



COMMUNAUTE BOUDDHIQUE ZEN VILLAGE DES PRUNIERES

Official Announcement

Plum Village, France
June 28, 2015

To all Plum Village Practice Centers,
To all Practice Centers and Sanghas worldwide,
To our Dear Beloved Friends,

We are happy to report that Thay's health has improved greatly since he returned to his Plum Village Hermitage in early April. Every day Thay has been out in nature, enjoying the blossoms, listening to the birds and resting at the foot of a tree. Thay enjoys lying in his hammock next to the running creek, in the fresh cool of the bamboo grove he planted more than thirty years ago.

Doctors and nurses continue to visit Thay, and he receives physiotherapy, massage and acupuncture daily. The team of attendants continue to care for Thay and support his needs around the clock.

Despite his advanced age, Thay has been making remarkable progress.

One day, Thay decided for himself that he was ready to start swallowing solid food, and directed his attendants to prepare an apple, then a lemon and then an avocado. Thay enjoyed each bite with great delight, chewing each mouthful at least forty times before swallowing. Everyone was very surprised. Thay's mindfulness, concentration and joy to really savor the food was remarkable. Since that day, with great concentration and determination, Thay has been able to enjoy feeding himself. The sisters have been investing their love and creativity in preparing diverse nutritious healthy food for Thay, which he eats with delight. As soon as Thay was able to nourish himself with several wholesome meals a day, he surprised all the doctors by successfully removing his own feeding tube, without any complications. Thay smiled, and we all smiled.

More recently, Thay has begun to develop his vocalisation, joining the attendants when they hum or sing. The first time this happened, one of the sisters was chanting in Vietnamese the name of Avalokita, the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion: *Nam Mo Bo Tat Quan The Am*. Thay suddenly pronounced the final sound "Âm" (pron. "um") clearly and on cue. Miraculously, the word "Âm" actually means "sound". Thay looked at those around him, his eyes gleaming, as if to say "everything is possible". It was a very moving moment, and the attendants all gathered to continue to chant with Thay. Since that very first "um", Thay now enjoys singing and humming every day, all the familiar Plum Village tunes in Vietnamese, English and French. At this point, Thay is able to voice the melody and, once in a while, he can form a word. He raises his arm in such a way as to express the meaning of each line, and has great joy and surprise every time he is able to produce a clear and accurate word.

Thay's therapists have been struck by his extremely strong will to recover, and have pointed out to us that this is the most important factor in his rehabilitation. Thay has been very determined to train himself so he can recover his physical strength and regain his balance and posture. Thay is clear about what he wants to do, and what he does not want to do. He is now able to sit by himself, beautifully upright. In the last three weeks Thay has wanted to start walking, even though his right side remains paralysed. With the support of one attendant behind, and one at his right leg to help move it forward, Thay now practices walking meditation in the garden, several times a day. We can feel Thay's delight and freedom at each step. Even though it takes great effort, we can see that, for Thay, each step is a step of victory, an affirmation of life and joy to be alive on this beautiful Mother Earth.

From time to time the whole monastic community of 150 monks and nuns has come to practice walking

meditation with Thay. Last week we could feel Thay's joy to see his disciples, and his happiness to lead the sangha in walking meditation. Thay pointed to the blue sky, the swaying bamboo, the smile of a brother, directing us to enjoy the present moment. Thay's courage, determination and joy, despite his physical limitations, was a clear teaching for all those present as we walked behind Thay with our two healthy feet. With every step, Thay demonstrated that he will continue to practice no matter what the conditions. Thay was affirming that he would never desert the Path. He was encouraging us to stay on the path, and enjoy the wonders of life.

We would like to thank everyone for offering your loving support to Thay and the sangha through the past months. We are deeply grateful for your energy of compassion and prayers, and for your commitment to continue to practice mindfully and deeply for Thay. A special thank you to those who have sent us beautiful children's drawings for Thay's room and those who have sent us heartfelt donations to support Thay's care.

The lotuses are blooming in our ponds, the plums are ripening in our orchards, and we are preparing our hamlets to welcome our guests for the Summer Retreat, around 800 people each week, for a whole month. The Summer Retreat is one of Thay's favorite times of year. We will welcome families and children, and the Dharma Talks will be given by Thay's continuation in the form of his Senior Dharma Teachers. Under the shade of the oak trees, bamboo groves and verandas in the late afternoon sun, we will see many circles of friends sharing deeply with one another. Hearts will be open, tears will be shed, as the sound of the bell reverberates.

Nine years ago Thay was asked,

"You will be 80 this year. Do you plan to retire as a spiritual teacher at any point?"

This is the answer he gave:

“In Buddhism we see that teaching is done not only by talking, but also by living your own life. Your life is the teaching, is the message. And since I continue to sit, to walk, to eat, to interact with the Sangha and people, I continue to teach, even if I have already encouraged my senior students to begin to replace me in giving Dharma talks. In the last two years, I have asked Dharma teachers, not only in the monastic circle but also in the lay circle, to come up and give Dharma talks. Many of them have given wonderful Dharma talks. Some Dharma talks have been better than mine. I see myself in my continuation, and I will not retire. I'll continue to teach, if not by Dharma talks then in my way of sitting, eating, smiling, and interacting with the Sangha. I like to be with the Sangha. Even if I don't give a Dharma talk, I like to join walking meditation, sitting meditation, eating in mindfulness and so on. So don't worry. When people are exposed to the practice, they are inspired. You don't need to talk in order to teach. You need to live your life mindfully and deeply. Thank you.”

These inspiring words are our compass as we prepare to lead retreats for thousands of people in the coming months: here in Plum Village this Summer, at the EIAB in Germany in August, and on the *Miracle of Mindfulness Tour* of the United States this fall. Please join us.

May you cherish the presence of those you love, and enjoy each step together.

With love and trust,

The Monks and Nuns of Plum Village

As Thay's condition is now stable, and his path of recovery is long, we will post updates only occasionally. We will keep our global community informed of any major developments in Thay's recovery. All official updates will continue to appear at: plumvillage.org, langmai.org, villagedespruniers.org, and www.facebook.com/thichnhathanh.