

[This document can be acquired from a sub-directory coombspapers via anonymous FTP on the node COOMBS.ANU.EDU.AU

The document's ftp filename and the full directory path are given in the coombspapers top level INDEX file]

[Last updated: 6 August 1993]

"Beginning Anew".

This text addresses some of the most fundamental and delicate religious issues.

Therefore, it should be read, quoted and analysed in a mindful way.

All copyrights to this document belong to Sister Annabel Laity, Plum Village, France

Enquiries: The Editor, "Mind Moon Circle", Sydney Zen Centre, 251 Young St.,

Annandale, Sydney, NSW 2038, Australia. Tel: + 61 2 660 2993

BEGINNING ANEW
SISTER ANNABEL LAITY

In our tradition we say that the sound of the bell is the voice of the buddha.

The buddha just doesn't mean anything particularly historical - it doesn't mean

Shakyamuni Buddha. The buddha just means "the awakened one". Shakyamuni Buddha

told us that there had been many buddhas before and there would be many buddhas

after him and there were also buddhas in the present moment with him.

So

please don't think you have to be a Buddhist to talk about buddha. It just

means "awakened mind". Everyone has that aspect of mind which is capable of

waking up and we say that the sound of the bell, is that aspect of the awakened

mind which can wake up. So for that reason we call it a Php Kh, which is the

Vietnamese pronunciation of the Chinese. Kh means tool and Php means dharma.

It is a dharma tool - one of those things you take with you when you go on a

retreat in order to make the retreat possible.

In Vietnamese history there are all sorts of miraculous stories about bells,

about people diving into rivers and finding bells in the bottom of the river, or

people digging foundations to make a monastery and finding bells. And people

dreaming about finding a bell in a certain place and then going there and finding a bell. So the bell is very significant for the Vietnamese

people.

Every temple has its own very big bell, hanging up. And when the bell rings out

you can hear it for a long way round the whole village and it used to be the tradition that everybody would stop when they heard the bell and they would say something like "Namo Amitabhaya Buddha".

In our tradition when we hear the bell, we stop. We use the bell to help us clear our minds. We stop talking and we just enjoy our breathing. It's a wonderful way to renew yourself. We say that when we hear the bell, a new dawn arrives so it's like waking up from a good sleep. You feel refreshed and you feel renewed when you hear the bell. And when you stop, you have the opportunity of allowing the feeling of compassion to arise in you, because the feeling of compassion can be blocked by too much thinking. So if we stop our thinking, it's easier for compassion to arise.

Everybody has compassion. We shouldn't say to anybody, "You don't have any compassion." We should never say about anybody, "She doesn't have any compassion." It isn't true. Everybody has a big store of compassion. The problem is they don't know how express it; they don't know how to bring it out. Everybody has plenty of blood but you have to cut yourself for the blood to come out. Compassion is the same.

If we can stop thinking we can look with compassion on all that lives. We only have to look on the things near us. If I look with compassion on the rose, the rose contains the whole universe. The rose contains the little insect that pollinates the flower, the sunshine, the rain So we only have to look with compassion on the rose and we're already in touch with many things. And I only have to look with compassion on my friends in the practice centre when I hear the bell to appreciate their preciousness. How precious it is to have friends in the practice and to keep them close to us. Obviously if they really don't want to stay we don't force them to stay but we do our best.

There was a monk in the Buddha's sangha who was not keeping the precepts. Another monk said, "Lord Buddha, you should call him to you and instruct him that he should keep the precepts. You should correct his behaviour."

The Buddha said, "If you have a child who has lost one eye and only has one eye left, wouldn't you do everything to look after that one eye?"

And the disciples of the Buddha said, "Yes, Lord, we would."

He said, "It's the same with this disciple who breaks the precepts. He has very little self-confidence; he has very little faith; he has very little capacity to keep the precepts. But if I call him to me and tell him off, he will lose what he has. I want to protect him, so that is why I'm not saying anything at the moment." So it's not the intention of the Buddha that we have to keep the precepts to stay in the sangha.

The Buddha also said, "The Dharma is like the ocean, and the ocean never receives a dead body. It always washes the dead body up onto the shore. It's the same. Somebody who really doesn't get on with the practice will quite naturally be washed up on the shore. They won't be able to stay in the ocean of the practice. You monks don't have to do anything about it. It happens quite naturally."

So we do our best to keep our sangha intact. Everybody has something valuable to add to the sangha. Sometimes people are going through a very hard time. Sometimes people have suffered so much in their life and they've been very busy and so their busy-ness has meant that their suffering is repressed. They don't realise it's there because they keep their conscious mind so occupied all the time. And then they begin to meditate and the conscious mind no longer has so many things to occupy it and so all the suffering from the past begins to manifest. They begin to touch it. And when they touch it they not only feel suffering within themselves but they feel suffering all around them too. So they can be rather difficult to live with. So we need to be able to help them be in touch with their suffering. We need above all to be able to listen to them.

This is something we say every morning in our sangha. It's an invocation of the name of the Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara because Avalokitesvara is not only one who looks but one who listens. The Chinese word is Kwan Am, I think. "Kwan" means to look; "Am" means the sound. So it means to look at the sounds, to be aware of the sounds of the world, the sounds of pain.

We invoke your name, Avalokitesvara. We aspire to learn your practice of

listening In order to help relieve the suffering in the world. We shall sit and listen without judging and reacting. We shall sit and listen with all our sincerity and open-heartedness. We shall sit and listen so deeply That we can hear what the other person is saying And also what has been left unsaid. We know that just by listening deeply We already relieve a great deal of the suffering of the other person.

So the practice of listening is a very deep one and it is very useful when you are building a sangha. To build a sangha means to make a community of practitioners and to build a sangha really is building work. If you want to make a house you have to do it properly. But you don't have to get caught in the idea of "This is my house. I want it this way." Quite simply, I'm doing the work of building a house so that other people can come and practise in that house. Because when we have a beautiful sangha that's living in harmony, it's a wonderful place for people who are overstressed, or overworked or over-anxious to be able to come and feel refreshed. It's like a beautiful house they can come to. So that is really why we build our sangha.

The most helpful way to build a practice community is the work of listening and knowing how to express yourself. To know how to listen, we have to know how to stop thinking. The best way for me is to follow my breath, not to make my breathing unnatural, not to force my breathing but just to be aware of how it naturally comes and goes, like a circle - breathing in turns into breathing out - I feel the breath in my body and in that way I find that my thinking is stopped.

So when I listen to somebody talk, I meditate while they're talking. I follow my breath. I really enjoy the feeling of my body but I'm listening with all my attention at the same time. Because when I enjoy the feeling of my body, I'm really there. I'm in the present moment because my body is really here in the here and now. And the other person talks.

The wonderful thing about a session of Beginning Anew is that you never reply. It helps us not to think, because if you think, "Oh, dear, I have to reply to that person in a minute," you may be thinking, "What am I going to say?" But

when you know you don't have to reply, you don't have to think about what you are going to say. Even if the other person is saying, "Oh you're a liar, you're this, you're that," you don't have to think, "Well, I have to tell this person I'm not a liar." It's OK. You just listen to them.

We need an atmosphere of lightness and calm. We shouldn't allow the atmosphere to get heavy, if we can help it. For the Beginning Anew you have a special chairperson who invites the bell. This should be arranged maybe by consensus - somebody you feel is really stable and light, that is, not a very heavy person - because that person will influence the whole community. And they have the bell and the way that they invite the bell, the way in which they sit there and follow their breath, is quite important. And you can have a different chairperson every time.

And so if somebody asks you, "Will you please be our chairperson at today's Beginning Anew session?" and you feel agitated, or you have a toothache, or something like that, say, "Sorry, I don't feel very well today. I don't think I can do it." Be very honest, because you know that your own agitation, your own lack of good health will influence the rest of the community. So just say that and they can find somebody else to do it.

In our community we try to come together once a week. We make a set time. If you live in a family it's good to do that as well, otherwise the time flies; it passes and you can't find it again. So it's important to make a time. Once a week we recite the precepts and the day before we recite the precepts we do Beginning Anew. Usually we come together in the evening after supper. Somebody has chosen a flower and they put it in the centre of the circle and we sit around the flower, and one person sits with the bell. Now that person doesn't have to say anything really if they don't want to. The way they are is what's important, not what they say. It may be just by sitting there, just by their deep listening, they already do a lot to help. So the person who invites the bell shouldn't feel, "Oh I have to direct everybody, make everybody go in a particular direction." You shouldn't feel you have to do anything like that.

And they take the bell, if they want in their hand, and they invite it three times. And the sound is an invitation. There's a space for people to breathe at least three times.

After the bell, it's open for the community to speak. The person who wishes to speak joins their palms and waits to be acknowledged by the rest of the community who will join their palms in return. Then that person will stand up and bring the flower before them. It's like saying, "I want to be as fresh as a flower when I talk because if I talk in the wrong way it will cause somebody to suffer in my community."

Sometimes you can't help but cause somebody to suffer. You shouldn't think always "I have to speak in a way that won't, because when you say, "You made me very angry, when you did something or you said something," maybe you will suffer but I have to accept it because if I cannot express my anger and I keep it inside me, it will bring ill health. Every time I see you, I will have the feeling that you are going to make me angry again and so I get a wrong perception about you. So I need to clear it up with you. So I have to say sometimes, "On Thursday, when you told me that the floor wasn't properly swept, I felt very angry because I spent over three hours sweeping the floor." I need to say that to you. Then you will think a little bit about that, "Oh my goodness, it wasn't very mindful of me to say that." So you will be more careful in the future. "It's beneficial for us both and the person who hears it will get more benefit than the person who says it, very often.

When we started having Beginning Anew in Plum Village about three years ago, we had some problems. The first session of Beginning Anew started about half past seven and went on until midnight. And how many people talked? Two people! Problems had been building up over a long time. And they made some mistakes. We knew they were suffering; we knew they were unhappy and that one of them at least was seriously considering leaving the community. So we wanted to give them a chance to express their suffering, why they were suffering, what had made them unhappy. But they didn't do it very skilfully.

And we learnt lessons from that which I would like to pass on to you. People

would say something like, "What I dislike about this community is that people always talk about the Dharma but underneath they don't really practise at all."

They talked in generalisations like "people do this; people do that".

And

everybody listening was thinking, "Oh, I must be the person they're talking

about." And when they talked they were quite angry so a lot of us had a feeling, "This person's very angry." But in fact, they never said outright,

"Oh, when Sister Annabel does this it makes me very unhappy," because if they'd

said that, it would be much easier. I would know that when I did that, I make

them unhappy. So I would think about it and try and do something about it. But

if I have a vague sort of statement about "people doing this", I only suspect it

might be me and I don't have enough motivation to want to do something about it.

So I suggest you never make general statements about people because you're too

afraid to mention somebody's name, when you practice Beginning Anew.

Don't

think, "If I mention that person's name they'll get mad at me so I'd rather just

make it general." But about six or seven people in the community will think

you're talking about them and they will get a bad feeling about you from that.

And if you do talk to somebody you shouldn't say something like, "Your pride,

your attitude, your general attitude towards life makes me very upset."

When

somebody hears something like that they don't know where to begin. How can I

possibly change my attitude towards life? It's too difficult, it's too much.

The person's simply left feeling hopeless. We need to help people correct what

they're doing by being absolutely specific. We have to say, "On Thursday morning, when you did, or when you said such and such a thing, I was very

upset." And then you can go on explaining a bit, "Maybe because I hadn't slept

the night before. Maybe because I've seen you do something like that to me once

before" You can go on explaining after that. But take the general out of it

and make it specific.

For instance, one time in Beginning Anew, somebody said to me, "On Sunday in tea

meditation when you passed me the biscuits you didn't even look at me."

I was

just sitting there following my breath and I suddenly had a very clear image of

exactly what I looked like from the outside - very serious, rather superior,

passing the biscuits like that. And I saw myself exactly as that other person saw me and I understood, because she had given that specific occasion so it was very helpful to me. Of course I didn't feel I was hurting her at the time at all; I didn't have any intention at all to hurt her, but I did. So I knew in the future how not to hurt her. And after that our relationship changed. Just by mentioning a little thing like that, somehow some energy between us began to flow again and our relationship became much better.

When we speak we try to do so with a very even voice. If we feel our voice getting agitated or high or louder, that is a sign that we feel agitated about what we're talking about and we should maybe stop and come back to our breathing. If we start to cry, we should stop. There's nothing wrong with crying but we need to come back to our breath and calm down before we go on. The sound of our own voice is a very good sign to us of how we are when we're speaking and we should listen to our own voice.

Before I take the flower and speak, I have to do it at the right time because if I speak at the wrong time, it will have the wrong effect. It's very subtle. The right time and the right place is very subtle. It's not my conscious mind that tells me when the right time is; it's something that comes up from my unconscious mind. And so I sit there.

Last night we had Beginning Anew with the Vietnamese people and I knew there was something I had to say. And I thought, "Oh maybe when we start to talk, I will." But somehow, it wasn't the right time. I just knew it wasn't the right time. So I just sat there and followed my breath and I didn't have any plans for the future at all. And then there was a big space of silence and somehow some sort of emptiness - you feel some sort of emptiness - it's not particularly you who's taking the flower - and at that time you just get up and you take the flower. And you talk. And you talk to help everybody - to help you, but to help everybody else too. And maybe you fail. Well, it isn't so awful. We all fail from time to time so it doesn't matter. And next time you can be better. It's not the end of the world.

The main thing is after Beginning Anew you feel lighter, you feel you've learnt something. You feel maybe a little bit hurt, but it isn't so serious. To feel a little bit hurt is better than somebody having to repress some bad feelings about you for many years . Because when you feel bad about somebody else, you feel bad about yourself. You understand? If somebody else feels bad about you, they're feeling bad about themselves. Because as soon as we have a bad feeling about somebody else, we know that we're feel bad about ourselves. So we're doing it for everybody; we're not just doing it for ourselves.

We know so well that in our consciousness are buried all the wholesome seeds, seeds of love and understanding, all the seeds of peace and joy. But because we do not know how to water them and we always allow sorrow to overwhelm them, how can they spring up fresh and green?

When we begin Beginning Anew we want to water those seeds of love and understanding. So from the deep part of my heart, with all my sincerity, I say something with a meaning to somebody in my community I know who needs watering because their flower is a little bit droopy. And everybody can do that. Some of the people who are best, the most skilful at watering flowers, are usually the youngest people in the community. We know they're inclined to be sincere. When you hear a young person saying something nice about you, you know that they probably mean it. An older person gets better at flattery we don't want to do flattery though.

Sometimes you want to tell somebody how they've hurt you by some unskilful action they've done. You may say, "Remember how we were both ordained together and how our practice has always been linked? Therefore I want to clear something up with you which I feel is bothering me at the moment. On Thursday when you did such and such I felt very hurt. You're always such a sweet person. You have such a lovely smile. I know that you didn't mean to hurt me but I want you to know, I really want you to know that you did hurt me, deeply, when you said such and such."

Sometimes we're just a little bit irritated with somebody. I think maybe we ought to say that too. "I was irritated with you when you did that." It's good

to be able to say that too. Not just deeply hurt, but just irritated. Because small irritation can build up into something big and it's best to nip it in the bud, to acknowledge that I am irritated, and to be able to say to the other person, "You irritated me."

Sometimes we don't want to say it to the whole community. For instance, if you suspect your dharma sister has stolen a lot of money, you wouldn't want to say in front of the whole community, "I was very hurt when I discovered you had stolen a lot of money." But you would want to say it just to them because you don't want other people to know. And so you have to arrange a time to talk to them just with one other very good dharma friend who's neutral and can sit there and keep the atmosphere stable and serene. So there'll just be three of you, in fact.

When we have problems which are specifically between two people, we usually invite those two people to come together with a third impartial person who looks after the bell, and we have several sessions. At one session one of the people can talk and the other person just listens the whole session and we bow and go away. And in the next session the other person talks. And so on, until it is resolved.

And if we know somebody has what we call an internal formation, that is a bundle inside, a sort of knot inside, made up of feelings and thoughts, causing them to suffer, but they can't express it, we should be able to encourage that person to speak - somehow to get them to speak - and that's very difficult sometimes. Because they can't undo the knot and we want to help them to talk. And sometimes when they begin to talk, it's very difficult to listen to them because they suffer so much and it sort of pours out and it's like a sort of poison coming out of a wound, like pus coming out of a wound, and it's not very pleasant.

So we have to know ourselves, "How much can I take?" We don't want to overstretch ourselves. And so that when we hear this coming out, we sit and listen and breathe as long as we can. And when we feel that we've had enough, we can't take any more, we have to bow and say, "I'm sorry. I'm very tired."

Can we carry on another time please?" And you have to have another session to finish it off. I had to do that in Vietnam. I had to listen to somebody express their suffering from five o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock. At ten o'clock I couldn't take any more. So I had to say, "I'm sorry, I have to stop. I can't take any more. We'll carry on another day."

When some people express their suffering a lot of violence comes out too. What is important then is the quality of our listening. We support each other by listening. But we have to know that this is helping this person to express their hurt. The quality of our listening is what helps. If we don't listen, what will happen is that as they express their suffering, it gets resown in their subconscious because it is not being accepted and they might say, "I feel like I'm talking to myself." And talking to myself may not be helpful because it's getting resown. But if we are receptive and we really sit and listen, then it's a chance that that suffering can be transformed for that person. So we should encourage them.

Generally we have four things that we may talk about in Beginning Anew. The first is you may water flowers, as we talked about. If you see a flower in your community is a little bit droopy, you can water it.

The second thing is you can talk about how you regret having done something during the past week. But it really must be a regret - not just to impress people by repenting or something like that. That can happen, by the way. You should really feel deep regret and if when you say it you feel better, you know that that was right. You feel relief.

And the third thing we need to express is how we've been hurt or how we are irritated and so on. Those are usually the three things: watering the flower, expressing our regret for something we have done and saying how we've been hurt. The third is the most difficult. It takes the most humility. It takes more humility than repenting something that you've done, I think. Because you need to admit that you are still an unenlightened being who gets hurt, even if it's about something very trifling like not getting a smile when you get the biscuits in the tea meditation.

Sometimes we allow a fourth thing as well, and that is an explanation to my community of my past experiences so they know what I'm going through psychologically in the present moment. That gives my community a chance to understand me better. So that if I look very grumpy, or I'm very short with people from time to time or I seem to be completely locked up in myself, and I can talk about my past, then my community says, "Oh yes! That's why you're like that!" And they won't feel that you've got a personal grudge against them. They'll understand the hurt and want to support you and help you.

All wrong-doing arises in the mind.

When the mind is pure,
there is no wrong-doing there.

The white flowers today,
as always,
float freely in the sky.

This traditional gatha recognises all the seeds we have in our own consciousness, in the collective consciousness. And our own consciousness is only a part of the collective consciousness. We may say, "I don't sow seeds of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. So I never break the five precepts." But in fact the seeds of breaking the five precepts are there in all of us because they are there in the society. And we are part of the society. So when we do Beginning Anew, we're not just doing it for ourselves. We're doing it for our whole society.

We have all done things in the past that we regret and Buddhism is something which doesn't like guilt. It is just another obstacle to our practice. So it is not useful, really, to feel guilty about what we've done in the past. It doesn't really help anybody. It uses up a lot of energy, feeling guilty, and we could use that energy in a different way.

So that is why we have that wonderful gatha. "All wrong-doing arises in the mind." If I'm going to kill somebody or steal something, I have to think about it first. So the idea arises and then I go out and do it. "When the mind is pure, there is no wrong-doing there." Well, I can make my mind pure at any moment. All I have to do is maybe hear the bell, sit and follow my breath, make my body and mind one. And my mind is pure. So the wrong-doing is not there.

"The white flowers today, as always, float freely in the sky." I am free. I am free of concepts of me, my wrong-doing and things like that. And I know there is only one way to put right what went wrong in the past. And that way is how I am in the present moment.

In Plum Village we sometimes have Vietnamese war veterans coming, and obviously, when they come to a Vietnamese community, it is very difficult for them. They remember how, during the war with Vietnam, they killed a lot of Vietnamese people and they feel a lot of guilt. So we tell them, "Please, what is done is done. There is no way you can undo it. There is only one thing you can do and that is to begin anew in the present moment." So we say, "Look, we are sending off medicine to Vietnam today. Why don't you help us wrap up the parcels, because this medicine may save a child's life. So all you can do now to put right having taken a child's life in the past is to save a child's life now."

So we see that the way we are now in the present is the most important thing, not what we have done in the past. Because the way we are in the present is what will influence our future. And Buddhism has always been very open about this, the thought that in our subconscious mind there is a store of unwholesome seeds and a store of wholesome seeds and the important thing is not how many unwholesome seeds there are but the ratio of wholesome to unwholesome.

The thing is how we are now, what we do now. The ability to be able to sit and to take in a few breaths and see that your mind has the capacity to be pure now and then act out of that purity is all that matters. And we don't need prisons and things like that if people know how to do that. So when we say we are sorry for something, that means I'm saying I'm sorry because I really want that person not to be hurt. Because when I say I'm sorry I'm meaning I'm going to do things in a different way now, do something different. Nobody wants to go back to the Vietnam War and kill children any more. It's much more happy to send off medicine, that is what I'm saying sorry is about - I won't do it again."

There's a tendency at first to always want to reply to people, to respond. One good way not to react when somebody says something to you, rather than say,

"Ooh! I didn't say that!" or, "Ooh! I didn't do that!" is to say something like this in our heart: "Thank you. I have heard what you said and I have made a note of it. So I'm not going to react now. I'm not going to say that you're right, but I'm not going to say that you are wrong. I will take it away and over the week I will think about it. It's very good." So you go away and you think, "Oh that person is partly true. It's not a hundred percent true, but there is some truth in it." And you see that. But if you react, you're inclined to say it's completely right or completely wrong. But, "Thank you. I have heard what you said and I have made a note of it," is very open, not as a formality, but because you are open.

What if the person who has hurt you isn't there at the meeting? - which often happens. It happened last night. Somebody asked the chairperson, "I have been hurt by somebody who is not here - a member of our sangha who is not here. Can I say so?" And the person inviting the bell said, "Yes. But on certain conditions. One: you take complete responsibility for what you say, so that if any of us goes to that person and says, "Oh, by the way, Brother So-and-so said he was very angry when you did that, that, that," you take responsibility for that. Two: you speak with all your awareness and mindfulness as if that person were here and you were speaking directly to them. And three: you do your best to go to that person when you have the next opportunity and talk it out with them. But we are very ready to listen to you now, to help you feel better. But it's like a preparation. You are preparing now to be able to go to that person with a flower and say to them, "You hurt me." Or, "I felt very hurt when you said that." It's better to say it that way.

Sometimes if somebody is breaking too many rules the chairperson invites the bell, and says "I think this is going against the principles," or if somebody keeps interrupting, or hasn't taken the flower, "No it's not allowed."

When people seem to be getting weary, the chairperson may want to say, "Noble community, some of you look a little tired, or uncomfortable, would you like to end this session in about fifteen minutes or go and stretch your legs? or have a breath of fresh air?" And at the end of Beginning Anew, we all bow and take

each other's hands so we feel some connection with each other. And some people go up and smile or hug each other.

From Beginning Anew you learn how to listen. It's a wonderful gift. And you can listen to anybody anywhere in the world. Sometimes it's the best thing you can do, to understand a person, why they're like that, what they've gone through in the past. It's quite enlightening when you see how a person who makes everybody around them suffer, how deeply they suffer themselves. Once you can touch the deep suffering they're going through, it makes it much easier to love them. If you can't touch that suffering, it's very difficult. Giving a person a bit of space to talk can create the conditions for their Buddha-nature to flower.

It is also practice in itself, a practice of how to listen deeply, how to be humble. The quality of the listening is so important. It is important that there is a core group of people in the sangha who really know how to listen and to speak, who commit to the practice of listening and speaking. I don't know how much conflict or friction there is in your sangha, what irritations, annoyances, or anger crops up. Is your community as healthy as it could be? Very often the best way to ascertain the health of the sangha is to ask, "How am I myself? How am I when I come to my sangha? How do I feel? Do I feel we could make things better? And if we could, then how?"

If there is a group who can practice Beginning Anew every month, like the Board, they become a healthy core, because if the core is healthy, the rest is healthy. If the blood is circulating properly in the Board then it circulates everywhere. If all those people have their own regular Beginning Anew session together, when they join the bigger group they may be able to really help.

Because sangha building is the very basis of our practice. A sangha needs to be growing all the time. It's like a tree. If the tree doesn't put out new branches, we know it's not in good health. A sangha needs to be developing, growing, changing the whole time, never the same one year to the next. And the best way is to use the enlightened aspect of everyone's mind in the sangha. And in order to do that you have to have a very good communication between yourselves so everybody feels they have something to contribute and they can be

listened to. That way the sangha can grow.

I can say without any doubt that my practice has been able to develop because of Beginning Anew more than any other thing in my community life. To be able to hear from other people how I have upset them, to be able to see myself as other people see me from the outside has really helped me to know myself better and to become a much happier person, a much easier person to live with. It has helped me tremendously. And so that is why when I go to teach people, I recommend the practice. Although it's been difficult sometimes to hear about my faults, it's not always been pleasant, in the end I've always felt lighter. And though I sometimes go to bed after Beginning Anew feeling a little bit upset, when I wake up in the morning, I always feel wonderful. I feel, "How wonderful! I have a chance to begin to be a new person today."

It is like the miracle of humility. Humility takes you right back to the beginning, right back to beginner's mind. You see that you haven't made any progress at all. You're right where you were in the beginning. And it's wonderful. You can begin anew.

Sister Annabel is the Director of Practice at Plum Village,
France

end of file