



“A Real Soulmate of the Buddha”

21 Day Retreat for the International Plum Village Community

SAVE THE DATE: June 1st – 21st, 2018

Dear Thầy,
Dear Dharma Friends,

July 8th, 2017

We hope you are well and happy and enjoying the practice where ever you are on this beautiful planet. It is arrival day for the Summer Opening today. We have a full hamlet for all four weeks this summer, with lots of children and teenagers. A dozen or so of yellow lotus flowers in our Upper Hamlet pond have ascended above the canopy of leaves and blooming slowly, almost as if they're taking turn to appear on stage. Every evening as we walk to and from the Still Water Meditation Hall alongside the pond, I am reminded of our beloved Teacher and how he loved to teach using a lotus flower to remind us of our true nature of interbeing. May we be reminded of this timeless message and to touch this ultimate nature as much as possible in our daily lives.

We write to share a happiness that next year 2018, Plum Village will be hosting our bi-annual 21 Day Retreat once again from June 1st to June 21st. We all know it was the joy of Thầy to participate and to share during this special retreat. He commented many times of the wonderful concentrated energy of the seasoned practitioners that came during these extended retreats, to see everyone flourishing in the dharma and nourishing each other in brotherhood and sisterhood.

Although the retreat is open to all people, experienced or new, we extend a special welcome to all our OI members and seasoned Plum Village practitioners in the international community. Please save the date! We know that our Teacher built this community within the spirit of family, of fourfold Sangha, where spiritual brothers and sisters, spiritual uncles and aunties come together regularly to meet and support each other, to learn and share with one another, and to encourage and collaborate with each other in our engagement and service.

2016 21 Day Vulture Peak Gathering

Last June 2016, we hosted our 21 Day retreat even though our Teacher was ill and could not offer spoken teachings. It was a wonderful gathering of elders and youngers in our OI community from all over the world. Many of the first OI members from the days of the School of Youth for Social Service came from Việt Nam. Some of our most senior members who Thầy ordained in the West also came to share their experience and dharma.

It was most inspiring to see monastics and lay Dharma Teachers teaching side by side. No one will ever forget the wonderful opening sharings of Sister Dinh Nghiem and Brother Anh Thu or that of Sister Chan Khong and Cheri Maples (blessings to her practice of recovery!) and many other pairs of lay and monastic teachers teaching side by side. They were clearly the living Bodhisattvas of our time, embodying the practice and sharing the wonderful Dharma from their own lives. We also heard from many seniors about the history of Plum Village and the formation of the Mahasangha in the West.

Thầy would make surprise appearances at some of these gatherings or sometimes stroll by in his wheelchair with many friends following behind. We could feel Thầy's trust and love, because when he was healthy and able, he made every effort to be with the Sangha, offering his presence and spiritual energy to all of us.

Togetherness

This year, *the gathering will be for the entire 21 day period*, unlike the previous year when it was in two segments. We got many positive feedbacks encouraging us to keep the retreat in one segment. We know regrettably that this will affect many of you traveling from afar and who have work responsibility or other family commitments. Perhaps our other centers might join us to host a simultaneous retreat or they can make use of the internet in some way.

Once registration opens, we will arrange for the first month to be open only for members of the Order and then open up for the general public, so keep an eye out for the open-registration date. During this retreat, we will also transmit the 14 Mindfulness Trainings of the Order for all qualified international OI aspirants. The retreat will be conducted in English with respective translations.



The 21 Day retreat tradition was an expression of love from our Teacher as with the 3 Month Winter Retreat. He revived the 3 Month Rains tradition of Buddha's time and encouraged all his students to respect this 3 month period by not going out. He made extra effort to teach and created favorable conditions for his students to progress on the path and to deepen their practice.

He also knew that it was difficult for many people to dedicate 3 months to apply themselves to the Dharma Sangha, that is why he created the 21 Day-3 Week tradition so that those who could come, can benefit from an extended uninterrupted period of practice. We remember how lovely it was to hear Thầy describe, from the Anapanasati Sutta when the Buddha decided to remain for another month after the rains retreat because the Buddha had seen how much the monks progressed in their practice.

It is in this spirit of love, of togetherness, that we invite all of you to join and help us continue Thầy's love and trust by coming together and sharing our practice.

Theme: A REAL SOULMATE OF THE BUDDHA "Tri Kỷ Cửa Bụt"

This was the theme title of the winter retreat in 2012-2013 when Thầy taught and shed light on many of the fundamental teachings of the Buddha on karma, retribution, samsara, conditioned genesis, the Twelve Links, the Three Doors of Liberation, Nirvana, and many other Buddhist teachings. Thầy shared that it was like he was weeding the teachings of the many wrong and unskillful interpretations and concepts that latter slowly found their way into the basic teachings that the Buddha taught. He taught in Vietnamese and during this 21 Day Retreat, we will revisit these seminal teachings of Thầy and discover whether our understanding and application of the Buddha's teaching is correct and can help us touch the ultimate reality and true freedom.

In light of this theme, we will also look deeply at the practice of mindfulness as taught by the Buddha, our Patriarchs, and Thầy to see whether our understanding and application is correct and in line with what the Buddha taught. We will look together at how mindfulness is being taught and applied today: what are the effects of secularizing and segregating the mindfulness practice as just a tool and not as part of a complete and integrated spiritual path. What are the limits and cautions as we apply and engage with the different areas and people of society?

We know that the Buddhist Path is numerous and will continue to grow deeper and wider with the help of the third jewel, the Sangha and with the insights of the collective body. The Buddha, the Dharma will be sustained by the true practice of the Sangha. This is Thầy's legacy and masterpiece - the Sangha body, the Sangha eye, the Sangha wisdom – one that he spent his whole life building and enhancing. This special 3 weeks retreat is also Thầy's masterpiece, his vision for the community to come together and build brotherhood and sisterhood, to gather our insights and update to changing conditions, and to see whether we are truly and still a soulmate of our Root Teacher.

Dear OI Siblings and dharma friends, we are grateful that you are out there doing the dharma work, known or unknown, continuing Thầy's legacy and love in the ten directions. You keep the flame of love alive, showing people the way through your authentic human practice and your choosing to come together. It is an exciting time, a turbulent one for our Mother Earth and there is so much human energy potential to be directed towards the right path. And how lucky we are to have a path, to have a spiritual community; we no longer live in fear or despair. Yes, there is so much to do and nothing to do at the same time.

In gratitude,

Brother Pháp Dung
for the Plum Village DTs