

Dear Thây, dear Sister True Emptiness, dear friends. As I was walking to where I sit now, I realised with every step, how much I take refuge in the sangha; how much, and how completely, I depend on you.

I would like to share with you a little of how I find my way between my pride and low self-esteem, and how I try to be truly myself. When I am truly myself, I feel very connected. There is no fear in me.

But when I put myself down, or when I feel pride, I feel disconnected, from friends, from nature, and from myself.

*"Who is it, holding the bell?"* I asked myself this question, in the spring, during a sangha meeting in Amsterdam. As I was about to invite the bell, I noticed there was a feeling of *being somebody*.

I did not want to invite the bell with that attitude. So I wondered, "How can I empty myself of this feeling?" Then a second question came into my mind: *"Who is it, holding the bell?"*

Right away I saw, all that I am, and all that I am able to become, is not from my own merit. It has been given to me by my parents, my teachers, friends, and numerous beings. And the feeling of superiority, of pride, just flew out of me. Instead I felt grateful. I concentrated on inviting the bell in the most beautiful way possible, and being a servant in inviting the bell.

*"Who is it, inviting the bell in an unskillful way?"* Now we come closer to Plum Village, and in fact another line should be added: *"Who is it, that had a hard time this year, to really arrive in Plum Village?"*

I have lived in Plum Village for long periods, and I have visited Plum Village many times, but this year it was very hard for me to really get in touch with the ground, with the trees and with the people. As the days passed, and I knew

this day would come, I began to feel worse and worse about myself. I thought, *"After all these years, I definitely should be able to arrive."* The harder I tried, I still could not get in touch in the way I know I can get in touch.

There came a moment when I just felt very hopeless. I sat down in the grass, and I said to myself: *"OK Eveline, after two weeks you are still not able to really arrive ... and that is OK."* Suddenly there

was a feeling of relief. It was like an opening in the wall, between what I considered to be me and not-me. Then I heard a bird sing, and I said to myself: *"At*

*least you can hear a bird sing. May be you are not able to arrive 100%, in this moment. But you are able to arrive for 3% or 10%, and that is OK."*

The next day, just before Thây's dharma talk, I was invited to be the bell mistress for the talk. That morning I rang the bell two times in an unskillful way. Thây had been talking about the tape in our head, that keeps going and is so hard to stop. And both times after I invited the bell not so skillfully, the tape of criticising myself, of putting myself down, started to run; telling me in countless ways, how not-good I was. I noticed it had started, and I did not let it run.

The following night there was a great thunder-storm. It woke me up, and kept me awake for several hours. As I lay in the dark, I kept wondering about many things, like what I would talk about today. They were not very light-giving thoughts.

The following day, after morning meditation, we read the discourse on *'Knowing the better way to live alone.'* At the end of this discourse there is a

*Who is it, holding the bell?  
Who is it, inviting the bell  
in an unskillful way?  
Embracing the present moment  
all separation dissolves.*

*Eveline Beumkes*

line that goes something like this:

*"When someone who doesn't know about the teachings, and thinks 'I am this body, this body is me; I am these feelings, these feelings are me; I am this perception, this perception is me; I am this mental formation, this mental formation is me; I am this consciousness, this consciousness is me', then that person is being swept away by the present."*

At that moment a bell rang in my head, and I thought: "Mmm, maybe I am not what I think I am. I am not my thoughts." And during breakfast, I realised more and more, I am not all the thoughts I have about myself. Suddenly these thoughts lost their power. They had been sticking to me, making me feel very heavy. Now they were completely changed. It was really unbelievable. They became as light as the seeds of a dandelion. Right away I felt so relieved and relaxed. I felt so happy to be in Plum Village. I could see the people around me. I could see



the trees, and I could hear the wind. I had really arrived, and I had a very happy day.

The next day there was a situation where I usually feel a lot of resistance, and I thought again: "*I am not my thoughts!*" I did not embark on any thought that came up. The image I received was that thoughts are like things you put in your pocket, like a pocket-knife, a note-book, and may be a candy. Just as easily as you can put them in, you can take them out again. You can empty your pocket. And that is what I did that evening. I did not feel touched by things that usually upset me.

I would like to share a song with you that came to me yesterday. I had been listening to the wind, sitting under a tree, looking at the sunlight playing on the leaves, and continuing to feel very happy ...

*I listen to the song of the wind,  
it has no name  
I listen to the song of the wind,  
it has no words  
I listen to the song of the wind,  
and I can see  
The wind is free,  
the wind is free*

*I listen to the song of the wind,  
it has no name  
I listen to the song of the wind,  
it has no words  
I listen to the song of the wind,  
and I can see  
I am the wind,  
and the wind is free*