



# the mindfulness bell

**Peace, Love, and Happiness**  
*Thich Nhat Hanh*

**Engaging Together for Change**  
*Brother Chan Phap Dung*

**Healing Racial Karma**

**Practicing During the Pandemic**

**Nourishing Our Community**

*Guest edited by ARISE  
and André Vellino*





Opening Heart Mindfulness Community gathering in their new space before the pandemic, March 9, 2020

photo by LaurenBarkume.com

When the pandemic arrived in the United States, we could no longer meet in person in Washington, DC, and moved onto the Zoom platform to continue sitting together. As a majority white and privileged community, most of us were easily able to shelter in place. However, we saw the devastating effects the pandemic brought upon essential workers, marginalized communities, and people in other countries, so we decided to apply Thich Nhat Hanh's practice of engaged Buddhism to this pandemic.

We relate deeply with Thay's teaching about understanding being the foundation of love. As he writes in *Be Free Where You Are*, "Understanding is the substance out of which we fabricate compassion. What kind of understanding am I talking about? It is the understanding that the other person suffers, too."

As a result of this insight, several of us had already been practicing together to deepen our understanding and awareness through racial and economic justice education, monthly social justice discussions and actions, and mobilizing our Sangha and friends for direct actions.

Inspired by our growing understanding, we could not help but act. We were not sure of the best way to get involved, so we considered the insights of interbeing and generosity. With interbeing, we know the suffering of one group of people is the suffering of all of us, and what we do for others we do for ourselves. With our Sangha's time and material resources, we knew we could make a difference in the lives of people who were suffering. Although this was only the start of the pandemic's economic fallout, individuals and families already faced food insecurity and didn't know where their next meal would come from. We knew that extending generosity would deepen our Sangha's understanding, love, and connectedness.

We studied the teachings on generosity more closely. How could we be generous without creating a superiority/savior complex, an inferiority/shame complex, or an equality complex? With this in mind, we explored one of Thay's deep practices of community: the practice of having a second body. This time, we decided to practice as a community, rather than as individuals. We asked Nueva Vida, a local organization serving Latinas with cancer, to be the second body to our community.

One of our members, Adriana Arizpe Martin, had been helping Nueva Vida for some years as a board member and volunteer. She introduced our Sangha to their work and, through them, to the women who were dealing with the fallout of inequality that treats low-wage Latina women as exploitable and disposable.

# Becoming a Second Body with a Frontline Community

By Opening Heart  
Mindfulness Community

*The Opening Heart Mindfulness Community's inclusivity committee began in 2018 and includes Adriana Arizpe; Annie Mahon, True Blue Lake; Brigitte Pichot, True Deep Aspiration; Camille Martone; Marie Sheppard, Joyful Path of the Heart; and Sandra Kim, Peaceful Action of the Heart. For more information about Nueva Vida, you can visit the website at [nueva-vida.org](http://nueva-vida.org).*



We had not known the extent of suffering in this population, many of whom live and work in our own neighborhoods and enable us to shelter in place while they put themselves and their families in harm's way. According to Nueva Vida's website, the Latinx population is a medically underserved community with barriers to accessing care and a high incidence of cancer mortality. Latinx women are more likely to be diagnosed at later stages and with larger tumors, and they are 20% more likely to die from their breast cancer, than non-Hispanic white women. Nueva Vida, which literally means "New Life," has as its core strategy the viewpoint that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this health potential because of social position or any other defined circumstances.

Nueva Vida helps Latina women with cancer, most of whom are also in difficult immigration situations, to learn about cancer prevention and supports them as they navigate a complex medical system during their cancer treatment. Nueva Vida also provides culturally appropriate emotional and material support to the women and their families.

We saw how much these women had suffered, especially going through a scary, vulnerable, and painful process without even a shared language. Many of the women have only a second-grade education and they face cancer without insurance or economic resources. In addition, they and their families are often labelled dangerous, criminals, and invaders.

Adriana offered us her story with Nueva Vida and how she connected her practice with this deeper teaching on understanding:

*I started practicing immediately after being diagnosed with breast cancer. I needed something to help me find peace during those very frightening moments of my life.*

*I practiced for years with focusing on my persona, my feelings, my fears, my weakness and strengths. I started noticing that the practice was helping me feel more centered and calmer, and I understood the fact that the best way to accept the uncertainty of my own personal future was accepting the present moment.*

*After that insight, I was ready to look further than myself, and I started to acknowledge that I was part of a community that I needed to look into more deeply.*

*As a Latina immigrant, I started noticing what was going on in the larger community that I was living in. I started paying more attention to the suffering and vulnerability present in that community. I decided to speak up, to ask questions, to try to help others notice what I was noticing, and, most importantly, I acknowledged that I, too, have been part of the injustice because I was not doing enough to ease the suffering. Understanding must lead to doing.*

We wanted to include the whole Sangha community in this generosity journey with us, not just those of us who instigated the second-body practice. So we created a campaign for the month of May to deepen our understanding of the practice of generosity, educate the Sangha about the Nueva Vida community and show up for and reach out to women in the Nueva community.

As part of our second-body practice, all financial donations made to the Sangha through the month of May were given directly to Nueva Vida to support the women. This benefited our Sangha's practice every bit as much as our shared resources and actions benefited the women with cancer.

They wrote the following about the second-body practice: "When each Sangha member takes care of his or her second body, the whole Sangha is taken care of. When your second body has some happiness, you share that happiness. If your second body has difficulties, you need to understand these difficulties. And if alone, you cannot help your second body, you need to ask for help from somebody else. You don't have to be better than your second body, you need to help your second body. Practicing like this, you will see a miraculous result... When you take care of your second body, your third, fourth, and fifth bodies are also taken care of. Taking care of your second body, you take care of everybody else."<sup>1</sup>

When we give our full attention to a person, a community, or a cause, we are practicing generosity. And that generosity can affect change in several dimensions at the same time—one of the many fruits of interbeing.

Our goals were to raise \$5,000 for Nueva Vida through direct donations and a matching grant from our entire Sangha, and to raise the visibility of these women and their work. We encouraged all our members to share this information widely. We raised \$4,000 and have raised awareness about Nueva Vida within our community and beyond. The value of the awareness outreach is difficult to measure. We believe the women of Nueva Vida feel more seen and valued by the community than they did at the start of this pandemic.

The fact that we have been able to give something and help this community brings us great joy and a sense of purpose and meaning. We need them to be well for us to be well. We must leave no one behind on this journey. We are in this together always, not just during this COVID-19 emergency. Together we can help transform despair and hopelessness into community care and repair.

We know this is a start for our Sangha. Now that we have a different understanding of the second-body practice, we can and will continue to partner with other frontline communities for the benefit of our Sangha and all beings. 🌱

<sup>1</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, "Taking Care of Each Other," *the Mindfulness Bell*, Spring 1999.