

Mindful Development

*A message for VESAK 2011 Thailand
"Buddhist Virtues For Socio-Economic Development"*

Dear Respected Venerables and Honored Delegates,

We congratulate the Buddhist Supreme Sangha Council and all the participants and organizers of the 8th UNDV conference, for gathering as a community to celebrate and enjoy our togetherness and to build brotherhood and sisterhood. It is our conviction that the Buddhist teachings and practices can make a major contribution towards a global spirituality and ethic that can guide humanity in this critical moment.

With the various crises we are witnessing in different parts of the world, it is clear that the era of independent nations with borders and separate interests is gradually coming to a close; that the suffering and pain of one nation is fundamentally linked to and is shared by the hearts of people of all nations; that the instability and depression of another nation affects the prosperity and security of peoples all over the planet. In our present time and place, it is clear that social and economic development and all the challenges that come with it are no longer individual matters.

But we are not without hope. The problems that confront our planet and our humanity – environmental tension, social and family dysfunction, economic instability, and political unrest – give us an opportunity to pause, recognize, re-examine the sources of our suffering, and find a path that can lead us towards a brighter future and to an even brighter present. This is the basic formula that the Buddha used during his own lifetime to guide his fellow beings to tend to their suffering. This basic formula can help guide us now, to our own salvation. The three distinctively Buddhist virtues of mindfulness, concentration, and insight can lead us to this salvation. Applied appropriately and skillfully, they can help us discover a global ethic and a mindful way of living that can guide the development of our society towards a more sane and healthy direction.

We must find ways to apply the Buddhist teachings – namely, the practice of mindfulness, the teachings on suffering and well-being, the wisdom of inter-being and non-discrimination, the Five Mindfulness Trainings (5 Precepts-*see attached*), and the teachings on the Four Nutriments – so that our society can become more mindful in its production and consumption; so that companies and individuals can produce less toxic waste that harms our collective minds and the environment, and can consume less and in a way that nourishes our body and heart. We as individuals and as nations should apply the Buddhist teachings of moderation, of knowing that *we already have enough*.

In the intimacy of our homes, fathers and sons apply the teachings so they can have more time and be more present for one another (rather than for their computer screens), and can restore communication by learning to listen deeply and speak more lovingly.

In the sterile classrooms and cold halls of our institutions, teachers and students can learn ways to support one another as in the warm atmosphere of the family, to be less stressful, to relax and handle their feelings and emotions, and to apply themselves in a direction that is meaningful and wholesome – graduating young people not just for the *work-force* of a capitalistic machine, but for a kinder and freer generation who cooperate more than compete.

In power oriented offices of companies and governmental workplaces, colleagues and fellow workers can serve more mindfully, building brotherhood and sisterhood, nourishing their compassion and generosity, and guiding our society in the direction of true happiness and reconciliation.

In our modern times, as we look for models of development in the ten directions, freedom to develop is highly prized and sought after, but at what price to our young ones and our fragile environment and at what cost to our individual and collective body and consciousness.

It is never too late to pause and reflect and to find practices that can bring responsibility and ethical behaviors back into our society, our governments, into our families, and our lives.

With love and trust,
Thich Nhat Hanh



The Five Mindfulness Trainings (To be attached with congratulatory message.)

The Five Mindfulness Trainings represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love, leading to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world. To practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of interbeing, or Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair. If we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are already on the path of a bodhisattva. Knowing we are on that path, we are not lost in confusion about our life in the present or in fears about the future.

Reverence For Life

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.

True Happiness

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after wealth, fame, power and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming.

True Love

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness – which are the four basic elements of true love – for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

Loving Speech and Deep Listening

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in

myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

Nourishment and Healing

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriment, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth.