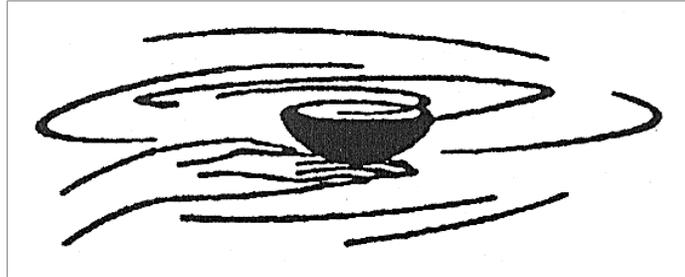


JOINING THE ORDER OF INTERBEING

Guidelines for Application for members of the UK Community of Interbeing



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Amended and agreed at Order Gathering April 2010

What is the Order?

THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF INTERBEING

The *Tiep Hien Order* or *Order of Interbeing* was first established by Thich Nhat Hanh in 1964, during the Vietnam War. At this stage it comprised a small number of dedicated followers who were involved in social work and were committed to the principles of Engaged Buddhism. The Order was founded on the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and a Charter written by Thây.

Since Thây (meaning teacher) and Sister Chân Không moved to France, they have offered retreats both at Plum Village and throughout the world. An ever-increasing number of practitioners, from all parts of the globe, have received the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and joined the Order of the Order of Interbeing.

THE UK ORDER OF INTERBEING

The Community of Interbeing was formed in 1994 and is the name given to the network of people in the United Kingdom who practise Buddhism according to Thay's teachings. The UK Sangha is therefore part of the wider international Sangha of many thousands of practitioners worldwide, all of whom follow Thây's mindfulness practice and teachings.

The UK Community of Interbeing is a network of local Sanghas, each with their own activities and contacts. At the national level, the organisation is governed by a group of trustees who meet four or more times a year.

Several thousand people in the UK have received the Five Mindfulness Trainings and a smaller number – about 40 – have also received the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and joined the Order of Interbeing. Four UK Order members – Martin Pitt, Mai Nguyen, Jane Coatesworth and Murray Corke – have received Dharmacharya transmission from Thay and become Dharma-teacher.

UK Order members have gatherings twice a year, some of which are shared with Aspirants.

WHO JOINS THE ORDER?

Some members of the *UK Community of Interbeing* choose to also become leaders of the practice by joining the *Order of Interbeing*. The Order invites those who lead the practice, have a commitment to sangha building and a close connection with Thich Nhat Hanh and this tradition to apply.

Becoming an Order member is neither a qualification nor an indication of authority. It is a commitment made by people who have benefitted from the practice to share it with others.

In general, someone who applies to receive the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings (an “Aspirant”) will have been involved with the practice for a sustained period. He or she will have already received the Five Wonderful Mindfulness Trainings, and will have maintained a continuous practice, probably for several years. In addition, an aspirant is likely to be an active member of their local and/or national Sangha and be known to a number of people in their Sangha.

Is this for me?

The following series of guidelines were provided by Plum Village for aspirants to consider before making an application to join the Order. Aspirants, with assistance from Local and Order members and mentors, should be able to answer “Yes” confidently to the following statements:

- “ I have a regular practice and feel a close connection to the tradition of Buddhism as transmitted by Thich Nhat Hanh, The Order of Interbeing and Plum Village.
- “ I have received the Five Wonderful Mindfulness Trainings. *(There will be a period of a year between receiving the Five Wonderful Mindfulness Trainings and the Fourteen Wonderful Mindfulness Trainings. An application can be made before this period is complete with a view to receiving them after the period is complete).*
- “ I practise in harmony with my local Sangha and have experience of practice with the wider community. *(for example: on retreat, on national retreats or at Plum Village).*
- “ I have a commitment to Sangha building and am aware of the responsibilities which accompany this. *(If there is already a local group this does not mean that the applicant has to organise a group elsewhere. Rather, the applicant should be making a positive contribution to the life of the Sangha.)*
- “ I am sufficiently familiar with the practice to be able to explain it to others, and to lead the practice.
- “ I am able to explain to other people, from my own experience, basic teachings including the Mindfulness Trainings. *(Applicants should consider whether they have taken them sufficiently into their own life that they can share them with others.)*
- “ *(For aspirants in a long-term relationship)* I am sure that receiving ordination will not threaten the harmony of my relationship. I have the support of my partner/spouse.
- “ I am confident that joining the Order will not have a negative effect on the happiness of my family.
- “ I am able to demonstrate the ability to change by having made some progress or breakthrough in my own life.

How do I join?

A Sangha member is accepted into the Order of Interbeing (The *Tiep Hien* Order or *Order*) when he or she formally receives the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. This is an important step for the practitioner and is taken only after much reflection on the significance of the Mindfulness Trainings and the Order in their life.

As the international community of practice has grown it is not possible for Thây to know personally everyone who wishes to receive the Fourteen Wonderful Mindfulness Trainings, he has requested that the national and local Sanghas in each country be responsible for recommending practitioners for ordination.

Existing Order members in each Sangha have a particular (though not exclusive) responsibility in this regard. For this reason, Aspirants are encouraged to have good contact with at least one Order member, if at all possible.

The Order of Interbeing in the UK has established a small Ordination Guidance Group to co-ordinate the application process. This process ensures that all relevant Order members are informed and consulted about each aspirant's request for ordination. It also provides a clear path for anyone in the UK Sangha who wishes to be considered for ordination into the Order.

A brown jacket in a monastic style is worn by Order members on formal occasions and at times where it is helpful for people to identify someone they can speak to (for instance, on a public retreat). OI members may choose where and when they wear their brown jacket and need to judge whether wearing it is helpful to themselves and to those around them. It is not meant to be used as an indication of authority.

Guidelines for joining the Order and the basic steps in the application process for UK Sangha members are given below.

GUIDELINES TO ASPIRANTS

Aspirants are asked to

- **return** the form with supporting signatures from their local Sangha (and Order members who know them), and a personal letter of aspiration.
- **reflect** on, and talk to others about, their aspiration. Some key questions for reflection are:- Where am I with my practice? What is the next concrete step for me in the direction of solidity and freedom? What is my motivation for joining the Order? What do I bring to the Order? Where is the focus of my practice now? How will I engage with my practice?
- **enquire** through compassionate dialogue whether they have the wholehearted and unanimous support of their immediate family, especially their partner, their local Sangha and of those Order members who know them.
- **wait** - expect to spend a period of at least a year from sending in the form before receiving the Trainings. During this time they are encouraged to meet and communicate regularly with one or, preferably, more mentors (see section on mentoring below).

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

1. A practitioner who is interested in becoming an aspirant writes to the secretary of the Ordination Guidance Group (currently Martin Pitt) requesting their application form.
2. After reflection and consultation with Order members (especially potential mentors), their local Sangha and others in the practice, the practitioner completes and returns the form (sending copies to all the Ordination Guidance Group members, mentors, and others concerned). At this point the practitioner becomes an 'aspirant' to join the Order. Before submitting the forms, a practitioner should check with a member of the Ordination Guidance Group about his or her choice of mentors.
3. There follows a period (of at least a year) during which time the aspirant is recommended to receive mentoring (preferably from more than one mentor) and to consult widely and receive the support of the local Sangha. Then, when the aspirant feels ready to receive the 14 Trainings, he/she writes to the Ordination Guidance Group secretary requesting recommendation from the UK sangha to receive the Trainings.
4. On receiving the request for ordination the Ordination Guidance Group communicate the details of the application to the UK Order and send an acknowledgement to the aspirant. A process of consultation takes place which involves the UK Order, especially those who are mentoring or know the aspirant. The result of this consultation process is one of two outcomes decided by the Guidance Group:
 - (a) the application is endorsed by the UK Order and confirmation details are sent to the aspirant and to Plum Village,
 - (b) the aspirant is requested to wait and deepen their practice and links with the Sangha.

In general, if an aspirant satisfies the conditions necessary to receive the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and has the agreement of their mentors, their application will be considered favourably. Good reasons, clearly expressed, will be needed to ask an aspirant to wait. In these circumstances, the Order will accept the responsibility to work with an aspirant and support their practice to a point where their application can be endorsed.

5. Once an aspirant has received the recommendation of the UK Order, arrangements can be made for him or her to receive the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings in a formal transmission ceremony conducted by Thich Nhat Hanh or a senior monastic in the Tiep Hien tradition.

Support of the local sangha

If you practise with a local sangha, it is important to obtain their support. It is they who know you best and can confirm that you are a practitioner who takes an active part in the local sangha and have been working in harmony with them.

You should inform the local group that you are considering applying to join the Order and are seeking their support. This could be at one of the regular sangha sessions, but preferably your aspiration should be announced to the whole local Sangha in the local mailing (for instance for a Day of Mindfulness).

Time should be set aside at a local meeting for you to explain why you are applying and for local members to ask questions. You should ensure that the meeting has a copy of the Guidelines. Usually the sangha will have a short discussion (which you do not attend) where they can decide if they support your application. The meeting should aim to ensure that there is harmony in the community concerning your application

If the meeting endorses your application 2 or 3 sangha members should sign on behalf of the whole group. (There is no requirement that all local members be present at the meeting, nor that all members sign. However additional signatures and endorsements are welcome)

If the meeting does not endorse your application a spokesperson for the meeting must give their reasons. In this case your application to the Order cannot proceed at that time.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICE FOR ASPIRANTS

A member of the Order of Interbeing is a student of Thich Nhat Hahn and represents his teachings and practice to the wider world.

Order members (and aspirants) should have understanding and skills in the following areas-

The **practice** of mindfulness in their daily lives, in their personal formal practice and with their local Sangha

Practical **skills** which support the local Sangha:- Facilitating Dharma discussion groups, Identifying appropriate guided meditations and readings, Harmonious bell practice, Introducing sitting practice and kin hanh, Familiarity with the Sutra opening and Sutra closing verses, Introducing mindfulness practice in daily life, Speaking from personal experience about the Five Mindfulness Trainings, Familiarity with the Plum Village Chanting Book.

A grounding in the **tradition** in which they have chosen to practice

Recommended reading: 'Interbeing', 'The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching' and 'Old Path, White Clouds' by Thay. 'Learning True Love' by Sister Chan Khong.

Familiarity with Plum Village.

From time-to-time the UK Order invites aspirants to attend their gathering (held twice yearly). It is highly recommended for aspirants to take this opportunity to meet members of the Order, other aspirants, and to share their questions etc in a congenial setting.

Aspirants are encouraged to go to Plum Village and to attend national or international retreats

Aspirants are expected to be members of the Community of Interbeing and to read 'Here and Now'. They may also wish to subscribe to 'The Mindfulness Bell', the international journal of the Order of Interbeing.

MENTORING

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a mentor simply as “an experienced and trusted advisor”. These words capture some of the most essential aspects of mentoring in the context of aspirant process. These roles are described in more detail below.

The mentor

A mentor is a member of the Order of Interbeing whom the aspirant has approached and invited personally and who has agreed to undertake this role. Mentors should feel able to offer appropriate time and energy to the role.

Mentors should endeavour to help aspirants to grow by reflecting the aspirant’s practice back to them. Mentors should support and encourage aspirants to extend their practice into areas that the aspirant is not familiar with.

Specifically Mentors should be ready to guide aspirants to engage with the issues and questions raised in the application guidelines outlined above and to help aspirants to develop the understanding and skills in the teachings and practice which would be expected of Order members.

The mentor-aspirant relationship will of course vary widely depending on the individuals involved. However it is expected that this relationship will be in the spirit of friendship (not authority). The most important guidance a mentor can give to an aspirant is likely to be the sharing of his or her own experience in skilful ways.

Mentoring is coordinated by Jane Coatesworth. Please contact her if you have any queries (contact details on back page)

The Aspirant in the mentoring process

Aspirants are advised to have more than one mentor to provide a diversity of experience. Aspirants are expected to take responsibility for their needs and to work together with mentors to explore any of the areas listed in the aspirant guidelines above that are not clear or well developed. The list is not exclusive and it may be relevant to explore additional areas. The period of mentoring is not specified but is expected to be at least one year. Mentors and aspirants are recommended to meet at least once a month and to have a clear idea of the aspirant’s focus of reflection between meetings. Aspirants are encouraged to meet with each other, and/or experienced Sangha members, to share in their reflections and practice.