



## **The Community of Interbeing UK**

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020

### **COVID-19 Advice for UK Sanghas**

Dear Friends,

“Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, we are committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope.”

We are writing to Sanghas around the country to offer support, ideas, and guidance to enable continuation of our group practice in a time of significant challenge, and to cultivate and sustain spiritual life for the benefit of families, friends, neighbours, society, and the beloved community.

### **General Public Health Advice**

Our advice to Sanghas is to read carefully information about the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation in the UK, and guidance for what to do if you think you're at risk, as published on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) by the Department of Health and Social Care. We must all refer to these pages and the devolved governments in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland for public health information.

If the virus outbreak worsens in the UK then social distancing measures are expected as part of our national response, where as a society we act together to try to slow the spread of the virus to the summer when there is less pressure on the NHS. We can usefully start to think now about social distancing and what that means for sangha group meetings - considering alternatives and making changes to ease transition and continue our shared practice.

Action now, by those who are able, will support friends quickly and address the potential for people feeling isolated and alone when social distancing measures are in place.

*A lotus for you, a Buddha to be*

Offering a smile and a bow - recognising the Buddha nature in all beings - is an established and deep element of our practice that we can all share freely in place of hand shakes and hugs. Where a hand or a hug is offered we can smile and decline politely, recognising that a solid individual practice has immediate benefit for others too.

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Meetings in person, where they continue, must take precautions - hand washing for instance in accordance with government advice. Many Plum Village songs and Gathas are the perfect length to enjoy during longer hand washing practice!

### **Responses to some specific queries you may have.**

*Should we hold meetings in person?*

This is a question that each sangha should answer for themselves with due reference to the advice and guidance being given by the government for each stage of the virus outbreak. As we are now moving into the delay phase of the government's strategy, it could be that sanghas decide it is prudent not to meet face to face in order to minimise risk to our beloved community. We would certainly recommend this course of action if the government issues advice to stop all non-essential indoor public gatherings for small numbers of people as we normally have at Sangha meetings.

*Is there any useful technology available so that we could hold our meetings online?*

Yes. If you have a member of your sangha with some basic IT skills then it is very easy to set up an online meeting for your sangha. If you are a small sangha with less than 12 regular attendees then you could use something like [www.whereby.com](http://www.whereby.com) for online meetings. Alternatively you can use [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us). The cost of using these online applications varies from around £7 to £12 per month. There are many help articles and videos available online for each of these applications and so they are pretty straightforward to set-up. If you get stuck with any aspect of getting online to enjoy shared practice, please email us here [onlinesangha@plumvillage.uk](mailto:onlinesangha@plumvillage.uk) and one of our team will reach out to support you directly.

The minimum technology required to join an online meeting is a phone. Sanghas may like to check that all their regulars have access to at least this minimum and consider making some provision for those that do not.

Dana collected by groups could fund, for instance, pay as you go mobiles for friends in need of them. People may also have unused devices at home that could be offered for use by friends, and shared.

Flowing as a river together it is important that all members of our community are considered and included, no matter their individual means.

*Are there online sanghas already set-up that we could join?*

For those wondering about online sanghas there's a lovely article, 'Plumline, Finding Home in an Online Sangha', by Donna Thomas, from the Autumn 2018 issue of The Mindfulness Bell (issue 79). The article has been shared with Donna's blessing on our website, linked [here](#).

Plumline is the global umbrella organisation for online sanghas in our tradition, with a caretaking council drawn from OI members. Plumline has a website and information about each of the many sanghas available and practicing online. There are a couple of ways to look at information. These options are all linked below:

<https://plumline.org>

[Plumline Sanghas List View (Google Doc) - February 2020](<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Vf6H0BvYI-YKGOOGBq5rS3Gk9bJO-TTGkI7OtAuV1a8/>)

Existing sangha groups might choose to either form their own online presences and activity, or join an existing Plumline group. Those choosing to create their own group should know that the Plumline facilitators sangha is available to you for support, with members across the world very happy to offer advice and practical assistance for you to establish online. Help available from the Plumline group [is linked here](#). This may all seem quite technical but it's amazing how quickly a new routine becomes normal. Plumline have produced a helpful video for new facilitators which you can [access here](#).

### **Care for ourselves, care for our community**

*"In Vietnam, there are many people, called boat people, who leave the country in small boats. Often the boats are caught in rough seas or storms, the people may panic, and boats can sink. But if even one person aboard can remain calm, lucid, knowing what to do and what not to do, he or she can help the boat survive. His or her expression – face, voice – communicates clarity and calmness, and people have trust in that person. They will listen to what he or she says. One such person can save the lives of many."*

— Thich Nhat Hanh, Being Peace

The Plum Village tradition of mindfulness is a practice centred in our true home, the present moment. They has transmitted to us the profound teachings and practices of the Buddha for nourishing peace, joy and happiness, and transformation of suffering. We are all in different places but we flow as a river in the same direction.

Aware of the truth of suffering we know that some of us will experience anger, fear, anxiety and despair – but freedom from these is also possible. The energy of mindfulness generated by our

practice together as a Sangha will be of significant benefit in the times to come.

*“The present moment is the substance with which the future is made. Therefore, the best way to take care of the future is to take care of the present moment. What else can you do?”*

— *Thich Nhat Hanh, The Art of Mindful Living*

This is our advice on 12th March 2020. We will distribute updated advice if needed by further developments.

A lotus for you,



The Trustees of Plum Village UK (the Community of Interbeing UK)