,
Smiling, watching clouds pass by.

My love, let me be the Cloud,
Passing through the Mountain's life,
Softly adorning the days and months—
While the Mountain keeps looking for the Cloud.

As Cloud, I drift lightly.
As Mountain, you endure.
Who knows, within these passing months and days,
Perhaps Cloud and Mountain will fulfill our hearts.

This is the life of Mountain and Cloud—
Why should we be burdened?
Whenever we meet again,
Cloud and Mountain remain forever unhurried.

The cloud will come back to the mountain
To share some joyful days.
The mountain stays firm right there—
The cloud returns, then flies away.

Life is released from its drunken spell.
The cloud is free in every place.
The ocean of love is vast—
The mountain understands the cloud's heart.

The mountain's generous hands
Still love the cloud through months and days.
The mountain stands in steady trust—
The love of cloud and mountain, always full.

2026 DEER PARK CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 25	Pravāraṇā Ceremony to end the 2025 Rains Retreat
January 17	Who is Thích Nhất Hạnh? course ends
January 18	Memorial Ceremony on the fourth year of Thầy's Passing
February 16-19	Lunar New Year's Eve (Tết) ceremonies and celebrations
March 1-7	Hiking Zen Retreat
March 15-21	Wake Up Retreat (ages 18-35)
April 6-25	Visits to Dartmouth College, Harvard, and New York
May 9	Rhythm of the Earth Music Festival
May 15-17	BIPOC Weekend
May 31	Vesak Celebration (Buddha's Birthday)
June 23-28	Teen Camp
July 12-18	Family Retreat
August 9-15	The Sun My Heart Colorado Retreat
September 9-13	Vietnamese Retreat
September 29- October 3	The Buddha the Scientist Retreat at Deer Park
October 4	The Buddha the Scientist Symposium at UCSD
October 18	90-Day Rains Retreat begins (through January 17, 2027)
November 1	Day of the Dead Celebration
November 26	Day of Gratitude Celebration
December 24	Christmas Eve
December 31	New Year's Eve

Please note: we will not be hosting a holiday retreat this year



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ISSN 2995-0694

A volunteer publication funded by Deer Park Monastery and published by
Parallax Press, 2236B Sixth St, Berkeley, CA 94710, US.

