



COMMUNAUTE BOUDDHIQUE ZEN
VILLAGE DES PRUNIER

Official Announcement

Plum Village, France
8 September 2015

Dear Beloved Community,

It has been two months now since Thay arrived in America, with the hope of getting more intensive treatment to recover from his stroke. Thanks to the incredible support of our Beloved Community we have been able to obtain the very best doctors and therapists for Thay, across all treatment modalities. We are happy to be able to share that Thay is benefitting from the best of Western, Eastern, conventional, and alternative medical approaches. Thay is receiving acupuncture every day, as well as physical therapy, speech therapy, osteopathy, and neurofeedback, with the support and oversight of a phenomenal team of doctors at UCSF.

With Thay's advanced age, the severity of the hemorrhage, as well as various complex health issues, recovery is extremely challenging. When Thay first started physical therapy, Thay was very engaged and enthusiastic with his therapists and the program that they had created for him. Preparing for Thay's sessions of physical therapy, we could all feel the joyful determination in his body language. We would tell him, "Thay, let's get ready for physical therapy" and Thay would raise his fist in the air and smile, as if to say "Let's go!"

However, the level of fatigue and physical discomfort that Thay was experiencing when we first arrived in the US limited his ability to participate in the sessions. With the help of the whole team of doctors and therapists we have been able to create an integrated program of treatment which allows Thay to have restful sleep, and more alertness, ease and peace in his body, enabling him to more fully participate in the sessions of therapy.

A recent breakthrough has been that whilst using a partial weight support walking frame, Thay's right leg has started to make small movements, initiating the stepping motion.

Thay has received training from three different speech therapists over the last two months, one of whom was able to help Thay speak his first words since the stroke. It was a legendary day. We are happy to be able to share his very first words:

In, out (several times)

Happy (several times)

Thank you (several times)

and "*Vui quá*" (meaning, "So happy," in Vietnamese)

It was like a guided meditation. Everyone was crying and laughing at the same time, including Thay.

Unfortunately, as the speech therapist who helped him to achieve this breakthrough lives far from San Francisco, she had to go back home after three days and Thay lost some momentum. We have tried a number

of other speech therapists but have not been able to maintain Thay's initial rapid progress. We are still looking for a local speech therapist, ideally fluent in Vietnamese, who would be able to work with Thay several times per week.

Besides all the medical treatments and therapy, Thay has been able to enjoy the Bay Area, going to visit the beach at least twice a week, enjoying beautiful views of the city and the Golden Gate Bridge, being in touch with nature and the wonderful fresh Pacific air. Every day Thay continues to remind us to enjoy the wonders of life, often pointing at the blue sky and helping us come back to the present moment. Sometimes Thay playfully switches roles with the doctors and therapists, putting a finger on his lips and inviting them to stop. In these moments he often indicates for us to prepare tea so his doctors can have a chance to enjoy a cup of tea in mindfulness. One therapist knelt down by his side, looking out of the window and began to cry silently. She later shared with us that it was perhaps the first time in her life that she had really stopped and appreciated the blue of the sky.

A very good friend of Thay's came to visit and shared his own experience of balancing his intention to live in the present moment with the natural wish for a loved one to recover as much as they can. He said that every moment with Thay is a "bonus moment," and that all we have to do is cherish these bonus moments. Every moment that Thay has to breathe, to smile, and to enjoy the blue sky is indeed a bonus moment, reminding us all to appreciate life fully, without expectation, peacefully accepting things as they manifest.

This is the spirit in which we have been continuing our large mindfulness retreats, both in Europe and now in the United States. We know that it has long been Thay's deepest wish to build a Beloved Community of practitioners, and it has been powerful and joyful for thousands of us to come together and realise that dream in France, Germany and now here at Blue Cliff Monastery in New York, where we have just finished a 5-day retreat. We have generated a strong collective energy in our silent sitting meditations under starlit skies, and in our walking meditations along streams and forest paths. We have sung together, laughed together, cried together, and celebrated the miracle of community. We see so clearly our Teacher's presence here with us at this retreat; he is not only in San Francisco. As Thay said in 2009 when for health reasons he could not be at the retreat in Colorado:

The presence of the Sangha carries Thay's presence. Please let me walk with your strong feet, breathe with your healthy lungs and smile with your beautiful smiles.

With great gratitude we thank you for keeping your practice alive, with your mindful breathing, your mindful steps, and your gentle smiles. When we come together to generate a strong collective energy of mindfulness, compassion and insight, we are manifesting Thay's vision for our collective future. Together we are discovering ways to continue Thay's legacy of bringing peace, happiness and healing to ourselves and the world.

Please join us at our retreats and events: tnhtour.org

With love and trust,

The Plum Village Monks and Nuns

Future official reports on Thay's recovery will be posted from time to time at plumvillage.org, langmai.org, villagedespruniers.org, and www.facebook.com/thichnhathanh.