

Dear everyone,

My best wishes for peace, happiness, vigilance and goodwill in the year ahead!

The past year has been marked by more violence than usual. Humanity is once again falling into the same stupidities and ruts. Let's tell a story:

Once upon a time there was a traveler from abroad. One morning he went into a grocery shop in a souk in the Middle East to buy some honey. He waited patiently for his turn, but didn't notice that the ants had gathered to eat a drop of honey that was on the rim of the large earthen pot in the shop; this pot was itself on the rim of a shelf. A bird came to eat the ants, a cat jumped on the honey pot to try to eat the bird, missed it, but knocked over the container which broke on the dirt floor, so the whole honey was wasted. The grocer, who was serving another customer, turned round and saw the traveler with a bewildered look on his face next to the broken jar of honey. He deduced that it was he who had done it, and became furious. The traveler tried to explain, but this made the shopkeeper even angrier, and he began to hit him. The other shopkeeper replied, tackling the shopkeeper to the ground and beginning to beat him, the shopkeeper shouted for help, and the neighboring shopkeepers came and lynched the foreigner so badly that he died. The king of the neighboring country where the foreigner had come from had been planning to invade the country for a long time, so he quickly seized on this pretext to launch a war of aggression. The professional armies were almost completely destroyed, many civilians died, refugees were crowding the roads with nowhere to go, and finally the economies of both countries were so ruined that the two governments were forced to make peace again...

Faced with the violence of the world, which is nothing new, we need to protect our inner world. There are various ways of doing this. For a start, let's remember to develop a sense of humour in spite of everything. In fact, lack of humour and depression are linked, without it being clear where the cause and effect lie. Here's a nice example of English humour. During the bombing of London in 1940, a courageous shopkeeper carried on working and put a sign on his door every day: "Open as usual". One day a bomb exploded outside his shop, shattering the window. The only sign he put up that day was: "More open than usual"...

It is well known that wars are only the result of the sum of the inner violence of human beings. In this sense, developing a culture of non-violence is fundamental. I particularly recommend an author, Jean-Marie Mueller, some of whose books have been published by my publisher Marc de Smedt for 15 years. He is a Christian Gandhian who has worked all his life in the direction of non-violence. Reading his work and having others read it is a real contribution in this direction. If only 10% of the money spent on arms were spent on non-violence, humanity would make giant strides forward. The Dalai Lama also asserts that if all children aged eight and over started meditating, within two generations there would be no more wars.

On the one hand, we must of course be wary of information overload, which is very much like an addiction, without falling into the other extreme of not being informed at all. Not wanting to look at what's going on in the world would be a success in the face of those who want to conquer it through violence. Let's come back to information overload as a typical addiction: this is made worse by the fact that it is now easy to find quality information free of charge on the Internet. Imagine a populist government realizing that the electorate loves sugar, and deciding to offer everything sweet for free in every shop. The result would be a diabetes epidemic the likes of which we've never seen! You can be obese, diabetic on information, and what is nourishing in small doses is toxic in large doses. Will you remember? It has been observed that addiction to information stimulates dopamine, and probably endorphins, as does sugar itself.

To deal with the avalanche of messages coming at us at all levels, educating people to pay attention is even more important than it has been until now. With a team of volunteers, we have translated Alan Wallace's book, *La force de l'attention*, published by Editions du Relié (In English, *The Attention Revolution*). Alan Wallace is one of the best Western teachers of Tibetan Buddhism. This is a key work that develops a science of attention in both traditional Buddhist and modern ways. Spiritual traditions, educators and psychotherapists alike recognize the central importance of attention, but have little idea of how to train it systematically. This book fills that gap. When we truly absorb ourselves with well-honed attention, we achieve peace, and, as the Buddha said, "peace is the greatest of happiness". The Christian monks of the desert knew this too, who referred to their spiritual path as *hesychia*, or peace.

Some may question the traditional teaching that meditations on peace are effective. However, they are already helping to lift us out of the cloud of darkness that covers the regions struck by violence, and to keep us at a distance from the excitement of revenge. Revenge drives us to pay back the wrongs done to us tenfold, and is a psychological mechanism at the level of six-year-old children arguing in the playground. What's more, there are some very interesting scientific elements that revisit the question of the remote effectiveness of thoughts, prayers and wishes: you can read Lynn McTaggart's books, such as *The Power of Attention* and *The Power of Eight*, for example.

For me, the year was marked by a winter in India, my first after Covid. In the spring, I was lucky enough to be able to spend five weeks teaching and working on my own writings in Guadeloupe, in particular in Saint-Claude, which is in the south of the island. I found a noticeable interest in yoga and meditation there, and I'm going back there for three weeks in June. May was enlightened by a beautiful festival organized by the Journal du Yoga in the Bois de Vincennes, the first after the pandemic. In June and July, I continued my tour with longer courses as usual during the summer period, then 'set sail' at the end of July for seven weeks in India. We started with a memorable trip of 24 participants to Ladakh, where I discovered the Noubra valley, with its extraordinary landscapes, close to the second highest peak in the world, K2, in Pakistan, close to the Indian border. Together with Dinesh, who has been organizing trips for groups of French people for a quarter of a century, we have received a request to do a second edition of this trip, so it will take place in the second half of August. It's because of the similarity of the landscape and culture with Tibet that the Dalai Lama likes to come to Ladakh for retreats and teachings, usually for a month a year.

At the end of September, I was delighted to be back in Assisi for a congress of the Italian Yoga Federation, where I've been giving talks for a long time. The ten or so books I have translated into Italian were of great interest to the participants, and they sold as hot cakes...

I'm leaving for India on 14 December, where I've been invited to a yoga congress in Mysore, organized by the Indica association, which has developed considerably since Covid. The subject will be *Maitri*, universal friendship, a theme common to the teachings of the Buddha and Patanjali in the Yoga-sutras. It's an important theme in every age, but particularly in our time.

During the summer of 2024, I'll be leading among others, a retreat in Germany, in the Westphalian Forest, with a yoga teacher training school developed by a friend who follows the teachings of Mâ Anandamayî.

In February 2024, I'll be guiding a group to Maharashtra of around thirty people, students of two yoga teachers from Lyon, and in October of the same year to Sikkim with a group of Breton students of my old friend of forty years, Emile Lozevis, with whom I started yoga. The first group was full, the second almost.

In January 2025, again with Dinesh Sharma, we are planning a trip to the Prayagraj Kumbha-mela (Allahabad, at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna). This will be the fourth major Kumbha-mela in this place that I've attended in a row since 1989, once every twelve years. For the last one in 2013, I acted as a resource person and a guiding light for an Arte documentary, in the program "*En quête d'ailleurs*" (Enquiry for elsewhere). In May-June 2025, it will be Mount Kailash, the greatest Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage, in western Tibet. We'll probably pass through Kathmandu and Lhasa at the start, as we did the last two times, to get used to the altitude, and at the end, head straight back to Nepal.

I am planning to lead a retreat in Lebanon organized by Lwiis Saliba, in the frame of a ten days trip April 13 to 23. It would be a week of practice in one place, and then a bit of visiting, if the situation there stabilizes. It's important to support the Lebanese who are meditating for peace. Lwiis is a professor of religion at the University of Beirut and has been particularly inspired by Swami Vijayananda. He has put around 300 hours of our interviews online, part lecture, part guided meditation on YouTube on the Lwiis Saliba channel. During the first hour, Lwiis's talks are mainly in Arabic, summarized in French, and during the second one, Jacques's guided meditations are translated into Arabic sentence by sentence by Lwiis.

All the best for the New Year 2024

Jacques Vigne