

APPRECIATION

by natalie

I first met Thay Thich Phuoc Tan a couple of weeks ago. On learning of my love for the English language, he asked if I would be interested in writing an article for *Huong Dao Quarterly* magazine. The first topic he posed was "Mother, Father, Ancestors, Salvation" and the second topic was "Appreciation". I think he offered the latter because he may have seen the confused look on my face when he proposed the first topic. I agreed, but was silently thinking oh dear...what have I gotten myself into. I only came to ask Thay for permission to teach English writing to children. Firstly I'm by no means a writer; I'm a Business Analyst by profession. Secondly and more importantly I'm not really sure I fully understand the Buddhist concepts behind these topics as yet. I have a passion for both though, so I guess that's a pretty good start, since there have been many a great achievements from those who merely started with PASSION.

I find the first topic a little difficult to grasp at this stage. However on giving it some further thought, I think perhaps it is that I find the concept a little difficult to accept. Although I am of Vietnamese origin, I have virtually lived my

whole life in a western cultural. I am grateful for all that Australia has offered me, but it is a culture that encourages individualism and independence. As a result of being a child of cross cultures, I have therefore been so preoccupied with the struggle to find the "I" and "Me" that I've lost touch with my roots - Mother, Father, Ancestors and the Salvation which comes from understanding this concept.

HUONG DAO would like to introduce this writing from a young Vietnamese girl, whose work from it every reader can feel the sweet taste of the Dharma.

Well done Natalie, walk with the firm, stopless and unslanting steps into the Dharma. A brilliant and wonderful horizon is waiting and opened for you not very far ahead, guaranteed more than enough to meet with all the curiosities - if any.

Huong Dao Editor Board

I will therefore make an attempt at writing an article on the topic of "Appreciation". Not so much with an emphasis on Buddhism, as I believe there are far better educated Thay's who are more skilled in this than I. I will write from the perspective of a young person and what "Appreciation" means to me.

When I first thought of how to approach this topic I narrow mindedly related it to a recent event in my personal life. I

recently lost the love of my best friend and perhaps even my soul mate because I didn't understand appreciation. I didn't understand its value. I guess as humans, this is how many of us have been conditioned though. We only really appreciate something or someone when they or it is no longer there.

I'm sure we have all heard so many stories of AIDS and cancer patients who recall, that the day they found out they had the illness was the day they really began to live. Why wait for this tragic news? LIVE NOW, breathe, you're alive! It is a pity we don't appreciate being alive, to be able to just sit and breathe in peace and oneness with yourself, to appreciate when we have our health, all our

limbs, nature, running water, the earth and sky, education, food, a home; the list is endless. These may all seem insignificant because many of us were born with all these given things. We therefore mistakenly think we have a right to them and so choose to neglect them, because it was given to us so freely and simply. Let me assure you, it is the little things we miss most when they are no longer there. Imagine just for one

moment being born without one of your limbs, or with poor health, or having to walk 1 km to fetch clean water.

I won't cover ways in which to appreciate all these things. I think this should be something many of you should sit down and observe yourself, to fully become aware of it's concept. Through my current studies of the teachings of Thay Thich Nhat Hanh, I would however like to share with you some of my awareness of appreciation; most of which has only occurred quite recently.

As I stood on a beach one day watching the waves crashing into the shore, I experienced for the first time in this one moment of being with nature; the simple joy of appreciating my legs, my eyes, my breath – all things I have neglected in the past because of my lack of mindfulness. Have you ever delighted in being chased by the waves as the tide comes in and you run to avoid getting your feet wet? I appreciated my legs, because I immediately felt an overwhelming compassion for those unfortunate enough to be confined to a wheelchair. They are unable to even make it onto the beach to simply stand and feel the softness of the sand falling between their toes. I appreciated my eyes, because it was able to see the beauty of the horizon where the earth and water meets the sky. I appreciated being able to just stand and breathe, smelling the fresh saltiness of the ocean and not having to struggle for breath. Don't miss the opportunities to nourish your mind, body and soul. It is far better to have been able to live to appreciate these

wonderful "little things" then to live with big regrets later on.

It is similar to the regret I'm sure my parents feel now. As a child I can't remember being hugged or given a cuddle – not because I was not loved, but because they didn't have the time. I think this is one of the reasons I find, that has contributed to me being very closed as a person. I therefore have this message for all parents, especially Vietnamese parents. Appreciate your arms by using them to hug and cuddle your children, your loved ones, even a tree. Don't just use them as a means to accumulate wealth or fight for the materialistic belongings that litter this world. Hugs and cuddles are a cure for so many of today's illnesses – depression, loneliness, isolation etc. Teach your children openness and the immense love that can radiate from a simple cuddle/hug – you will receive back from this cuddle/hug so much more love and joy than all the wealth you have accumulated.

It is this constant wanting and craving for the accumulation of wealth that agitates us and disturbs our peace of mind. Often many of us are so consumed by this task, that when something simple fails we see it as a tragedy. An example of this is how in the past I have often complained when there is no hot water or the toilet is blocked or the food is not nice or why doesn't the heater work? I have found through my travels, that I have much to learn from those who have so little and these things I complain about are luxuries. Perhaps it is clichéd, but it's those who have so little that are the happiest.

Instead of spending time craving the things they think or know they are missing out on, they spend this energy appreciating what little they do have. I believe this is one of the fundamentals of understanding the teachings of Buddha.

I will finish on this final note. On a recent trip to Wilsons Promontory National Park. I had the privilege of making the trek up Mount Oberon. As I began the ascent – I thought it would be a great opportunity to do walking meditation during the 3.2km walk. Two hours the sign at the bottom said. For me it meant two hours of peace and tranquillity, two hours that I will never have again in my life to observe this natural wonder. There were quite a number of people for such a cold day – about 15 degrees Melbourne weather, so for the rest of the world – it would have felt maybe more like 10 degrees. I started slowly; being aware of each step, whilst other people rushed passed me, eager to reach the summit. This made me smile because six months ago I was one of "those people". I was happy because I felt I had accomplished some mindfulness. I realised that reaching the summit wasn't so important anymore. It was how I made my journey there that mattered most. The summit would be there whether it took me 2 hours or 2 days. Appreciate the journey of life and all that you have – don't be in a rush to "get there"; you could end up missing the best years of your life.

