

The Fertile Soil of Sangha

Thich Nhat Hanh on the importance of community.

By [*Thich Nhat Hanh*](#)

Two thousand five hundred years ago, [Shakyamuni Buddha](#) proclaimed that the next Buddha will be named Maitreya, the “Buddha of Love.” I think Maitreya Buddha may be a community and not just an individual. A good community is needed to help us resist the unwholesome ways of our time. Mindful living protects us and helps us go in the direction of peace. With the support of friends in the practice, peace has a chance.

If you have a supportive sangha, it’s easy to nourish your [bodhicitta](#), the seeds of enlightenment. If you don’t have anyone who understands you, who encourages you in the practice of the living dharma, your desire to practice may wither. Your sangha—family, friends, and co practitioners—is the soil, and you are the seed. No matter how vigorous the seed is, if the soil does not provide nourishment, your seed will die. A good sangha is crucial for the practice. Please find a good sangha or help create one.

Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are three precious jewels in Buddhism, and the most important of these is Sangha. The Sangha contains the Buddha and the Dharma. A good teacher is important, but sisters and brothers in the practice are the main ingredient for success. You cannot achieve enlightenment by locking yourself in your room. Transformation is possible only when you are in touch. When you touch the ground, you can feel the stability of the earth and feel confident. When you observe the steadiness of the sunshine, the air, and the trees, you know that you can count on the sun to rise each day and the air and the trees to be there. When you build a house, you build it on solid ground. You need to choose friends in the practice who are stable, on whom you can rely.

Taking refuge in the sangha means putting your trust in a community of solid members who practice mindfulness together. You do not have to practice intensively—just being in a sangha where people are happy, living deeply the moments of their days, is enough. Each person’s way of sitting, walking, eating, working, and smiling is a source of inspiration; and transformation takes place without effort. If someone who is troubled is

placed in a good sangha, just being there is enough to bring about a transformation. I hope communities of practice in the West will organise themselves as families. In Asian sangha's, we address each other as Dharma Brother, Dharma Sister, Dharma Aunt, or Dharma Uncle, and we call our teacher Dharma Father or Dharma Mother. A practice community needs that kind of familial brotherhood to nourish practice.

If you have a sangha that is joyful, animated by the desire to practice and help, you will mature as a bodhisattva. I always tell the monks, nuns, and lay practitioners at [Plum Village](#) that if they want to succeed in the practice, they have to find ways to live in harmony with one another, even with those who are difficult. If they can't succeed in the sangha, how can they succeed outside of it? Becoming a monk or a nun is not just between student and teacher. It involves everyone. Getting a "yes" from everyone in the sangha is a true dharma seal.



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[Thich Nhat Hanh](#) (1926–2022) was a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, author, and peace activist who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Martin Luther King Jr.