

## **Heartland Community of Mindful Living Order of Interbeing Aspirant Training**

### **Introduction**

"The mentoring program is a guide for the study and practice of Buddhist teachings in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. Its intent is to stimulate individual and collective transformation, increase happiness and stability, develop bodhichitta, and encourage a deepening mindfulness practice. We hope that practice with this program will support aspirants in their efforts to bring happiness to others and relieve suffering, and to build and support Sanghas. These are the real reasons for receiving Order of Interbeing ordination.

All those involved in training—mentors, aspirants, and local Sanghas—should be aware that the program requires study and practice. Regular practice is essential to realize the depth of the teachings leading to transformation. Mindfulness is at the cores of all efforts.

As the Charter explains, an aspirant must have received the Five Mindfulness Trainings. The aspirant then announces his or her desire to train for OI ordination by written letter or application to the local Order members or to a Dharma teacher. One or more OI core community members then mentor the aspirant for a minimum of one year. When the aspirant and mentors perceive that the aspirant is ready, the mentors write to Thay recommending ordination. The letter of recommendation indicates the aspirant is deeply engaged in active, daily practice that will allow him or her to achieve increasing stability, happiness, and transformation. Academic understanding alone would not support a recommendation. In addition, Order members and aspirants are expected to actively participate in and support their Sangha. As Thay said "Only when you have the feeling that you have enough time, energy, and interest to take care of a community should you ask for formal ordination." After careful consideration, Thay may issue a formal ordination invitation."

—Minh Tran, Chan Huy and Rowan Conrad, True Dharma Strength in a proposal offered on behalf of the Order of Interbeing Education and Training Committee.

Chan Huy and Rowan make some important points about the OI aspirant training process:

1. We aspire to the order to deepen our mindfulness through the practice of building and supporting Sanghas.
2. The aspiration process requires active daily practice.
3. An aspirant announces his or her intent to begin the process by writing a letter to the local order members and to a Dharma Teacher, Bethany, David and David-ji, and Chan Huy in our case.
4. Aspirant training requires a commitment of at least one year.
5. When the local order members and Dharma Teacher perceive the aspirant is ready, they will recommend ordination to Thay.
6. Acceptance into the OI aspirant training program does not guarantee ordination.

### **Core Training Program**

As a result of reflecting on our own aspiration processes and in consultation with Chan Huy, we have come up with the following Core Training Program:

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- 1) **Subscribe to and read the Mindfulness Bell** in order to keep in touch with the greater Sangha.
- 2) **Submit an article to the Mindfulness Bell** about an aspect of practice.
- 3) **Study deeply Thay's book Interbeing**. Become familiar with the origins of the Order of Interbeing, the conditions for membership and the practice of the 14 Mindfulness Trainings. Write your own commentary on each of the 14 Mindfulness Trainings. Share your experience of how they inform your practice. Chan Huy states that this text contains core teachings that make this form of Buddhism different than others.
- 4) **Study deeply the following books by Thay:**
  - a) **Being Peace**. He offers his essential teachings on taking care of our suffering, the three jewels, the five aggregates, interbeing, gatha practice, working for peace, taking care of our anger, beginning anew and finding the peace within ourselves, so we may find peace with others.
  - b) **Breathe! You are Alive: The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing**. This is the basis for our practice of mindfulness of breathing.
  - c) **Our Appointment with Life: Discourse on Living Happily in the Present Moment**. This commentary of the Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone and the Elder Sutra is the basis for our practice of dwelling in the present moment.
  - d) **Joyfully Together**. This book aptly describes how to create and nourish a harmonious community.
- 5) If you have not done so already, **develop a daily meditation practice**. As little as 20 minutes of sitting or walking meditation each day can bring great peace and awakening.
- 6) **Devote one day each week to mindfulness practice**. The practice of 60 Days of Mindfulness yearly is required for aspirants and ordained members of the OI. Thay describes a day of mindfulness in his book The Miracle of Mindfulness. Your local Sangha mentors can offer suggestions as well.
- 7) **Keep a mindfulness diary**. During your weekly day of mindfulness, spend one-half hour recording your reflections on your practice. Keep it personal. Avoid the academic or theoretical.
- 8) **Review and summarize your mindfulness diary monthly** in a letter or conversation with your local Sangha mentors. Have face to face contact with your local Sangha mentors at least twice a year.
- 9) **Recite the 14 Mindfulness Trainings monthly**, preferably with your Sangha.
- 10) **Attend at least one retreat in our tradition every year**. If you have not attended a retreat **led by Thich Nhat Hanh** in the last two years, do so during your aspiration period. Thay advises that each person who considers him or herself his student attend a retreat with him at least every two years.
- 11) **Participate in local and regional Sangha activities** such as Mindfulness Training recitations, Days of Mindfulness and retreats.
- 12) **Help with organization tasks of your local and regional Sangha** such as setting up the meditation hall, promoting Sangha activities and leading dharma discussions.

### **Personalized Program**

Certainly, the study and practice of the teachings can be as broad or deep as you wish. With this in mind we have developed the following Personalized Program. Choose one or more of these activities to enhance the Core Program. Discuss your aspirations for your chosen activity or activities with your mentor.

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- 1) Become familiar with the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh by studying the Heart of the Buddha's Teachings. Refer to Thay's Sutra commentaries as needed for amplification.
- 2) Read Old Path, White Clouds. Gain an appreciation of the life and times of the Buddha.
- 3) Be able to perform the following Sangha-Building tasks:
  - a) Share the practice of mindful breathing with a newcomer
  - b) Offer your understanding of the the Five Mindfulness Trainings, in general and specifically
  - c) Explain the significance of the Sangha Karman procedure
  - d) Conduct the Five Mindfulness Trainings recitation ceremony
  - e) Define "Interbeing" and explain Thay's teachings on Interbeing
  - f) Offer your understanding of the Order of Interbeing's history to a newcomer
  - g) Bell Mastering
  - h) Sing common chants and songs
  - i) Introduce the practice at a retreat, Sangha gathering or Day of Mindfulness
  - j) Conduct a formal meditation service
  - k) Explain and practice Beginning Anew
  - l) Offer your experience and understanding of the Peace Treaty and mindfulness of anger
  - m) Share your understanding and experience of Buddhist Psychology, as taught by Thay in his book Touching Peace.
  - n) Tell the story of the life of the Buddha, his enlightenment and convey your understanding of its significance to a newcomer.
- 4) Organize and lead a Day of Mindfulness in your community.
- 5) Engage your practice by serving your community in some way. Examples could be volunteering at a local prison, jail, homeless shelter, food pantry or hospice, working with peace and justice groups, or other areas of need that inspire you.

We are so happy when someone declares their aspiration to join us in the practice of the 14 Mindfulness Trainings. The aspiration period can be a time of great joy and growth for aspirants and mentors alike. We applaud you for taking this step in your efforts to uphold the Bodhisattva vow to save all beings.

With heartfelt welcome,

David – True Wonderful Lamp  
Bethany – The Practice of True Emptiness