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Thai Plum Village Practice Center

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### Welcoming the Extraordinary Songkran 2020

There are still a few days until the Songkran holidays (Thai's New Year) but the atmosphere of the monastery is quite quiet. A group of brothers and sisters in the "Care Taking Council" is preparing for the Songkran festival at the monastery within the spiritual family of monks and nuns. How can joy be complete when the world is overwhelmed by anxiety, fear, and crisis due to the pandemic called nCovid-19. Every year, the monks and nuns are very happy to organize a retreat for hundreds of Thai speaking people to attend, a meaningful New Year and full of spiritual culture, joy and cohesion, especially among family members and close friends. Although we are quite peaceful and are being protected by our Lord Buddha, heavenly dragons, guardians, land ancestors and nature, but we are very sympathetic and thinking of you. Due to the situation, we cannot help outside the monastery besides practicing sitting, walking meditation, chanting, and praying for the world to be safe and for humanity to soon stop the pandemic in order to return to normal life. We can only contribute to our stability, our peaceful presence through online meditation, chanting, and touching the earth so you can have a place for refuge so you do not get overwhelmed with worries, anxieties, and hopelessness.

Although this year we are not able to gather together like every year to celebrate Songkran in piety and to improve the moral and spiritual quality in each person, each family, and in the community, because we must practice social-distancing. In the Buddhist tradition, sometimes monks also enter into a time called solo-retreat, maybe for a week or two weeks or even longer period for contemplation, to discover and realize deeply the Buddha's teachings (the true reality). The "Three-Month Rain Retreat" of the monastics is also a type of mass retreat. These days were extremely precious, valuable to the monastics where they do not have to travel, and they must dwell in one place for three months. Therefore they have plenty of time to promote, to cultivate their body and mind, to build, and consolidate the monastics life.

Living outside involves businesses and events; it becomes more difficult to have time for yourself and your family. Please take advantage of this pandemic season to come back to take care of yourself, listen deeply to yourself in order to understand and love yourself a little more. When only you are able to understand and love yourself, then you will be able to understand and love others. Take advantage of this opportunity to be with your family, your loved ones and do things that can bring them joy and happiness that you once promised to yourself to do so. Sometimes we complain that we have no time to really live, to love, and to be there for ourselves. Isn't that right? Isn't this the best time? Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, our most beloved and respected teacher taught that "How can we love if we are not really there"? "If not now, when"? Songkran, during the epidemic and quarantine season, is a great opportunity for us to sit down to offer each other the drops of nectar from each thought, word, and deed. Even though it might be a small act, but it is enough to bring the warmth, joy, and happiness for yourself, your loved ones, and others. We do not need to splash the water like we do every year (although the splashing water feast is very fun and connected) but we know that in everyone's heart there is a baby Buddha. We sprinkle the nectar of compassion therefore the baby Buddha in each person will grow with faith, joy, happiness, compassion,

inner peace and freedom. This will spring up and spread the power to reduce and transform the energies that overwhelm us which are worry, fear, and insecurity.

As Buddhists, we always know how to respond to each situation accordingly. There is nothing to be afraid of because we have a path. There are natural disasters, floods, poverty, epidemics which many people and other species perish. Therefore we should not panic. Birth and death (samsara) is natural, yet our ancestors still had to experience, learn, go through, and feel loss. However they gave us their experiences and skills so we can keep moving forward. They died for us and so we live for them. When they die, a part of us die. When we are alive, a part of them are alive in us. Because you are therefore I am. That is the deep teaching of interbeing, “non-self of Buddhism”.

This pandemic has become very threatening, has taken thousands of lives and it is highly contagious. This pandemic will create deep hardship in the world economies. However, the scarier thing is the fear itself. Fear will cause us to slowly wither and even kill us. It gives rise to anxiety, depression, despair, confusion, anger, and violence. However, if we look at a different perspective, the atmosphere of the earth has become fresher, cleaner, reduced car accident and death. People are re-learning the habit of eating and living, becoming more mindful, slowing down, moderate, and healthier, we learn to appreciate each other more.

Although the curve of the disease has not flattened, life is still beautiful and there are many things for us to be aware of and cherish. If we know how to light up the light of mindfulness and live deeply and meaningfully each moment, there will be no chance for regrets and fear to take place. Fearless is something we can generate, especially in this difficult moment. Certainly, we hope for a vaccine as soon as possible, but let's not just sit there and long for a vaccine. The spirit of fearlessness, joy, happiness, love and inner peace is also an extremely crucial and effective vaccine. "Live happily, die peacefully." That is the teaching of His Holiness, the Dalai Dharma. Will I be infected by nCovid-19? Nobody knows! But we know for sure that we can learn to live mindfully and peacefully in the midst of the pandemic.

May the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha bless you all to live in safety and happiness.

Wishing you and your family a very peaceful and loving Songkran.

On behalf of the monks and nuns at Thai Plum Village International Meditation Practice Center.

With Metta,  
Bikkhu Dhamma Sati