

# Conflict Resolution Guide

from The Plum Village Lineage North American Dharma Teachers Sangha

**Background.** This document was prepared by the Harmony Committee of the Plum Village North American Dharma Teachers Sangha over three years beginning in 2010. The committee included both lay and monastic Dharma Teachers. The document provides resources for using conflicts for learning and practice opportunities in processes of conflict resolution.

Everything is seen as an opportunity for practice. This includes conflict.

The Dharma Teachers Sangha (DTS) views conflict as a disturbance in the balance and harmony of the Sangha and the goal always is to restore the harmony and balance while applying our insight and compassion. The goal is NOT to establish “guilt and innocence,” or in any other way get caught in the adversarial punitive approaches to conflict that prevail in our greater society. One reason we have entered into this practice is to “go beyond” such views and behavior.

Where persons are unable to meet and resolve a conflict themselves, for whatever reason, there is often a feeling of helplessness, of “what else can I do?” or “what can I do differently?” There are many answers to such questions. What is offered here is one process for moving ahead from the stuck place.

**Overall Context.** A conflict is embedded in a context. We are all part of many contexts: work, home, sangha, and various other social groupings. But sangha is a bit different in that we are all there to try to live “in harmony and awareness.” Thus we may want to remind all sangha members (and other friends) who encounter the conflict to offer compassion and nonjudgmental listening to those in conflict. We all have an ongoing need to be heard — not necessarily agreed with or advised, just heard.

**Individual and Family Context.** A common way of attempting to resolve conflict is to attempt to determine who owns what percentage of the blame for a conflict. An alternative perspective is for each person to shift their focus

from who is to blame for the conflict to what their personal experience in the conflict is.

The intention and focus is on restoring harmony which requires all parties to let go of the victim perspective. Each person explores what they are bringing of themselves to the conflict and what attitudes, beliefs, past learnings, and ways of being contributed to the conflict unfolding as it did.

The focus is on identifying and speaking about these things rather than on who did what wrong. We use the experience of conflict as an opportunity to learn about ourselves and others, as well as to develop more skillful responses.

**Reviewing the Teachings.** Everyone involved in the conflict, or in contact with those who are involved, can be reminded to review Thay’s teachings on sangha, conflict, perception, and bodhichitta. These teachings are found in many places throughout the vast collection of Thay’s written and recorded work; too many to attempt to find and list them all here. Below are some specific teachings that are helpful. And they will be attached to this written document and/or linked.

**Mindfulness Trainings.** Parties in conflict and others involved in any way can always profit from meditation and reflection on the fourteen mindfulness trainings of the Order of Interbeing<sup>1</sup> in general. These resources may be particularly helpful:

[The Second Mindfulness Training: Non-attachment to Views;](#)

[The Sixth Mindfulness Training: Dealing with Anger; and](#)

[The Eighth Mindfulness Training: Community and Communication.](#)

and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.orderofinterbeing.org/for-the-aspirant/fourteen-mindfulness-trainings/>

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The second of the [Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness](#) also offers valuable insight.<sup>2</sup>

[Lovingkindness Meditations](#) and [Forgiveness Meditations](#)<sup>3</sup>. When involved in a conflict we often forget to persistently apply our practice. Persons involved in the conflict can be reminded to apply their practice in a very focused way.

The Alaya Meditation on Lovingkindness (attached) gives guidance on both the traditional Meta Bahavana and Thay's Lovingkindness by Understanding meditations. Where persons in conflict are unfamiliar with, or unskilled with, these meditations, more experienced sangha members can offer instruction. A regular Lovingkindness Meditation using the person(s) with whom one perceives conflict can be very powerful and is encouraged. The meditation based on understanding can be a lot of work, but when applied diligently over time can bring dramatic results. Pieces of these meditations (such as meta phrases offering good wishes to oneself and the person(s) involved) through the day, like gathas, can be quite beneficial.

**Looking Carefully.** Once firmly grounded in the teachings, especially as suggested above, persons involved are ready to more actively pursue the conflict. A suggested next step is working with the attached "[Conflict Analysis Form.](#)" Even though you may have used it at a previous stage revisiting it can be productive as the practices may have changed some perspectives.

**Coming Together.** After the parties complete and/or review the form in light of the practice, a suggested next step would be for the person(s) in conflict to come together and have a discussion based on their Analysis forms. The parties, and perhaps the entire Sangha, may also feel

prepared to practice [Beginning Anew](#) as the conflict begins to resolve.

**Including Facilitation.** Sometimes your efforts may require "neutral" facilitation. Sometimes the parties may be unsuccessful addressing the situation even with additional application of the practice and the help of the form. The parties in conflict may wish to identify one to three sangha members in whom all involved have confidence, asking them to facilitate a face-to-face meeting, or series of meetings, in pursuit of resolution.

**Turning it Over.** Should all attempts described be unsuccessful, it may be time to ask those involved to ask a mutually agreed panel of three Sangha members well-grounded in the practice to issue a recommendation. The conflicting parties would be requested to agree in advance to agree to such a recommendation.

**Asking for Outside Help.** Where all resources discussed here prove unproductive after sincere application and where all other all local efforts have proven unsuccessful, a local Sangha Member or Dharma Teacher may refer the conflict to the Dharma Teachers Sangha Harmony Committee for further mindful mediation.

**Involving the Harmony Committee.** When the Harmony Committee is approached for assistance, the first question will be if those making contact are aware of this document and its resources. If not, they will be referred to it. If so, the question will be whether the local group has diligently pursued the suggestions in this document. If the answer is no, they will be requested to do so before any active Committee involvement.

You can contact the Harmony Committee by email at: [harmony@orderofinterbeing.org](mailto:harmony@orderofinterbeing.org). This will forward to all current committee members. One member is assigned responsibility each month for initial responses.

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<sup>2</sup> See pages 22 - 26 of Thay's book, *Transformation at the Base* ([Parallax Press](#), 2001). A later edition is titled *Understanding our Minds*.

<sup>3</sup> Three forgiveness meditations are included in the Appendices. The hyperlink in this paragraph goes to the first of the three.

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## Appendix A. Mindfulness Trainings

### *The Second Mindfulness Training:*

***Non-Attachment to Views*** Aware of the suffering created by attachment to views and wrong perceptions, we are determined to avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. We are committed to learning and practicing nonattachment from views and being open to others' insights and experiences in order to benefit from the collective wisdom. Insight is revealed through the practice of compassionate listening, deep looking, and letting go of notions rather than through the accumulation of intellectual knowledge. We are aware that the knowledge we presently possess is not changeless, absolute truth. Truth is found in life, and we will observe life within and around us in every moment, ready to learn throughout our lives.

### *The Sixth Mindfulness Training:*

**Taking Care of Anger** Aware that anger blocks communication and creates suffering, we are committed to taking care of the energy of anger when it arises, to recognizing and transforming the seeds of anger that lie deep in our consciousness. When anger manifests, we are determined not to do or say anything, but to practice mindful breathing or mindful walking to acknowledge, embrace, and look deeply into our anger. We know that the roots of anger are not outside of ourselves but can be found in our wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in ourselves and in the other person. By contemplating impermanence, we will be able to look with the eyes of compassion at ourselves and at those we think are the cause of our anger, and to recognize the preciousness of our relationships. We will practice Right Diligence in order to nourish our capacity of understanding, love, joy and inclusiveness, gradually transforming our anger, violence, fear, and helping others do the same.

### *The Eighth Mindfulness Training:*

**True Community & Communication** Aware that lack of communication always brings separation and suffering, we are committed to training ourselves in the practice of compassionate listening and loving speech. Knowing that true community is rooted in inclusiveness and in the concrete practice of the harmony of views, thinking and speech, we will practice to share our understanding and experiences with members in our community in order to arrive at a collective insight.

We are determined to learn to listen deeply without judging or reacting and refrain from uttering words that can create discord or cause the community to break. Whenever difficulties arise, we will remain in our Sangha and practice looking deeply into ourselves and others to recognize all the causes and conditions, including our own habit energies that have brought about the difficulties. We will take responsibility for the ways we may have contributed to the conflict and keep communication open. We will not behave as a victim but be active in finding ways to reconcile and resolve all conflicts however small.

## Appendix B. First Six of the 50 Verses.

1. Mind is a field  
In which every kind of seed is sown.  
This Mind-field can also be called  
“All the seeds.”
2. In us are infinite varieties of seeds:  
Seeds of samsara, nirvana, delusion, and enlightenment;  
Seeds of suffering and happiness;  
Seeds of perceptions, names, and words.
3. Seeds that manifest as body and mind,  
As realms of beings, as stages and worlds  
Are all in our consciousness.  
That is why it is called “store”.
4. Some seeds are innate,  
Handed down by our ancestors,  
Some were sown while we were still in the womb,  
Others were sown when we were children.
5. Whether transmitted by family, friends,  
Society or education;  
All our seeds are, by nature,  
Both individual and collective.
6. The quality of our life  
Depends on the quality  
Of the seeds  
that lie deep in our consciousness.

### *Thich Nhat Hanh’s Second Verse Commentary*

OUR STORE CONSCIOUSNESS contains every kind of seed. Some seeds are weak, some strong, some large, some small, but all are there — the seeds of both samsara and nirvana, of suffering and happiness. If a seed of delusion is watered in us, our ignorance will grow. If the seed of enlightenment grows in us, our wisdom will flourish.

Samsara is the cycle of suffering, our dwelling place when we live in ignorance. It is difficult to remove ourselves from this cycle. Our parents suffered and they transmitted the negative seeds of this suffering to us. If we don’t recognize and transform the unwholesome seeds in our consciousness, we will surely in turn pass them on

to our children. This constant transmission of fear and suffering drives the cycle of samsara. At the same time, our parents also transmitted seeds of happiness to us. Through the practice of mindfulness, we can recognize the wholesome seeds within ourselves and in others and water them every day.

Nirvana means stability, freedom, and the cessation of the cycle of suffering (samsara). Enlightenment does not come from outside; it is not something we are given, even by a Buddha. The seed of enlightenment is already within our consciousness. This is our Buddha nature, the inherent quality of enlightened mind that we all possess, and which needs only to be nurtured.

In order to transform samsara into nirvana, we need to learn to look deeply and see clearly that both are manifestations of our own consciousness. The seeds of samsara, suffering, happiness, and nirvana are already in our store consciousness. We need only to water the seeds happiness, and avoid watering the seeds of suffering. When we love someone, we try to recognize the positive seeds within them and water those wholesome seeds with our kind words and deeds. The seeds of happiness grow stronger when they are watered, while the seeds of suffering diminish in strength because we are not watering them with unkind words and deeds.

Our store consciousness also contains seeds generated from our perceptions. We perceive many things, and the objects of these perceptions are then stored in our store consciousness. When we perceive an object in Buddhist terms, we see its “sign” (*lakshana*). The Sanskrit word *lakshana* also means “mark,” “designation,” or “appearance.” The sign of a thing is the image that is created by our perception (*samjna*) of it. Suppose we see a wooden platform supported by four legs — that image becomes a seed within our consciousness. The name we assign to this image, “table,” is another seed in us. “Table” is the object of our perception. We, the perceiver, are the subject. The two are linked: every time we perceive the object we have named as a “table,” or

even simply hear the word “table,” our image of a table manifests in our mind consciousness.

Buddhism identifies three pairs of signs of phenomena. The first pair is the universal and the particular sign of something. When we look at a house, the sign, or image, “house” is initially universal. The universal sign “house” is like its generic label. A few years ago you could buy generic food in the supermarket. Instead of color images and brand names, the label on a can of corn, for example, displayed simply the word “corn” in black type on a plain white wrapping. The universal sign of an object is like that.

Using our discriminative mind, however, we soon perceive thousands of details about each house — the brick, wood, nails, and so on, that are specific to it. These specifics are the particular sign of a house. The house can be seen as a whole — its universal sign — or as a combination of its parts, its particular sign. Everything has both a universal and a particular nature.

The second pair of signs is unity and diversity. Our notion of a house is an idea of unity. All houses are part of the designation “house.” But the universal notion of “house” does not show us any individual house, which is unique in its particulars. There are countless variations of houses, and that is the nature of diversity. When we look at any phenomena, we should be able to see unity in the diversity, and diversity in the unity.

The third pair of signs is formation and disintegration. A house may be in the process of being built, but at the same time it is also in the process of disintegrating. Even though the wood is new and the house is not yet completely built, already the moisture or dryness of the air is beginning to weather it. Looking at something that is beginning to take form, we should already be able to see that it is also in the process of disintegrating as well.

Meditation training is designed to help us learn to see both aspects of each pair of signs. We see the whole when we are looking at the parts, and each part when we are looking at the whole.

When a carpenter looks at a tree, he can already envision a house, because he has been trained in constructing a house from the material of the tree. He is seeing both the universal and particular aspects of the tree. Through mindfulness we train ourselves to see all six signs — universal and particular, unity and diversity, formation and disintegration — whenever we perceive a single sign, a specific object. This is the teaching of interbeing.

We assign names and words, or “appellations,” to the objects of our perception, such as “mountain,” “river,” “Buddha,” “God,” “father,” “mother.” Every name we’ve assigned to a phenomenon, every word we’ve learned, is stored as a seed within our consciousness. The seeds give rise to other seeds in us, called “images.” When we hear the name of something, an image arises in our consciousness, and we then take that image to be reality. As soon as we hear someone say the words “New York,” for example, we immediately touch the seeds of the image of New York we have in our store consciousness. We picture the Manhattan skyline or the faces of people we know there. These images may differ from the current reality of New York, however. They may be entirely creations of our imagination, but we cannot see the boundary between reality and our erroneous perceptions.

We use words to point to something—an object or a concept — but they may or may not correspond to the “truth” of that thing, which can only be known through direct perception of its reality. In our daily life we rarely have a direct perception. We invent, imagine, and create perceptions based on the seeds of the images that we have in our store consciousness. When we fall in love, the image of our beloved that we hold in our minds may be quite different from the actual person. You might say that we end up marrying our false perception rather than the person herself.

Erroneous perceptions bring about much suffering. We feel certain that our perceptions are correct and complete; yet often they are not. I know a man who suspected that his son was not his

own but was the child of a neighbor who had visited his wife often. The father was proud and ashamed to tell his wife or anyone else about his suspicion. Then one day a visiting friend remarked how much the boy looked like his father. At that moment, the man realized that the boy was indeed own son. Because he had held onto this wrong perception, the man endured much pain for many years. Not only these three people, but everyone around them also suffered because of this wrong perception.

It is very easy to confuse our mental image, our sign of something with its reality. The process of mistaking our perceptions for reality is so subtle that it is very difficult to know that it is going on, but we must try not to do this. The way to avoid this is mindfulness. We practice meditation to train the mind in direct perception, in correct perception. When we meditate, we look deeply into our perceptions in order to find out their nature and to discover the elements that are correct and the elements that are incorrect.

If you are not mindful, you will believe that your perceptions, which are based on prejudices that have developed from the seeds of past experiences in your store consciousness, are correct. When we have a wrong perception and continue to maintain it, we hurt ourselves and others. In fact, people kill one another over their different perceptions of the same reality.

We live in a universe filled with false images and delusions, yet we believe that we are truly in touch with the world. We may have a deep respect for the Buddha and believe that if we were to meet him in person, we would bow before him and attend all of his teachings. But in reality, we may have already met the Buddha in our own town and not had the slightest wish to even go near him, because he didn't conform to our image of what a Buddha is supposed to look like. We are certain that a Buddha appears with a halo, wearing beautiful robes. So when we meet a Buddha in ordinary clothes, we do not recognize him or her. How could a Buddha wear a sport shirt? How could a Buddha be without a halo?

There are so many seeds of wrong perception in our consciousness. Yet we are quite sure that our perception of reality is correct. "That person hates me. He will not look at me. He wants to harm me." This may be nothing more than a creation of our mind. Believing that our perceptions are reality, we may then act out of that belief. This is very dangerous. A wrong perception can create countless problems. In fact, all our suffering arises from our failure to recognize things as they are. We should always ask ourselves, humbly, "Am I sure?" and then allow space and time for our perceptions to grow deeper, clearer, and more stable. In medical practice these days, physicians and caregivers are reminded by each other to not be too sure of anything. "Even if you think you are certain, check it again," they urge each other.

## Appendix C. Lovingkindness Meditation

### *Understanding Lovingkindness Meditation*<sup>4</sup>

**Opening the Heart.** This form of meditation has the aim of helping us to open our hearts compassionately to ourselves and to others. Different traditions have slightly different forms of this meditation. A common source is *The Discourse on Love*, a text common to all Buddhist traditions. The Plum Village translation is:

*He or she who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech. He or she will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones. (And this is what s/he contemplates):*

*May everyone be happy and safe, and may their hearts be filled with joy. May all . . . beings live in Security and in Peace--beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, visible or not visible, near or far away, already born or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility. Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm. Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate Boundless Love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. We should let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. Our love will know obstacles, our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living. Free from wrong views, greed and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing Perfect Under-*

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<sup>4</sup> Copyright 2007, Alaya. Copies may be made for use by meditators for their meditation group, or by clergy, medical, or therapeutic professionals for use with clients provided the text is not edited or modified in any way and source credit is given. Copies may not be made for sale. Permission has been given to the North American Dharma Teacher's Sangha to utilize this item as part of their conflict resolution process and literature. Alaya can be contacted via the Open Way Sangha, Open Way Mindfulness Center, 702 Brooks Street, Missoula, MT 59801.

*standing, those who practice Boundless Love will certainly transcend Birth and Death.*

In the classic form it is called *meta* meditation and the process is something like this:

1. Follow your breath [in—out] for a few minutes. For this meditation you might wish to follow your breath in the center of your chest.
2. While continuing to follow your breath, call up an image<sup>5</sup> of yourself. Project feelings of lovingkindness from your chest to this image. After a period of time . . .
3. Let this image fade, and invite up the image of someone for whom you have warm [erotic not intended here] feelings. Continuing to follow your breath, project feelings of lovingkindness from the center of your chest (i.e. from your heart) to this image.
4. Same process with an image\* of someone toward whom you have neutral feelings; perhaps someone you don't know well.
5. Same process with someone for whom your feelings are negative in some way.
6. Call all the previous images up together, and project feelings of lovingkindness to the group.
7. Allow the images to fade. Follow your breathing for a few minutes.

If this is done in a formal setting, someone can sound bells and give instructions for each step. You can do it on your own from this paper, or like other guided meditations, you can do a tape or digital recording of instructions and meditate using it.

**Loving Kindness through Understanding.** Another, often more powerful, way to do lovingkindness meditation is to pick yourself or any person you know. (Parents are always a fruitful choice.) It is often wise not to attempt deep

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<sup>5</sup> For some people holding an image is difficult and distracting. If this is true for you, perhaps hold an idea of the object rather than an image throughout this meditation.



forms of this meditation unless you have good family or professional support available.

As always, begin with a period of breathing meditation. Then call up an image, to hold as you go deeply into yourself or whatever person you have chosen. (You can also use a photograph.) Look at yourself or the chosen person at a point in their life, OR examine their (or your) life chronologically beginning before birth. Try to understand everything you can about their (your) biological being (body), feelings (what they feel positively about, negatively about, and are neutral about), perceptions (ways of assigning meaning to phenomena), mental formations (fixed ideas or “stories” that “run” their/your life), and consciousness (here meaning their spiritual awareness) at the time you have chosen.

**Repetition.** Usually, you do this meditation many times over weeks or months (if you are doing the chronological approach this will be very necessary) and to do actual research. For example, to understand yourself and your parents you can go ask someone questions such as: What were the circumstances of my parents’ life around the time I was conceived? Where they healthy? Getting along? Financially stable? Having good support from their parents for the marriage and my impending birth? Did they have a solid spiritual path that nourished them? How were they feeling about me being on the way? How did they look at the world? What “distorters” had been built into them by their parents, culture, religion, etc.? In this way you can deepen your understanding of the context within which you appeared.

In understanding early years it is necessary to look deeply into parents. So it is a three-person meditation really. You can just look at this period of life to understand yourself and/or your parents. Or you can continue chronologically.

If doing a chronology, then go to your birth and first year. Ask a variety of key questions including, but not limited to: How do you think you were impacted during this time? Were you sick or well? Happy or sad and cranky? How were

you cared for? What kind of “perceptual sets” do you suppose were installed?

These are just suggestions. Part of preparing for the meditation is identifying the relevant questions to pursue meditatively.

When you don’t have a “research” answer to an important question, make a meditative intuitive guess. Often these will be figuratively, if not literally, accurate.

**Understanding as the Basis of Love.** Thich Nhat Hanh frequently says, “True love” is based in understanding.” The better you understand yourself, all the yourselves that have been over the years — including your “ancestral selves — the more natural it will be to have lovingkindness for yourself (and thus others). The greater the understanding, the easier it will be to put down that club that most of us carry around to use to pound on ourselves (and others). You can deepen your understanding of, and thus love for, any person to whom you apply this in-depth meditative understanding process.

**An Example.** In his fourth decade, this author did an ongoing chronological meditation on his mother during a month-long stay at Plum Village monastery. For a week, morning, noon, and night the meditation continued — sitting, walking, and eating — year-by-year going through her life.

Nothing profound happened until age 18. Remembering a wedding picture, her dreams and aspirations at that time began unfolding. Understanding came that in her life, having a son was the only dream that had come true. Heart opened with loving feelings and long-held resentments at her “grasping and clinging” dropped away.

**A Note of Caution.** The emotional impacts of this approach can be quite deep. As per above, it is best if you have strong support from family, friends or spiritual or therapeutic “professionals” when using this deep understanding approach.

## Appendix D. Interpersonal Conflict Analysis Form<sup>6</sup>

1. Describe the conflict, in chronological order, to the best of your current ability and objectivity. It is often difficult to separate description from interpretation, yet that is what is being asked of you here. Attach an additional page if needed, but please be brief and to the point. If it is hard to be succinct, you may need more meditation and reflection time.
2. Which of my personal beliefs and values are at play in this situation? For example, how was conflict handled in my family of origin? How has my experience within my family and other formative environments influenced my usual reaction to conflict (e.g., fight, flee, or freeze)? How might the past be shaping my perceptions and experience within this conflict? (You may wish to address this on a page to be added.)
3. How am I a part of the situation?
4. Who else is involved in the difficulty?
5. How and when and by whom were the other people involved informed that I perceived a difficulty between us?
6. How am I contributing to the problem?
7. What have I done to try to resolve the conflict?
8. How have others tried to help resolve this situation?
9. What outcome do I want personally?
10. What outcome do I want for the Sangha?
11. In what ways am I (or could I) be keeping things stuck/unresolved?

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted with permission from a Conflict Analysis Form by Alaya. See [Appendix C](#) for Alaya Information.

12. What is my power (formal and informal) in the situation?

13. In what ways could I promote movement and resolution?

14. How am I viewing and using this conflict as part of my practice?

15. Please consider which of the following seem to be going on and then consider how they inform my current understanding of the conflict.

- Power conflicts
- Hidden Agenda
- Policy/Processes Inadequate
- Cultural Differences
- Personality Conflict(s)
- Value Conflicts
- Territorial/Boundary Conflict
- Organization Structure Issues
- Information Problems
- Erratic Personal Behavior

○ Communication Problems:

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong Form  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inaccuracy of             | <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong time  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rumors/Gossip             | <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong place |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Describe briefly.) |                                      |

16. In my view, do additional Sangha members need to be included in order to reach resolution? If so: who are they, how do they need to be involved, and how do I suggest accomplishing this?

17. What elements or conditions does a solution need to include or meet? (What does resolved look like?)

18. What are the alternatives to resolution?

19. What ways do I see that this conflict could be resolved right now?

20. In the absence of a solution agreed between the parties, am I willing to agree to abide by a decision made by three senior sangha members acceptable to each side?

Yes       No

Attach pages as necessary to continue answers to any questions for which space was inadequate. But remember that brief, succinct, to-the-point answers probably will serve you and the process best.

## Appendix E: Forgiveness Meditation: Forgiving Another<sup>7</sup>

1. Establish the person/situation(s) requiring forgiveness. Be specific. Make notes if helpful.

Take as much time as is needed.

(Who did what when, how, . . .)

2. Work for mental understanding of the other person's situation.

(Why might s/he have done this? What was going on with him/her?)

Again, take as much time as is needed. Even if that requires several meditations over time.

3. Specify clearly what expectations you have that the other person did not meet.

What I expected was \_\_\_\_\_.

What I got was \_\_\_\_\_.

4. Do you wish to stop punishing yourself and feeling bad for what was/is/has been done to you?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If yes, proceed.

5. Say aloud<sup>8</sup>, "I chose to stop punishing myself and feeling bad for what [ ... *Name of Person* ...] did." (or is doing).

6. Image the person in a chair in the room with you.

Breathe mindfully and make contact with this image.

Say aloud, "I would have preferred you had (done or not done) \_\_\_\_ . But you (did or didn't do) that, so I now will to release this incident/these incidents. I choose to let it go and be free of it."

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<sup>7</sup> Meditation developed from a psychosynthesis forgiveness process in Thomas Yeomans book "Psychosynthesis." (Thomas Yeomans is founder of The Concord Institute, 23 Wilson Road, Colrain, MA 01340.

<sup>8</sup> "Aloud" is important. Information processes differently, more completely it seems, when it comes out of the mouth and back in the ear than when it just rattles around inside the head.

7. Say aloud, "Therefore I cancel all demands, expectations, and conditions that you do (or say or be) \_\_\_\_\_ in the past and now. I cancel the demand that you be other than yourself. You are responsible for your actions and deeds, and I release you to your own good."

8. Breathe deeply and mindfully.

Above your head and all around you floats a deep and infinite reservoir of love, compassion, and understanding.

Make contact with that compassion and love. Let it flow into you, permeating you, opening your heart, and releasing all of your expectations and demands.

[This energy and wisdom that has nurtured, protected and served you all your life. Let it do so now.]

9. Feeling this love and compassionate understanding, say aloud to the image of the person you are forgiving: "I send this love and forgiveness to you just as you are and have been."

Take time to feel and experience this.

This meditation can be productively done in several ways. You can read each piece as you do it. That allows you to give each step as much time as you need. You can record it and play it back to yourself if this works better for you. Or you can ask someone you trust to guide you through it.

Remember that forgiveness is a process, and seldom (if ever) a one-time event. You may have to repeat this process a number of times for one instance, and then again for different instances.

The more you forgive, the more you are able to forgive. It's like physical exercise. Practice develops skill.

## Appendix F: Forgiveness Meditation: Forgiving Yourself<sup>9</sup>

1. Establish the situation requiring forgiveness. Select one if there are several. (What did I do to whom when and how? You may want to write this down.)
2. Work for mental understanding of your own situation which led to this action. (Why might I have done this? What was going on with me?)
3. Specify clearly what expectations you had of yourself that you did not meet. (What I expected from me was \_\_\_\_\_. What I did was \_\_\_\_\_.)
4. Do you wish to stop punishing yourself and feeling bad for what you did?  
If yes, proceed. If no, back to more meditation, introspection, therapy, deep listening friends, etc.
5. Say aloud<sup>10</sup>, “I do regret that I \_\_\_\_\_, but I now chose to stop punishing myself and generating more negative emotion for it.”
6. Image the person(s) you harmed (or have a picture(s) in a chair in the room with you). Breathe mindfully and make contact with this image, picture, or sense of the person.

Say aloud, “I deeply regret that I \_\_\_\_\_. Yet it serves no purpose for me to continue to punish myself for this unskillfulness. I deeply regret the harm that you suffered. It helps neither of us for me to continue to berate and punish myself for this mistake. Wherever I skillfully can, without causing further harm, I will make amends to you. I now will release my self-recrimination, self-criticism and unhelpful guilt. I choose to let it go and be free of it.”

7. Say aloud, “Therefore I cancel all demands, and all expectations, for how I should have been

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix E for source.

<sup>10</sup> “Aloud is important. Information processes differently, more completely it seems, when it comes out of the mouth and back in the ear than when it just rattles around inside the head.

in the past. While I wish I had not \_\_\_\_\_, the past is past. I will make every effort not to repeat this unskillfulness in the future. Of course, I desire your forgiveness, but that is your choice.

What I control is my own forgiveness, and I now chose to forgive myself. I am totally responsible for my own actions and deeds. I accept the responsibility for my actions, and I accept that my own forgiveness of myself is necessary for me to move forward in this life. Ironically, somehow I know my own self-forgiveness is a part of your moving forward also.”

8. Breathe deeply and mindfully. Above your head and all around you floats a deep and infinite reservoir of love, compassion, and understanding. Make contact with that compassion and love. Let it flow into you, permeating you, opening your heart, and releasing all of your self-expectations and demands about what you should have done, who and how you should have been. This energy and wisdom that has nurtured, protected and served you all your life. Let it do so now.

9. Feeling this love and compassionate and understanding, say to yourself, “I send this love and forgiveness to myself just as I am.” Take time to feel and experience this.

Recite this mantra several times until you really feel it. **I will be gentle with myself, I will love myself, I am a child of the universe, being born each moment.**

This meditation can be productively done several ways. You can read each piece as you do it. That allows as much time as you need for each step. You can record it and play it back to yourself if this works better for you. Or you can ask someone you trust to guide you through it.

Remember that forgiveness is a process, and seldom (if ever) a one-time event. You may have to repeat this process a number of times for one instance, and then again for different instances. The more you forgive, the more you are able to forgive. It’s like physical exercise. Practice develops skill.

## Appendix G: Forgiveness Meditation

### Jack Kornfield<sup>11</sup>

*Forgiveness of others, forgiveness of yourself*  
To practice forgiveness meditation, let yourself sit comfortably, allowing your eyes to close and your breath to be natural and easy. Let your body and mind relax. Breathing gently into the area of your heart, let yourself feel all the barriers you have erected and the emotions that you have carried because you have not forgiven — not forgiven yourself, not forgiven others. Let yourself feel the pain of keeping your heart closed. Then, breathing softly, begin asking and extending forgiveness, reciting the following words, letting the images and feelings that come up grow deeper as you repeat them.

**FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS:** *There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed others, have betrayed or abandoned them, cause them suffering, knowingly or unknowingly, out of my pain, fear, anger and confusion.* Let yourself remember and visualize the ways you have hurt others. See and feel the pain you have caused out of your own fear and confusion. Feel your own sorrow and regret. Sense that finally you can release this burden and ask for forgiveness. Picture each memory that still burdens your heart. And then to each person in your mind repeat: *I ask for your forgiveness, I ask for your forgiveness.*

**FORGIVENESS FOR YOURSELF:** *There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed myself. I have betrayed or abandoned myself many times through thought, word, or deed, knowingly or unknowingly.* Feel your own precious body and life. Let yourself see the ways you have hurt or harmed yourself. Picture them, remember them. Feel the sorrow you have carried from this and sense that you can release these burdens. Extend forgiveness for each of them, one by one. Repeat to yourself: *For the ways I have hurt myself through action or inaction, out of fear, pain and*

*confusion, I now extend a full and heartfelt forgiveness. I forgive myself, I forgive myself.*

**FORGIVENESS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HURT OR HARMED YOU:** *There are many ways that I have been harmed by others, abused or abandoned, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word or deed.* Let yourself picture and remember these many ways. Feel the sorrow you have carried from this past and sense that you can release this burden of pain by extending forgiveness when your heart is ready. Now say to yourself: *I now remember the many ways others have hurt or harmed me, wounded me, out of fear, pain, confusion and anger. I have carried this pain in my heart too long. To the extent that I am ready, I offer them forgiveness. To those who have caused me harm, I offer my forgiveness, I forgive you.*

Let yourself gently repeat these three directions for forgiveness until you feel a release in your heart. For some great pains you may not feel a release but only the burden and the anguish or anger you have held. Touch this softly. Be forgiving of yourself for not being ready to let go and move on. Forgiveness cannot be forced; it cannot be artificial. Simply continue the practice and let the words and images work gradually in their own way. In time you can make the forgiveness meditation a regular part of your life, letting go of the past and opening your heart to each new moment with a wise loving kindness.

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<sup>11</sup> Available on Jack Kornfield's web site.  
<http://www.jackkornfield.org/meditations/forgivenessMeditation.php>

## Appendix H: Communication Skills.

These suggestions<sup>12</sup> have evolved over more than three decades through the experience of some dozen professionals working with individuals, couples, and organizations. Mastery of these skills will be a major step in improving communication in your life in general. Using these skills is the one of the most effective ways of truly connecting with others and of resolving conflict. They are generally useful, and where two or more persons are in conflict, they become essential for producing productive resolution. They “operationalize” right speech.

1. Listen. Don't make up what you are going to say in response while others are speaking. Devote 100% attention to listening clearly without judgment or reactivity.
2. Do not speak when fueled/controlled by anger. Wait for “the heat” to pass.
3. Be honest. Right speech (Gentle, no “edge” in voice. True + Kind &/or Helpful).

### LISTEN

4. Be direct. Not running on endlessly or wandering about.
5. Stay on the subject. Don't avoid.
6. Admit that you are a contributor to any conflict situation.

### LISTEN

7. Don't drag up the past. Stick with now.
8. Don't lay blame. Problem solve.

9. Don't try to win. Make your objective understanding and finding workable solutions.

### LISTEN

10. Avoid questions, **especially why questions**. Rather make statements.
11. Make “**I**” statements. (**I** feel..., **I** am..., etc.), rather than “third party” statements such as “you...,” “one...,” and “they...”.
12. Express both content **and emotion**.

### LISTEN

13. Avoid the phrase, “yes, but...”, and synonyms.
14. Avoid the phrase, “if only...,” and synonyms.
15. Use the phrase, “I won't ...”, instead of “I can't ...”.

### LISTEN

16. Don't assume. Check out.
17. Don't speak for others. Especially don't tell them how they feel.
18. Don't make threats. You can state consequences. Know the difference.

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<sup>12</sup> The owner of the copyright on these suggestions has given the Dharma Teachers Sangha permission to use and reproduce this list of communication skills. Anyone may reproduce them for use provided they do not charge for them and references the immediate source as the Dharma Teachers Sangha.

## Appendix I: Beginning Anew

### Overview

*Beginning Anew* nourishes the Sangha.

*Beginning Anew* nourishes the practitioner.

*Beginning Anew* allows us to openly appreciate each other, and to acknowledge and or/check out difficulties which we feel we may have introduced into the life of the sangha or a fellow practitioner.

*Beginning Anew* allows us to share our suffering so we do not carry it alone.

*Beginning Anew* gives us an opportunity to address conflicts that may have arisen with another with the support of the mindfully assembled sangha. Both the persons in, and the context of, the sangha afford great support.

We will know we have “arrived” as a sangha when we can open our minds, hearts, and mouths and say or share anything with the assembled sangha without fear. Probably we still have “a ways” to go . . . .

Sometimes we come to sangha just to celebrate the joy of the beauty of life, the world, and each other. More often we probably come to practice to deal with our mental knots and practical difficulties; formally put, “To follow the path that leads to the cessation of the creation of the causes of suffering.”

Our tradition tells us that mindfulness and meditation (often seen as the **Buddha** element of practice) is not enough. Study of the Way (often seen as the **Dharma** element of practice) is not enough. It takes three gems. It also takes **Sangha** as a practice. *Beginning Anew* is a sangha-focused practice. Without the sangha elements our practice rests on a two-legged stool; a much less stable seat than one with three legs.

Our tradition gives us two very specific interactive sangha-based practice forms: *Beginning Anew* and *Shining Light*. For fully effective practice, we need incorporate and master these forms.

## *The Beginning Anew Ceremony*

*Beginning anew* is a living evolving practice. Several forms of implementing it have evolved. What follows is one form, a rather comprehensive and complete form, of this practice. All forms begin with Flower Watering.

### Flower Watering

Flower Watering is an opportunity to tell another sangha member something very specific that you enjoy or appreciate about him/ her. Very specific is an important phrase here. General or rambling is not effective.

Ben, you always smile when you see me. And it is such a sincere smile. It helps me to feel alive and good about myself. I just wanted to say “thanks.”

### Sharing Suffering

What troubles your life at the moment? What feels like a heavy burden and you just want others to know? We will not ask you questions or play therapist. We will just listen and acknowledge. It is like tea ceremony sharing in that there is no verbal interaction. Just deep listening.

Some of you may not know I was fired from my job last month. I’ve been so ashamed and felt like such a failure that I really have not told people about it. They sugar coated it and called it a reduction in force, but it was truly a way to fire me. I could just never get along with the new boss. Whatever I did was wrong. It was the same way with my mother, so this is also old business. It starts all my old “mental formations” about not being good enough and never fitting in. It is very hard to say this here because a part of me thinks I’m not good enough to belong here either. I don’t want to talk about it. I just want you to know. Maybe a hug on break or after we end to show I’m OK here would be nice.



## Offering Regrets

Offering Regrets is an opportunity to tell a person or the sangha as a group something specific you have concern about such as a way you may have hurt another person or the sangha. Again, specific is important.

Sue, last week when I commented your shoes were made of dead animals I saw a reaction. It was an insensitive thing to say. I didn't mean to imply your practice was insincere. I'm often too aggressive in grinding my animal rights ax and I apologize for any offense given.

## Exploring Difficulties

Do you have a difficulty, problem, or conflict with someone in the room? (Only explore difficulties with someone who is actually here now in this room.) This is an opportunity to address that person directly with the support of the sangha to seek some resolution, or at least some open airing.

Ralph, when you left me off the practice leader schedule it seemed like you didn't trust me to set-up or lead. Is there some problem that you have with me or my practice?

To which Ralph would breathe deeply three times and respond, Betty, I meant no disrespect. Your last month as a practice leader you were so busy you had to ask for substitutes three of the four weeks. I thought you would welcome relief from this task. And I did want consistency in the leadership for the month. I realize now I should have said something to you and let it be your choice to be regular or take a break from leading. I was just in a hurry to get the schedule out and I made a mistake. Truly I am sorry for not dealing with you directly on this.

Or maybe Ralph does have a problem here. Betty, the last month we had this duty together you were always late and so we were starting late since I was setting up mostly alone. Somehow you were never there in time to help and never got a substitute either. Also, I couldn't greet people at the door and set up the Dharma

Hall. And when you were supposed to bring the flowers you always forgot. No, I guess I don't trust you to be on time and not burden your co-leader with a lot of extra work. And I guess I was too chicken to tell you this. But it was so hard for me that I didn't want to put you on with someone else either. I needed to talk with you about it but just didn't. Now I realize that was very unskillful. I hope we can resolve this.

The discussion continues with the support of the Beginning Anew practice leaders and the assembled sangha. Remember your biggest support is in being present, mindful, listening, and not judging or reacting; not so much in offering active suggestions though at times that is a part.

## *The Process of Beginning Anew*

### Setting It Up

At least one of the practice leaders should be experienced in facilitating *Beginning Anew* if possible. General skills in group facilitation are also needed.

A single flower is placed in the center of the room. The sangha sits in a circle or square facing in. Where possible, have one circle that includes everyone. Only use two circles if the space absolutely requires this.

Begin with a sitting period or periods. During the sitting period [a designated person or the practice leader] will read *Beginning Anew*<sup>13</sup> as a guided meditation while persons attending listen meditatively. Sometimes this is skipped if *Beginning Anew* was read earlier in the practice day or period.

After the meditation, the practice leader explains the purpose and process of the Ceremony if there are any attending who have not done it before. Experienced leaders will intuit when bells are needed throughout the process. Then

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<sup>13</sup> *Beginning Anew* can be found in either edition of the Plum Village Chanting Book from [Parallax Press](#).

s/he says, “Let us Begin Anew. We will start with Flower Watering.”

Whoever wants to water the flower of another takes the flower and sits it in front of the person to whom they wish to give positive feedback. Sitting in front of the person with the flower between them they bow to the person whose flower they wish to water. Then crisp, focused, specific positive feedback is given. When finished the waterer bows and is bowed to. The waterer then puts the flower back in the center of the room as s/he returns to her/his seat. Another person can now take the flower and do watering. (If a person wants to say something to the whole sangha, they take the flower and return to their own seat, placing it before them.)

*After flower watering seems completed or the time allotted for it has finished, the practice leader says, “Let us begin anew by sharing suffering.”*

Anyone wishing to share suffering gets the flower, returns to their seat, bows, shares, bows when finished, returns the flower to the center. Others do not verbally respond.

*After sharing suffering is completed or the allotted for sharing suffering has finished, the practice leader says, “Let us begin anew by offering regrets.”*

Anyone wishing to share regrets gets the flower, takes it to the person who is the object of the regret, bows, and shares, bows when finished, returns the flower to the center. Neither the listener nor others in the circle makes any verbal response.

*After regrets are finished or the time allotted for regrets has finished, the leader says, “Let us begin anew by exploring difficulties.”*

Anyone wishing to explore a difficulty with someone present gets the flower, takes it to that person, bows, sits in front of them, and opens the specific difficulty they wish to explore. The practice leaders may offer helpful suggestions as needed for their process. On occasion, another

member present may have something to offer the process of the two persons exploring, but it is important that the involved persons remain the focus. Advice is seldom helpful. No person other than those directly involved should speak without recognition of the leader(s) of the ceremony.

After the exploration is finished, the initiator takes the flower back to the center of the room and returns to her/his seat. The floor thus opens for another person.

*After all difficulties have been explored or the time for such exploration ends, The leader says, “We have Begun Anew. May the spirit of Beginning Anew be with us always.”*

A short (a few minutes) or full (twenty minute) sitting period follows. The ceremony ends with the traditional closing bells. If this ends the practice day, the closing chant follows.<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes Beginning Anew is done in a different order. Sometimes people speak from across the circle when addressing someone rather than sitting in front of each other (less powerful, but also less threatening), and sometimes only flower watering plus another part or two is done rather than the full ceremony. It is not exactly what is done so much as the spirit and skill with which it is done that is most important.

While this was originally intended as a sangha maintenance communication activity, it has also been used for conflict resolution. It usually can only work effectively for conflict resolution when people have previous experience and comfort with its use and/or there is very skilled facilitation and no time limit on process.

Recently persons have adapted Beginning Anew for other situations; particularly work with couples. Others have reported successful<sup>15</sup> use of

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<sup>14</sup> Beginning Anew as described here is from a presentation by Chan Phap Luc given at the Open Way Mindfulness Center in 2001. This written version was revised in 2007 and 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Here successful means the meditator comes to under-

the process alone using meditative images of a person or persons with whom they struggle internally but where no external difficulty has manifested. (The other person(s) does/do not know there is a difficulty.)

Some people report difficulty relating to some of the language in *The Sutra on Beginning Anew*. Thus a new wording of the sutra is available if you perceive that a more “contemporary” wording may be more compatible with your audience<sup>16</sup>.

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stand their own issues that are being projected and/or comes to some greater understanding of the other person’s situation thus “mellowing” as per the perceived difficulty during the process.

<sup>16</sup> Available from: Program Director, Open Way Sangha, 702 Brooks Street, Missoula, MT 59801.