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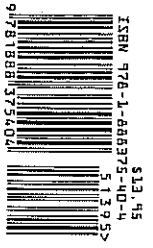


Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet, scholar, and human rights activist. In 1967, he was nominated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for the Nobel Peace Prize. He is author of more than sixty books, including *Old Path White Clouds*, *Present Moment Wonderful Moment*, *Touching Peace*, and *Teachings on Love*. He lives in Plum Village, a meditation center in France, and travels worldwide leading retreats on the art of mindful living.



PARALLAX PRESS
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA
www.parallax.org

US \$13.95



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THE LANGUAGE SIMPLE AND CLEAR.
THIS BOOK IS FOR EVERYONE."
—FELLOWSHIP MAGAZINE



BEING PEACE

THICH NHAT HANH

AUTHOR OF THE ENERGY OF PRAYER

INTRODUCTION BY JACK KORNFIELD

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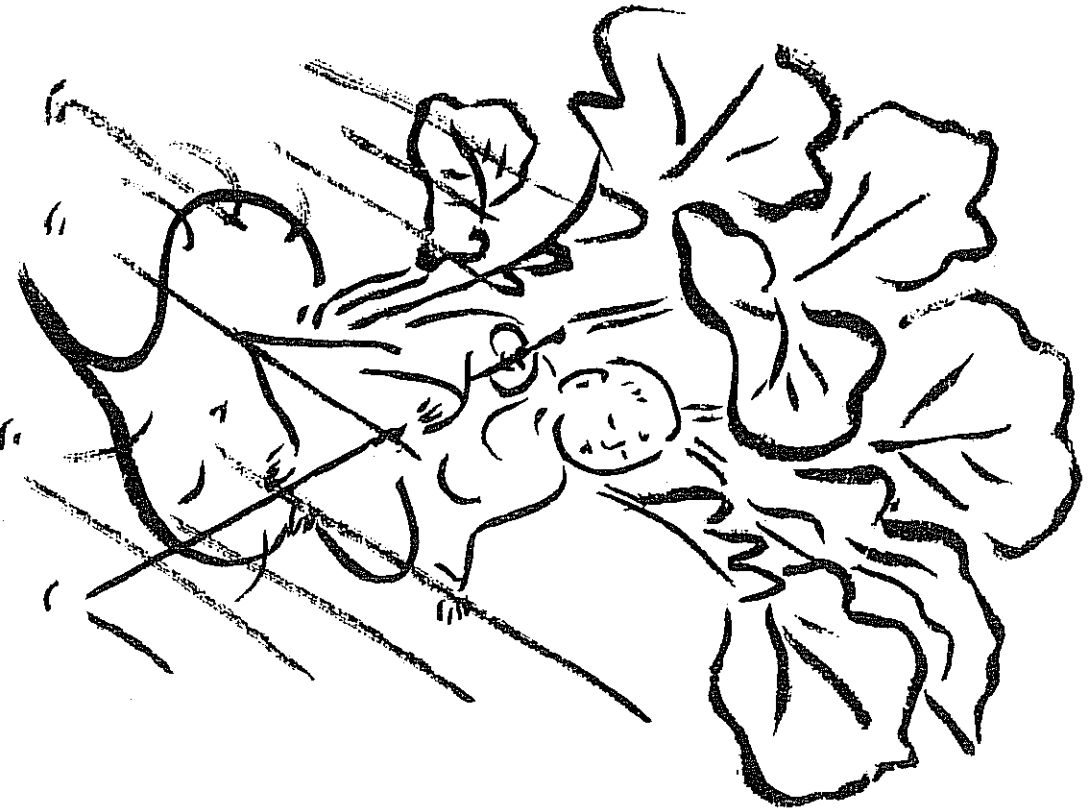
-Tich Nat Hanh

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Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA
1987

INTERBEING

I BELIEVE that the encounter between Buddhism and the West will bring about something very exciting, very important. There are important values in Western society, such as the scientific way of looking at things, the spirit of free inquiry, and democracy. If there is an encounter between Buddhism and these values, humankind will have something very new, very exciting. Let us look at some examples: Printing was invented in China and movable metal type was invented in Korea, but when the West began printing, it became a very important means for communication. Gunpowder was discovered by the Chinese, but when it came to be manufactured by Westerners, it changed the face of the Earth. And the tea that was discovered in Asia, when brought to the West, has become tea bags. When combined with the Western way of doing things, the Buddhist principle of seeing and acting nondualistically will totally change our way of life. The role of American Buddhists in bringing Buddhism into the encounter with Western civilization is very important for all of us.

Buddhism is not one. The teaching of Buddhism is many. When Buddhism enters one country, that country always acquires a new form of Buddhism. The first time I visited Buddhist communities in the United States I asked a friend, "Please



show me your Buddha, your American Buddha." The question surprised my friend, because he thought that the Buddha is universal. In fact, the Chinese have a Chinese Buddha, Tibetans have a Tibetan Buddha, and also the teaching is different. The teaching of Buddhism in this country is different from other countries. Buddhism, in order to be Buddhism, must be suitable, appropriate to the psychology and the culture of the society that it serves.

My question was a very simple question. "Where is your bodhisattva? Show me an American bodhisattva." My friend was not capable of doing that. "Show me an American monk, an American nun, or an American Buddhist Center." All these things are not apparent yet. I think we can learn from other Buddhist traditions, but you have to create your own Buddhism. I believe that out of deep practice you will have your own Buddhism very soon.

I would like to present to you a form of Buddhism that may be accepted here in the West. In the past twenty years we have been experimenting with this form of Buddhism, and it seems that it may be suitable for our modern society. It is called the Tiep Hien Order, the Order of "Interbeing."

The Tiep Hien Order was founded in Vietnam during the war. It derives from the Zen School of Lin Chi, and is the forty-second generation of this school. It is a form of engaged Buddhism. Engaged Buddhism is Buddhism in daily life, in society, and not just in a retreat center. "Tiep" and "hien" are Vietnamese words of Chinese origin. I would like to explain the meaning of these

words, because understanding them helps in understanding the spirit of this order.

"Tiep" means "to be in touch." The notion of engaged Buddhism already appears in the word "tiep." First of all, to be in touch with oneself. In modern society most of us don't want to be in touch with ourselves; we want to be in touch with other things like religion, sports, politics, a book—we want to forget ourselves. Anytime we have leisure, we want to invite something else to enter us, opening ourselves to the television and telling the television to come and colonize us. So first of all, "in touch" means in touch with oneself in order to find out the source of wisdom, understanding, and compassion in each of us. Being in touch with oneself is the meaning of meditation, to be aware of what is going on in your body, in your feelings, in your mind. That is the first meaning of "tiep."

"Tiep" also means to be in touch with Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the enlightened people in whom full understanding and compassion are tangible and effective. Being in touch with oneself means being in touch with this source of wisdom and compassion. You know that children understand that the Buddha is in themselves. One young boy claimed to be a Buddha on the first day of the retreat in Ojai, California. I told him that this is partly true, because sometimes he is Buddha, but sometimes he is not; it depends on his degree of being awake.

The second part of the meaning of "tiep" is "to continue," to make something more long-lasting. It means that the career of understanding and compassion started by Buddhas and bodhisattvas should be continued. This is possible only if we get in touch with our true self, which is like digging deep into the soil until we reach a hidden source of fresh water, and then

the well is filled. When we are in touch with our true mind, the source of understanding and compassion will spring out. This is the basis of everything. Being in touch with our true mind is necessary for the continuation of the career started by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

"Hien" means "the present time." We have to be in the present time, because only the present is real, only in the present moment can we be alive. We do not practice for the sake of the future, to be reborn in a paradise, but to be peace, to be compassion, to be joy right now. "Hien" also means "to make real, to manifest, realization." Love and understanding are not only concepts and words. They must be real things, realized, in oneself and in society. That is the meaning of the word "hien."

It is difficult to find English or French words which convey the same meaning as Tiep Hien. There is a term from the Avatamsaka Sutra, "interbeing," that conveys the spirit, so we have translated Tiep Hien as interbeing. In the sutra it is a compound term which means "mutual" and "to be." Interbeing is a new word in English, and I hope it will be accepted. We have talked about the many in the one, and the one containing the many. In one sheet of paper, we see everything else, the cloud, the forest, the logger. I am, therefore you are. You are, therefore I am. That is the meaning of the word "interbeing." We interare.

In the Order of Interbeing, there are two communities. The core community consists of lay and monastic men and women who have taken the vow to observe the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order. Before being ordained as a brother or a sister of the Order of Interbeing, one should practice at least one year in this way. Upon ordination, the person has to organize a community around himself or herself in order to continue

the practice. That community is called the extended community. This means all those who practice exactly the same way, but have not taken the vow, have not been ordained into the core community.

The laypeople who are ordained into the core community do not have any special sign at all. They don't shave their heads, they don't have a special robe, except sometimes they wear a brown jacket. What makes them different is that they observe a number of rules, one of which is to practice at least sixty days of retreat, days of mindfulness, each year, whether consecutively or divided into several periods. If they practice every Sunday, for instance, they will have fifty-two already. The people in the extended community can do that, or more, even if they don't want to be ordained. In the core community people can choose to observe celibacy or lead a family life.

At least once every two weeks, members and friends come together and recite the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. They begin with the three refuges and the two promises for children. These two promises envelop all the mindfulness trainings of the adults. The first promise is:

"I vow to develop my compassion in order to love and protect the life of people, animals, plants, and minerals."

The second promise is:

"I vow to develop understanding in order to be able to love and to live in harmony with people, animals, plants, and minerals."

So the two promises are compassion, or love, and understanding. They are the essence of the Buddha's teaching. After the children recite the three refuges and these two promises, they can go outside and play; and the adults recite their Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings.

Until recently, I have used the term "precepts" instead of "mindfulness trainings." But many Western friends told me that the word "precepts" evokes in them a strong feeling of good and evil, that if they "break" a precept, they feel they have completely failed. Precepts are different from "commandments." They are the insights born from directly observing suffering and the causes of suffering. They are the most concrete expression of the practice of mindfulness. That is why it is appropriate and helpful to describe them as "mindfulness trainings."

Precepts usually begin with admonitions concerning the body, such as "not to kill." The Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing are the opposite—the ones concerning the mind come first. According to the teachings of the Buddha, the mind is the root of everything else. These then are the Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing:

The First Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering created by fanaticism and intolerance, we are determined not to be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist teachings are guiding means to help us learn to look deeply and to develop our understanding and compassion. They are not doctrines to fight, kill, or die for.

This mindfulness training is the roar of the lion. Its spirit is characteristic of Buddhism. It is often said that the Buddha's teaching is only a raft to help you cross the river, a finger pointing to the moon. Don't mistake the finger for the moon. The raft is not the shore. If we cling to the raft, if we cling to the finger, we miss everything. We cannot, in the name of the finger or the raft, kill each other. Human life is more precious than any ideology or doctrine.

The Order of Interbeing was born in Vietnam during the war, which was a conflict between two world ideologies. In the name of ideologies and doctrines, people kill and are killed. If you have a gun, you can shoot one, two, three, five people; but if you have an ideology and stick to it, thinking it is the absolute truth, you can kill millions. This mindfulness training includes the admonition not to kill in its deepest sense. Humankind suffers very much from attachment to views. "If you don't follow this teaching, I will cut off your head." In the name of the truth, we kill each other. The world is stuck in that situation. There are people who still think that Marxism is the highest product of the human mind, that nothing can compare with it. Others think it is crazy, and that we have to destroy those people. We are caught in this situation.

One of the most basic teachings of the Buddha is that life is precious. Peace can only be achieved when we are free from fanaticism. The more you practice this mindfulness training, the deeper you will go into reality and understanding the teaching of the Buddha.

The Second Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering created by attachment to views and wrong perceptions, we are determined to avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. We shall learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to others' insights and experiences. We are aware that the knowledge we presently possess is not changeless, absolute truth. Truth is found in life, and we will observe life within and around us in every moment, ready to learn throughout our lives.

This mindfulness training arises from the first one. Remember the young father who refused to open the door to his own son, thinking the boy was already dead. The Buddha said, "If you cling to something as absolute truth and are caught in it, when truth comes in person and knocks on your door, you will refuse to let it in." A scientist with an open mind, who can question the present knowledge of science, will have more of a chance of discovering a higher truth. A Buddhist in her quest for higher understanding, also has to question her present views concerning reality. The technique of understanding is to overcome views and knowledge. The way of nonattachment from views is the basic teaching of Buddhism concerning understanding.

The Third Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering brought about when we impose our views on others, we are committed not to force others, even our children, by any means whatsoever—such as authority,

threat, money, propaganda, or indoctrination—to adopt our views. We will respect the right of others to be different and to choose what to believe and how to decide. We will, however, help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness through compassionate dialogue.

This also springs from the First Mindfulness Training. It is the spirit of free inquiry. I think Westerners can accept this, because you understand it. If you can find a way to organize it globally, it will be a happy event for the world.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training

Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help us develop compassion and find ways out of suffering, we are determined not to avoid or close our eyes before suffering. We are committed to finding ways, including personal contact, images, and sounds, to be with those who suffer, so we can understand their situation deeply and help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace, and joy.

The first Dharma talk given by the Buddha was on the Four Noble Truths. The first truth is the existence of suffering. Contact with and awareness of suffering is needed. If we don't encounter pain, illness, we won't look for the causes of pain and illness to find a remedy, a way out of the situation.

America is somehow a closed society. Americans are not very aware of what is going on outside of America. Life here is so busy that even if you watch television and read the newspaper, and

the images from outside flash by, there is no real contact. I hope you will find some way to nourish the awareness of the existence of suffering in the world. Of course, inside America there is also suffering, and it is important to stay in touch with that. But much of the suffering in the West is unnecessary and can vanish when we see the real suffering of other people. Sometimes we suffer because of some psychological fact. We cannot get out of our self, and so we suffer. If we get in touch with the suffering in the world and are moved by that suffering, we may come forward to help the people who are suffering, and our own suffering may just vanish.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training

Aware that true happiness is rooted in peace, solidity, freedom, and compassion, and not in wealth or fame, we are determined not to take as the aim of our life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure, nor to accumulate wealth while millions are hungry and dying. We are committed to living simply and sharing our time, energy, and material resources with those in need. We will practice mindful consuming, not using alcohol, drugs, or any other products that bring toxins into our own and the collective body and consciousness.

The Eight Realizations of Great Beings Sutra says, "The human mind is always searching for possessions, and never feels fulfilled. Bodhisattvas move in the opposite direction and follow the principle of self-sufficiency. They live a simple life in order to practice the way, and consider the realization of perfect understanding as their only career." In the context of our modern soci-

ety, simple living also means to remain as free as possible from the destructive social and economic machine, and to avoid stress, depression, high blood pressure, and other modern diseases. We should make every effort to avoid the pressures and anxieties that fill most modern lives. The only way out is to consume less. Once we are able to live simply and happily, we are better able to help others.

The Sixth Mindfulness Training

Aware that anger blocks communication and creates suffering, we are determined to take care of the energy of anger when it arises and to recognize and transform the seeds of anger that lie deep in our consciousness. When anger comes up, we are determined not to do or say anything, but to practice mindful breathing or mindful walking and acknowledge, embrace, and look deeply into our anger. We will learn to look with the eyes of compassion at those we think are the cause of our anger.

We have to be aware of irritation or anger as it arises, and try to understand it. Once we understand, we are better able to forgive and love. Meditation on compassion means meditation on understanding. If we do not understand, we cannot love.

"Learn to look at other beings with the eyes of compassion" is a quote from the Lotus Sutra chapter on Avalokiteshvara. You might like to write this down and put it in your sitting room. The original Chinese is only five words: "compassionate eyes looking living beings." The first time I recited the Lotus Sutra, when I

came to these five words, I was silenced. I knew that these five words are enough to guide my whole life.

The Seventh Mindfulness Training

Aware that life is available only in the present moment and that it is possible to live happily in the here and now, we are committed to training ourselves to live deeply each moment of daily life. We will try not to lose ourselves in dispersion or be carried away by regrets about the past, worries about the future, or craving, anger, or jealousy in the present. We will practice mindful breathing to come back to what is happening in the present moment. We are determined to learn the art of mindful living by touching the wondrous, refreshing, and healing elements that are inside and around us, and by nourishing seeds of joy, peace, love, and understanding in ourselves, thus facilitating the work of transformation and healing in our consciousness.

This mindfulness training is in the middle. It is the heart of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, the most important one: to live in awareness. Without this training, without mindfulness, the other mindfulness trainings cannot be observed completely. It is like a carrying pole. In Asia they used to carry things with a pole, and put the middle of the pole on their shoulders. This training is like the middle of the pole that you carry on your shoulders.

The Eighth Mindfulness Training

Aware that the lack of communication always brings separation and suffering, we are committed to training ourselves in the practice of compassionate listening and loving speech. We will learn to listen deeply without judging or reacting and refrain from uttering words that can create discord or cause the community to break. We will make every effort to keep communications open and to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

We now come to the second set of mindfulness trainings, concerning speech. The first seven trainings deal with mind, then two with speech, and five with body. This mindfulness training is about reconciliation, the effort to make peace, not only in your family, but in society as well. In order to help reconcile a conflict, we have to be in touch with both sides. We must transcend the conflict; if we are still in the conflict, it is difficult to reconcile. We have to have a nondualistic viewpoint in order to listen to both sides and understand. The world needs people like this for the work of reconciliation, people with the capacity of understanding and compassion.

The Ninth Mindfulness Training

Aware that words can create suffering or happiness, we are committed to learning to speak truthfully and constructively, using only words that inspire hope and confidence. We are determined not to say untruthful things for the sake of per-

sonal interest or to impress people, nor to utter words that might cause division or hatred. We will not spread news that we do not know to be certain nor criticize or condemn things of which we are not sure. We will do our best to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten our safety.

The words we speak can create love, trust, and happiness around us, or create a hell. We should be careful about what we say. If we tend to talk too much, we should become aware of it and learn to speak less. We must become aware of our speech and the results of our speaking. There is a gatha that can be recited before picking up the telephone:

Words can travel across thousands of miles.

May my words create mutual understanding
and love.

May they be as beautiful as gems,
as lovely as flowers.

We should speak constructively. In our speech we can try not to cause misunderstanding, hatred, or jealousy; but rather to increase understanding and mutual acceptance. This may even help reduce our telephone bills. The Ninth Mindfulness Training also requires frankness and courage. How many of us are brave enough to denounce injustice in a situation in which speaking the truth might threaten our own safety?

The Tenth Mindfulness Training

Aware that the essence and aim of a Sangha is the practice of understanding and compassion, we are determined not to use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit or transform our community into a political instrument. A spiritual community should, however, take a clear stand against oppression and injustice and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.

This does not mean that we must be silent about injustice. It just means we should do it with awareness and not take sides. We should speak the truth and not just weigh the political consequences. If we take sides, we will lose our power to help mediate the conflict.

During one visit to America, I met with a group of people who wanted to raise funds to help the government of Vietnam rebuild the country. I asked whether they would also like to do something for the boat people, and they said no. They thought that politically it is not good to talk about the boat people, because that would discredit the government of Vietnam. In order to succeed in one thing, they have to refrain from doing something that they think is right.

The Eleventh Mindfulness Training

Aware that great violence and injustice have been done to our environment and society, we are committed to not live with

a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. We will do our best to select a livelihood that helps realize our ideal of understanding and compassion. Aware of global economic, political, and social realities, we will behave responsibly as consumers and as citizens, not investing in companies that deprive others of their chance to live.

This is an extremely hard training to observe. If you are lucky enough to have a vocation that helps you realize your ideal of compassion, you still have to understand more deeply. If I am a teacher, I am very glad to have this job helping children. I am glad that I am not a butcher who kills cows and pigs. Yet the son and the daughter of the butcher come to my class, and I teach them. They profit from my right livelihood. My son and daughter eat the meat that the butcher prepares. We are linked together. I cannot say that my livelihood is perfectly right. It cannot be. Observing this mindfulness training includes finding ways to realize a collective right livelihood.

You may try to follow a vegetarian diet, to lessen the killing of animals, but you cannot completely avoid the killing. When you drink a glass of water, you kill many tiny living beings. Even in your dish of vegetables, there are quite a lot of them, boiled or fried. I am aware that my vegetarian dish is not completely vegetarian, and I think that if my teacher, the Buddha, were here, he could not avoid that either. The problem is whether we are determined to go in the direction of compassion or not. If we are, then can we reduce the suffering to a minimum? If I lose my direction, I have to look for the North Star, and I go to the north. That does not mean I expect to arrive at the North Star. I just want to go in that direction.

The Twelfth Mindfulness Training

Aware that much suffering is caused by war and conflict, we are determined to cultivate nonviolence, understanding, and compassion in our daily lives, to promote peace education, mindful mediation, and reconciliation within families, communities, nations, and in the world. We are determined not to kill and not to let others kill. We will diligently practice **deep looking with our Sangha to discover better ways to protect life and prevent war.**

The defense budgets in Western countries are still enormous. Studies show that by stopping the arms race, we will have more than enough money to erase poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and many diseases from the world. This mindfulness training applies not only to humans, but to all living beings. As we have seen, no one can observe this training to perfection; however, the essence is to respect and protect life, to do our best to protect life. This means not killing, and also not letting other people kill. It is difficult. Those who try to observe this training have to be working for peace in order to have peace in themselves. Preventing war is much better than protesting against the war. Protesting the war is too late.

The Thirteenth Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, we are committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the

well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. We will practice generosity by sharing our time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. We are determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. We will respect the property of others, but will try to prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other beings.

Bringing to our awareness the pain caused by social injustice, the Thirteenth Mindfulness Training urges us to work for a more livable society. This training is linked with the Fourth Mindfulness Training (the awareness of suffering), the Fifth Mindfulness Training (lifestyle), the Eleventh Mindfulness Training (right livelihood), and the Twelfth Mindfulness Training (the protection of life). In order to deeply comprehend this training, we must also meditate on these four mindfulness trainings.

To develop ways to prevent others from profiting from human suffering and the suffering of other beings is the duty of legislators and politicians. However, each of us can also act in this direction. To some degree, we can be close to oppressed people and help them protect their right to life and defend themselves against oppression and exploitation. Letting people profit from human suffering or the suffering of other beings is something we cannot do. As a community we must try to prevent this. How to work for justice in our own city is a problem we have to consider. The bodhisattvas' vows—to help all sentient beings—are immense. Each of us can vow to sit in their rescue boats.

The Fourteenth Mindfulness Training

(For lay members): Aware that sexual relations motivated by craving cannot dissipate the feeling of loneliness but will create more suffering. Frustration, and isolation, we are determined not to engage in sexual relations without mutual understanding, love, and a long-term commitment. In sexual relations, we must be aware of future suffering that may be caused. We know that to preserve the happiness of ourselves and others, we must respect the rights and commitments of ourselves and others. We will do everything in our power to protect children from sexual abuse and to protect couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. We will treat our bodies with respect and preserve our vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of our bodhisattva ideal. We will be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world, and will meditate on the world into which we are bringing new beings.

(For monastic members): Aware that the aspiration of a monk or a nun can only be realized when he or she wholly leaves behind the bonds of worldly love, we are committed to practicing chastity and to helping others protect themselves. We are aware that loneliness and suffering cannot be alleviated by the coming together of two bodies in a sexual relationship, but by the practice of true understanding and compassion. We know that a sexual relationship will destroy our life as a monk or a nun, will prevent us from realizing our ideal of serving living beings, and will harm others. We are determined not to suppress or mistreat our body or to look

upon our body as only an instrument, but to learn to handle our body with respect. We are determined to preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of our bodhisattva ideal.

You may have the impression that this mindfulness training discourages having children, but it is not so. It only urges us to be aware of what we are doing. Is our world safe enough to bring in more children? If you want to bring more children into the world, then do something for the world.

This training also has to do with celibacy. Traditionally, Buddhist monks were celibate for at least three reasons. The first is that the monks in the time of the Buddha were urged to practice meditation for most of the day. They had to be in contact with the people in the village in order to teach them the Dharma, and in order to ask for some food for the day. If a monk had to support a family, he would not be able to perform his duties as a monk.

The second reason is that sexual energy had to be preserved for meditation. In the religious and medical traditions of Asia, the human person was said to have three sources of energy: sexual, breath, and spirit. Sexual energy is what you spend during sexual intercourse. Breath energy is the kind of energy you spend when you talk too much and breathe too little. Spirit energy is energy that you spend when you worry too much and do not sleep well. If you spend these three sources of energy, your body will not be strong enough to penetrate deeply into reality and realize the way. Buddhist monks observed celibacy, not because of moral admonition, but to conserve energy. Someone on a long fast knows how important it is to preserve these three sources of energy.

The third reason Buddhist monks observed celibacy is the question of suffering. Even today, if we go to India we see many children without food and many children sick without medicine. One woman can give birth to ten, twelve children, without being able to feed two or three properly. The existence of suffering is the first truth in Buddhism. To bring a child into the world is a great responsibility. If you are wealthy, maybe you can do it with no problem. But if you are poor, this is a real concern. To be reborn means first to be reborn in your children. Your children are a continuation of yourself. You are reborn in them, and you continue the cycle of suffering. Aware that having more children in the society of his day would be to make them suffer, the Buddha urged the monks not to have children. I think that during the past 2,500 years, Buddhist monks in many countries have helped curb the birth rate. That is quite important.

The Fourteenth Mindfulness Training urges us to respect our own body and to maintain our energy for the realization of the Way. Not only meditation, but any efforts that are required to change the world require energy. We should take good care of ourselves.

In my opinion, the liberation of sexual behavior in the West has caused a number of good results, but has also caused some problems. The liberation of women, because of modern birth control methods, has been something very real. In the past, young girls in Asia as well as Europe had enormous problems and some even committed suicide when they became pregnant. Since the discovery of birth control, these kinds of tragedies have lessened considerably. But the liberation of sexual behavior has also caused much stress, much trouble. I think the fact that many people suffer from depression is partly because of that.

Please meditate on this problem. It is an important problem for Western society.

If you wish to have children, please do something for the world you will bring them into. That will make you someone who works for peace, in one way or another.

