

*Teachings on Meditation*

*by Thich Nhat Hanh*

*Edited by Jason Espada*

## Introduction

I have selected the following teachings on meditation by Thich Nhat Hanh for those who are new to the practice, as well as for older students. From the time I first saw Thay, on retreat in 1989, he has embodied for me what the teachings are about. His grace, dignity, calm stability and loving nature are communicated by his presence, in his voice, as well as his writings. His words on meditation, especially, are a real treasure.

I begin this collection with a basic method of meditation, based on his teachings. This is followed by his commentaries on the gathas, or short meditation poems that he has taught. His teachings on walking meditation are also included. For myself, walking meditation brings a good energy to the practice, which counters sleepiness, or lethargy. If I'm feeling restless, I've found that it's also very effective at calming body and mind.

What will work for a person is such a personal matter, I would suggest we experiment and see that is effective for us.

May we all we all receive the benefits of practice, just as our teachers intend.

Jason Espada  
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## A Basic Method of Meditation

Here is a basic method of meditation, as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Feel free to use this, if it works for you.

This method uses mindfulness of breathing, along with what are called 'gathas', or short meditation poems. We can be in the sitting position, or walking.

In sitting meditation, we sit with our back straight, in a posture that is both relaxed and attentive. Then, we simply breathe naturally.

In mindfulness of breathing practice, gently, patiently, and with clarity, we aim to bring one hundred percent of our attention to the breath. Our full awareness is given to the breath, all throughout the complete length of the inhalation, and the exhalation.

To show how we practice this, Thich Nhat Hanh gave us this illustration of mindfulness 'following', or staying with the breathing: He held up a pen in his left hand, lengthwise, and said: 'Let's say this is the length of your breath'. Then he held up the first finger of his other hand and said, 'And let's say this finger is your mindfulness. When mindfulness touches the breath, it's like this: (so saying, he placed his finger on one end of the pen).

When we breathe in, if we choose to, we can think 'in' (and as he said this he moved his finger along the length of the pen to the other end), and when we breathe out, we can think 'out' (and so saying he moved his finger back along the pen to the starting point). 'In' (moving along the pen to the end), 'Out' (moving back to the beginning). This is how we should practice, with mindfulness staying in contact with the breath.

He continued, 'When we leave our object, it's something more like this: It would be like thinking 'In' (finger moving along the pen), 'Out' (and back), 'In' (and then) 'Oh!, I forgot to turn off the light in my room' (and with this the finger leaves the pen and flies off into the air...) This is called leaving the object, or distraction. Instead of being distracted, we should simply stay in touch with the breathing, all throughout the entire length of the inhalation, and the exhalation.

If at times you find that your mind is restless, it can be useful to practice counting the breaths. Mindfully follow the inhalation, and the exhalation all the way through, in a relaxed way, and at the end of the exhalation, count gently to yourself, 'one'.

Breathing like this, you can count up to three, or four, ten, or twenty-one, as it suits your needs, and then start over again at one. If your attention wanders, just bring it back to the breath, and start over.

Another technique, offered by Ajaan Buddhadasa, in his book *Mindfulness with Breathing*, is to count the duration of an inhalation and exhalation, (for example, to the count of 5) and then to experiment with increasing this number (to 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10, or more). This automatically makes the breath longer, which relaxes us, quite naturally.

Practicing like this, conscious breathing with counting can be done at the beginning of a session, to settle and focus the mind, and to make it firm, before moving on to other methods, or it can be done for the whole session, as you wish.

When using the method of a gatha, in addition to this mindfulness of breathing, each line of a short meditation poem is repeated, to oneself, as many times as one likes before moving on to the next line.

The first word is brought to mind on the inhalation, and the second word, on the exhalation. We can use one gatha, or more than one.

The first gatha offered here is:

in - out ( a few times) (and then)

deep - slow (a few times...)

calm - ease

smile - release, and

present moment - wonderful moment

(or, 'present moment – there are wonderful things in this moment...)

The gathas are a means to direct and to quiet the mind. When the mind is calm, stable, and clear, we can choose to continue working with the gatha, reciting a line one or more times, and then letting go of words and just being with the inhalation and the exhalation for a few breaths. Or we can let go of the words completely, and just be with the experience of breathing in and out quietly, calmly and lucidly. See for yourself what works best for you.

As a general rule, we should keep our practice as simple as we can, and use only the minimum amount of method necessary to bring our mind to a settled, calm and clear state.

A second gatha, if you wish to use more than one, has both a long and a short version. After learning the longer meaning, if we wish, we can just use the shorter one. It goes like this:

Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in,  
breathing out, I know that I am breathing out

(practice as described above) (and then)

Breathing in, I see myself as a flower,  
breathing out, I feel fresh

Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain,  
breathing out, I feel solid

Breathing in, I see myself as still water,  
breathing out, I reflect things as they are, and,

Breathing in, I see myself as space,  
breathing out, I feel free

The shorter version of this, then, would be:

In, out  
Flower, fresh  
Mountain, solid  
Water, reflecting  
Space, free

A third gatha is as follows. In this one, each line is said to oneself along with the exhalation:

I arrive  
I am home  
In the here  
In the now  
I feel solid  
I feel free  
In the Ultimate,  
I dwell

## Walking Meditation

To wake up and steady the mind, or for a change of pace, to freshen the mind, you can practice walking meditation in a manner similar to that of sitting practice. Here, walking a little more slowly than usual, attention is placed on the breathing and on the contact between the feet and the ground. This is very soothing, very relaxing.

One method for walking meditation is to measure the length of the breath by the number of steps that are taken with the in-breath and the out-breath. ('one step, two steps, three, four... one, two, three, four...') (or, if walking more slowly, 'one..., two..., one..., two...'). Or, if you prefer, you can use a gatha, or you can just quietly follow your breath and the feeling of your foot touching the ground.

On the subject of walking meditation, Thich Nhat Hahn said, 'The quality of your walking depends on the degree of your concentration.' 'Don't lose any steps. If you have 100 steps, these 100 steps should be like 100 gems.', and, 'Each step can bring you peace and joy.'

Practice with patience, and with care.

My best wishes to you in your practice.



Teachings on Meditation, by Thich Nhat Hahn, selected by Jason Espada

On his gatha

In - Out

Deep - Slow

Calm - Ease

Smile - Release

Present Moment - Wonderful Moment

From A Dharma Talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1997

Healing is Possible Through Resting

Good morning, my dear friends.

Welcome to the third week of our summer opening. Today is the thirtieth of July 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We have been practicing pebble meditation during the past two weeks, and I hope that the children who just arrived yesterday and today will continue with our practice of the six pebbles. There are children who have been here for the last two weeks, and they will show you how to practice pebble meditation. You'll have to make a small bag like this, and find six pebbles like this, little pebbles. Wash them very carefully, dry them, and put them into the bag.

Today we will learn a short poem together, young people and also less young people. We are going to use the pebbles to practice the poem also. It would be wonderful if you can memorize the short poem in order to practice. Many of you know it by heart already, but

there may be a few of you who have not been introduced to the practice of this poem: "In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment." I guess most of us can sing it already. Shall we sing?

In, out.

Deep, slow.

Calm, ease.

Smile, release.

Present moment,

Wonderful moment.

This is a wonderful poem, because every time you practice it you'll feel much better within your body and your mind. When you are angry, when you are worried, when you suffer, if you know how to practice that poem then you will feel much better right away after one or two minutes.

I am going to remind you of the way to practice. First, "in" and "out." It means that when I breathe in, I know I am breathing in. It's easy. And when I breathe out, I know I am breathing out. I don't mix the two things up.

Breathing in, I know it is my in-breath. Breathing out, I know this is my out-breath. By that time, you stop all the thinking, you just pay attention to your in-breath and your out-breath. You are 100 percent with your in-breath and your out-breath.

It is like holding a baby in such a way that you hold it with 100 percent of yourself. Suppose this is a baby and I hold the baby like this. I hold the baby with 100 percent of myself. Remember, there are times when your mother holds you like this. Have you seen the image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus? She holds him like that: 100 percent. So here, our in-breath is our baby, and we hold our in-

breath 100 percent. “Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.” You just embrace your in-breath, nothing else. Don’t think of anything else. That is the secret of success.

When you breathe in, you just breathe in, you do nothing else. Do you think you can do that? I am asking the adults also, do you think you can do that? Just embrace your in-breath with 100 percent of yourself—mind and body together. And when you breathe out, you embrace your out-breath. You identify your in-breath as your in-breath, because when I hold my baby I know this is my baby, not something else. So, “in, out” means, “breathing in I know this is my in-breath, breathing out, I know this is my out-breath.” It’s very simple, but it’s wonderful. I am sure that if you try it, after two or three in-breaths and out-breaths you will feel much better already. I can guarantee it because I have done it and I always feel wonderful.

If you are about to cry, if you are about to kick or hit someone else because of your anger, and if you know how to go back to yourself and practice “in, out” for three times, I am sure that you’ll be different. You will not cry, you will not kick, you will not punch because you are a much better person after the practice of “in, out.” Today, try and you’ll see the power of the practice.

Then after you have practiced “In, out” three, four, or five times, you’ll feel that your in-breath has become deeper and your out-breath becomes slower. Because when you are angry, when you are in despair, when you suffer, your in-breath and out-breath are very short and not calm at all. But then after having breathed in and out peacefully, your in-breath will be very smooth. Your out-breath, also. So the quality of your breathing has been improved. Your in-breath is deeper and calmer, your out-breath is also deeper and calmer. That is why we can practice “deep and slow.”

Breathing in, I know that my in-breath has become deeper, and the deeper it is, the more pleasant it becomes. Try to practice breathing in for a few times and you'll see that it is deeper. And when it is deeper, you'll feel a lot of pleasure. When you breath out, you say, "Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slower, slower, more peaceful." If your breath is deeper, you are deeper. If your breath is slower, you are slower. It means you are more peaceful. So, breathing in, I know that my breath has become deeper. Breathing out, I know that my breathing has become slower. It's wonderful.

You might use your pebbles also. If you are practicing sitting meditation, you put the pebbles on your left, you bow to the pebbles, and you pick up a pebble with two fingers. One pebble. You look at it and you put it in the palm of your left hand and you begin to practice breathing in, breathing out. "In, out." The practice is smooth. "In, out." Once more. "In, out." You'll feel much better. Then, I use my two fingers to take the pebble up and I put it on my right side. I have practiced "In, out" already.

Now, I'd like to practice, "Deep, slow." So, I take another pebble. I look at it. I put it in my left hand and I begin to practice. "Deep, slow." It has become deeper by itself, you don't have to make it deeper. It has become deeper by itself alone because you have practiced already three times "In, out." That is why your breath becomes deeper naturally, and slower. Let us practice together "Deep, slow" three times. "Deep, slow" [pause for three breaths]. Good, we have finished with "Deep, slow. We pick up the pebble and put it on our right side.

Now we practice the third line, "Calm, ease." It means, "Breathing in, I feel calm. Breathing out, I feel I take everything at ease." This exercise is very wonderful to practice, especially when you are nervous, when you are angry, when you don't feel peaceful in

yourself. Quick, quick! You have to go back to your in-breath and out-breath and practice "Calm, ease."

This is an exercise given by the Buddha himself in a sutra called *Anapanasati Sutra, The Sutra on Mindful Breathing*. "Breathing in, I calm the mental formations in me. Breathing out, I let go." I let go of my anger. I calm my anger, I calm my worries, I calm my jealousy. And I let go of my anger, I let go of my jealousy. I think that adults have to practice together with the children. Every time the child is angry then her mother or her father should take her hand and invite her to practice. "Calm, ease."

"Let us, together, practice calming and easing. 'Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I let go'" at least three times and you will feel much better.

You can begin right away with "Calm, ease" or you might begin in a classical way with "In, out" first and then "Deep, slow" and then "Calm, ease." Either way is good. The Buddha dharma is wonderful. The moment you take the dharma up and practice you begin to feel better right away. And as you continue the practice, your quality of being always continues to improve.

I propose to you to practice three times 'Calm, ease' but no one prevents you from practicing more than that: four times, five times, six times, if you like it. I think you will like it because it makes you suffer less. And if you can practice eight times, ten times, you'll feel much better. "Calm, ease."

Then you'll come to the fourth pebble, and that is "Smile, release. Smile, release." "Breathing in, I smile." You can smile now. You may feel it is very difficult to smile, too difficult to smile. But after having practiced three or four times you feel that you are able to smile. And if you can smile, you'll feel a lot better. You may protest, "Thay, I have

no joy in me, why do you want me to smile? That's not natural." Many people ask me like that, not only children, but grownup people. They protest, "Thay, I have no joy in me. I cannot force myself to smile, it would not be true, it would not be natural."

I always say that a smile can be a practice, a kind of yoga practice. Yoga of the mouth: you just smile even if you don't feel joy and you'll see after you smile that you'll feel differently. Sometimes the mind takes the initiative and sometimes you have to allow the body to take the initiative.

Sometimes the spirit leads, and sometimes the body can lead. This is why when you have joy, you naturally smile. But sometimes you can allow the smile to go first. You try to smile and suddenly you feel that you don't suffer that much any more. So don't discriminate against the body. The body also can be a leader, not only the spirit. I propose that you try this when you wake up during the night. It's totally dark. Breath in and smile, and you'll see. Smile to life. You are alive, you smile. This is not a diplomatic smile, because no one sees you smiling. Yet the smile is a smile of enlightenment, of joy—the joy you feel of being alive.

So smiling is a practice, a yoga practice. Don't say, "I have no joy, why do I have to smile?" Because when you have joy and you smile, that is not practice, that's very natural. When you don't have joy and you smile, that is a real practice. You know there are something like 300 muscles, small and big on your face. Every time we get very angry or worried all these muscles are very tight. When people look at you with that tension on your face, they don't see you like a flower. People are afraid of you when all the muscles on your face are tense like that. You look more like a bomb than a flower. But if you know how to smile, in just one second, all these muscles are relaxed and your face looks like a flower again. It's wonderful.

So we have to learn to smile and then we'll look presentable right away. Look into the mirror and practice, and you'll see that the practice of the smile is very important. It brings relaxation and you can let go. You feel that you are released from the grip of the anger, of the despair.

[Bell]

On my right, there are already four pebbles. Now I'd like to practice the fifth pebble. This is the most wonderful practice. The fifth pebble can bring you a lot of joy, a lot of enlightenment, a lot of delight. That is "Present moment, wonderful moment. Present moment, wonderful moment."

This is a very deep teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha said that it is possible to live happily right here and right now. We don't have to go to the future. We don't have to go elsewhere to be happy. We can be happy right here and right now. You don't need more conditions to be happy, you have enough conditions to be happy right here and right now. If we know how to be ourselves and to look inside and around ourselves, we see that we have had enough conditions to be happy. That is the practice of living happily in the present moment.

When you breathe in, you feel that you are alive. Life is available to you, now: the blue sky, the white cloud, the green vegetation, the birds singing. Plum Village is here. Many friends are here. Your daddy is still alive, your mommy is with you, your brother is there, your sister is there. You have strong feet. You can run. You have eyes that can help you to see everything. There are many conditions for your happiness, you don't need anything else, you can be happy right away. You stop running. That is the practice. Because there are people who run all of their lives; they run because they think that happiness is not possible in the here and the now.

So this is a wonderful teaching of the Buddha. You breath in and you say "Present moment." It means, "I establish myself in the present moment. I don't run any more." This is the practice of *samata*, stopping. Stop running. I am wonderful like this in my sitting position or my walking position or even in my lying down position. It's wonderful like that, I don't need to run any more. Stopping. Present moment, wonderful moment. It's wonderful that you are alive.

To be alive, that is a miracle. Imagine a person who is already dead. You might not have seen a dead person but maybe you have seen a dead bird, a dead animal. No matter what you do, the animal cannot come back to life. Whatever you do, whatever you say, the animal is not able to listen, to hear. A dead person is also like that. She lies on the bed and no matter what you do, you cannot revive her. You cannot bring her into life again. You cry, you beat your chest, you pull your hair. But that person is already dead.

So, when you look at yourself, you see you are still alive. You see the person you love is still alive. That is wonderful. You have to wake up to that fact. The teaching of the Buddha is the teaching of waking up, waking up to see that all these wonderful things are still available. So you stop running, you establish yourself in the present moment. "Breathing in, I am in the here and in the now. Present moment. Breathing out, I feel this is a wonderful, wonderful moment."

The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, you have only one moment to be alive. That is the present moment. So simple and so deep. You have an appointment with life. You should not miss that appointment. Life is most precious. You've got to meet her, you've got to be with her. And you know something, life is only available in the here and the now, in the present moment. So don't miss your appointment with life. Don't miss the present moment. That is why



the fifth practice is wonderful. If you practice like that, you get a lot of joy whether you are on your cushion or on your bed or in the position of walking meditation. "Present moment, wonderful moment."

From A Dharma Talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1996

## The Art of Healing Ourselves

Please, when you breathe in, do not make an effort of breathing in. You just allow yourself to breathe in. Even if you don't breathe in it will breathe in by itself. So don't say, "My breath, come, so that I tell you how to do." Don't try to force anything, don't try to intervene, just allow the breathing in to take place. What you have to do is be aware of the fact that the breathing in is taking place. And you have more chance to enjoy your in-breath. Don't struggle with your breath, that is what I recommend. Realize that your in breath is a wonder. When someone is dead, no matter what we do, the person will not breathe in again. So we are breathing in, that is a wonderful thing. Breathing in I know I'm alive, it's a miracle. We have to enjoy our in-breath. There are many ways to enjoy your in-breath. We want you to tell us how you enjoy your in-breath, whether in a sitting position or in a walking position. But if you don't enjoy breathing in, breathing out, you don't do it right.

This is the first recommendation on breathing that the Buddha made. When breathing in, I know this is the in-breath. When breathing out, I know this is the out-breath. When the in-breath is long, I know it is long. When it is short, I know it is short. Just recognition, mere recognition, simple recognition of the presence of the in-breath and out-breath. When you do that, suddenly you become entirely present. What a miracle, because to meditate means to be there. To be there with yourself, to be there with your in-breath.

So you now understand the two sentences, "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out." And a few minutes later, "Breathing in I know my in-breath has become deep. Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slow." That is not an

effort to make the in-breath deeper or the out-breath slower. That is only a recognition of the fact. These instructions will be used for our walking meditation right after the Dharma talk. After having followed your in-breath and out-breath for a few minutes you will notice that your in-breath and out-breath now have a much better quality, because the image of mindfulness, when touching anything, increases the quality of that thing. The Buddha when he touches something, reveals and increases the quality of being of that thing. Mindfulness is the Buddha, therefore it plays that role.

When you look at the full moon, and if you are mindful, “Breathing in I see the full moon, breathing out I smile at the full moon,” suddenly the full moon reveals itself to you maybe one hundred times more clearly. It's more beautiful, it's clearer, it's more enjoyable. Why? Because the moon has been touched by mindfulness. So when you touch your in-breath and out-breath with your mindfulness, your in-breath becomes more harmonious, more gentle, deeper, slower, and so does your out-breath. Now you enjoy in-breathing and out-breathing. Naturally your breathing becomes more enjoyable, the quality of your breathing increases. So “In/Out” is for the beginning. [Thây writes on blackboard.] Then “Deep/Slow” is the next step: “Breathing in, I know that my in breath has become deep and I enjoy it. Breathing out, I see that my out-breath has become slow and I enjoy it.”

During that time you have stopped, you have allowed your body and your mind to rest. Even if you are walking, you are resting. If you are sitting, you are resting. You are not struggling anymore, on your cushion, or walking. Then later on you will try this. These words are only to help you to recognize what is happening. “Calm/Ease: Breathing in I feel the calm in me.”

This is not autosuggestion, because if you have enjoyed In/Out and Deep/Slow, calm is something that is established. Resting. If you

touched your calm, your calm rose. It's like when you touched the moon. "Breathing out, I feel ease in me." I don't suffer anymore. I will not make it hard anymore. Don't be too hard on yourself. Allow yourself to be at ease with yourself. Don't struggle. All of these can be done even if lots of suffering is still in your body and in your soul. Doing this, we are taking care of them. We are not trying to escape the pain in us. We are giving our body and our consciousness a rest.

"Smile/Release: Breathing in I smile." In Plum Village we speak about "mouth yoga," you just try to smile and then you realize the relaxation of the many hundreds of muscles on your face. According to the law of cause and effect when you have joy you smile. Or when you smile you release all the tension on your face. The first case is cause and effect. The second case is also cause and effect. So why do you have to wait for joy to take the initiative? Why don't you allow your mouth to take the initiative? Do you practice some kind of discrimination against your body? You know that the moment when you sit down and rest you feel much better in your soul. So the body can always take the initiative if you allow it to be. And to practice meditation, you don't practice it only with your mind, but also with your body. The Buddha said it is possible to touch nirvana with your body.

"Breathing in, I smile," because there is calm, ease, and the joy of being rested. And "breathing out, I release." I release because there is in me a tendency to continue to run, to struggle. Even in my dream I continue to struggle—that is a habit energy of more than three, four thousand years. I recognize it. It has been transmitted to me by many generations of ancestors. So now I'm practicing for them. If I can stop and release, then all my ancestors in me get liberated. You are doing it for everyone, because you are not a self. And you are doing it out of love.

The last is, “Present moment/Wonderful moment.” To be walking on earth and realizing that you are alive, dwelling in the present moment. You see, to be alive and to be walking on earth is already a miracle. Because you have been running to look for your happiness, you may not know that happiness is available in the here, and the now. Conditions for your happiness may be more than enough in the here and the now. That is the result of the practice of stopping—stopping to realize that you are wonderful like this. You can be happy right now.

“Present moment,” because that is the only moment for us to live. If you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment.

“Wonderful moment,” that is life that you touch. Suddenly happiness becomes possible. Being alive, walking with the Sangha, touching the blue sky, the earth, breathing in and out freely, allowing us to rest body and consciousness is already a wonderful thing.

Do we need a deeper practice? A more difficult practice? More complicated kind of practice? I don't think so. Because for those of us who have practiced forty, fifty years already, we continue to practice like this or something similar to this, and we always get more peace and joy and happiness. Our insight always continues to grow. You don't have to look for an “intensive” course of meditation, or a “high” level of meditation, or “intensive” or “high” practice. Lin-Chi, the founder of the Rinzai school of meditation, said, “The miracle is not to walk on fire or on thin air, the miracle is to walk on earth.” If mindfulness is there, you are performing the miracle of being alive in each moment.

On his gatha

In - Out

Flower - Fresh

Mountain - Solid

Water - Reflecting

Space - Free

From "Peace is Every Step; An Evening with Thich Nhat Hahn",  
Berkeley, California, April, 1991.

In Out , Flower Fresh , Mountain Solid , Space Free

"Dear friends, I would like to invite you to practice breathing with me. I have a new gatha for the practice of breathing, so let us learn together. (You cannot hear?) Let us learn together, an exercise on breathing. (you hear me?-good.)

"Breathing in, I know I am breathing in, breathing out,  
I know that I am breathing out."

When we breathe in, we just focus our attention on our in breath, and nothing else. And when we breathe out, we just focus our attention on our out breath, and nothing else.

And then after that we may like to try this: "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower, breathing out, I feel fresh."

And we can use the word "flower" as we breathe in, and we use the word "fresh" as we breathe out.

If you look at children, they look very much like flowers. And all of us were born as flowers, but because we have not taken care of ourselves well, that is why sometimes our flower is tired, we wither a little bit. And breathing in like that is to refresh our flower, to make it beautiful again.

So, "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower, breathing out, I feel fresh."

I see the human body as a flower too. Our eyes, they look like rose petals. Our lips can be a very beautiful flower, our hands, beautiful flowers.

"Breathing in I see myself as a flower, breathing out, I feel fresh."

And then we might like to switch to the third breath:  
"Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain, a mountain, breathing out, I feel solid."

If you practice Buddhist meditation, you like to sit in the lotus position, and that is a very beautiful position of the human body. And you feel very solid, like a mountain, especially when you practice breathing in that position.

A mountain is not swayed by the wind. And human beings, if they don't know how to sit, to breathe, they may be swayed back and forth by their emotions, strong emotions, like winds. And practicing this, we become more solid, like a mountain.

There are people who do not know how to handle their emotions, especially the big emotions. And when they are overwhelmed by these emotions they don't know what to do, and sometimes they have to commit suicide. They do not know

that you are more than your emotions. So when there is a strong emotion, you just breathe, in and out, and become a mountain. And be aware that we are more, much more than one emotion. And we will overcome that emotion.

"Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain, breathing out, I feel solid."

And then the next one is water: "Breathing in, I see myself as still waters..."

Let us imagine a pond on the highland, very still. The water is so limpid and still that it reflects truthfully the color of the sky, and also the shapes of the mountains. And if you look into the water, you see your face, not distorted.

When we are still like that, we will reflect reality as it is. We will have right perceptions. If you are agitated, and then we cannot reflect things as they are.

Therefore, "Breathing in, I make myself still, like a pond on a mountain, and, breathing out, I reflect things as they are." So we use the words "water", "reflecting".

Many times when we listen to other people, we don't really listen. We listen to our prejudices, we listen to our emotion, and therefore we miss the point that the people want to make. It is because we are not still enough, clear enough. That is why we have a wrong perception concerning what is going on. So this exercise is quite important.

And the last one is "space", and "free", space inside me and space around me, because we do need space in order to be happy.



A flower does need space in order to be happy. If you want to arrange flowers, you know that each flower needs space around her. So if you arrange flowers well, you don't need a lot of flowers. Maybe you need 1, or 2, or 3, and you give each flower a lot of space. And we human beings, we are like that too, we need space in order to be happy. And not only space outside, but space inside.

If we are so full of emotions, so full of anger and hatred, and fear, and then we don't have enough space within us, we cannot be happy. Therefore the practice is to let go, in order to have space inside, and around. And if we love each other we should give each other enough space inside and also outside, so that that person, these people, will flower.

"Breathing in, I see myself as space, breathing out, I feel free."  
Freedom is the base of happiness.

So these exercises you might practice like this:

In - out  
flower - fresh  
mountain - solid  
water - reflecting  
space - free

And then, if you want, you just practice one, like "flower, fresh", for 3 times, or, "mountain, solid", for three times. And we shall do that every time we hear the bell, we practice peace as a community, as a sangha. Let us try. And enjoy your breathing.

(Bell)

I would like to say one more thing concerning the last exercise, "space", "freedom". I would like to tell you a story that I saw in the sutras. I think it is in the Samuta Nikaya. One day the Buddha was sitting with a number of monks, in the wood, near the city of Vajali. Suddenly one person came by. He looked very unhappy. He was a farmer.

He asked the Buddha whether he had seen his cows, passing by. The Buddha asked, "What cows?" He said that he had twelve cows, and they have all run away. "Monk, I am the most unhappy person on earth. I think I am going to die. I only have twelve cows, and they have gone, all of them.

And I also have two pieces of land where I cultivate sesame seed plants, and they are all eaten up by insects. So I think I will die." The Buddha said he didn't see any cows, and he suggested that the farmer go in the other direction in order to look for his cows.

And after the farmer was gone, the Buddha turned to his monks and said this: "Monks, you are very lucky, you don't have any cows."

So, if we have any cows, either inside and outside, let them go. Our happiness, our freedom, our peace depends very much on our capacity to release our cows.

(Bell)

I have said that every time we are overwhelmed by the emotions, we can hardly be ourselves. We are like a tree, when there are strong winds blowing. The top of the tree sways very much. And we have the impression, if we look at the top of the

tree, that the tree is not very solid. It can be broken. But if we go down, to the trunk of the tree, and if you are more aware of the roots of the trees, deep in the soil, you will have another feeling, the tree is much more solid.

So we are a kind of tree. Our emotions are on this level, but if we know how to bring our attention to this level, the level of our navel, and then this is the trunk of the tree. So every time you are possessed by one strong emotion, try to hold your attention here, a little bit below the navel, and breathe according to this gatha; "in, out", "mountain, solid", and so on. And you will find that you are much more solid.

Pay attention to the movement of your abdomen. Help your abdomen to do the work of pumping the air, and after a few minutes you'll feel much better. So this method may save your life in the future. If you know how to practice it in your daily life, and when you face a danger, a big danger, you will know how to breathe in and out in order to regain your control, and your solidity.

Of course, when we practice like this there is something present in us. That something is called mindfulness. Mindfulness is the capacity to be there, in the present moment; solid, calmer, more lucid. And that is the fruit of the practice of mindfulness. You need only to practice breathing in and out like that in order for mindfulness to be present. And mindfulness will bring you many good things; solidity, freshness, calmness, clear-sightedness, and freedom.

When you breathe in and out, and release things, you become a freer person. And this practice should be done everyday, by yourself, and by the people you love, and by the community.

We practice as an individual, and we practice as a community.  
This is the practice of peace.

Mindfulness has the capacity of transforming. It can transform a neutral feeling into a wonderful, pleasant feeling. When you look at the sky, the blue sky with mindfulness, the sky becomes more beautiful.

"Breathing in, I am aware of the blue sky, breathing out,  
I feel so happy."

When you contemplate a beautiful sunset, and if you know how to breathe in and out with mindfulness, you enjoy the beautiful sunset much more than if you are possessed by the past or future, or by a feeling like anger, or fear.

When you contemplate a flower in mindfulness, the flower will reveal herself to you deeply. When you eat a tangerine in mindfulness, the tangerine will reveal itself to you deeply. If you breathe in and out, and look deeply at the tangerine, you will see that the whole cosmos has come together in order to make the tangerine possible. Looking deeply at the tangerine we can see the sunshine, the rain, the earth, and many more things. And looking at the tangerine like that, and seeing the tangerine like that, you will eat it in a very different way. Your encounter with the tangerine will be very deep.

When you look at the tangerine with your mindfulness, the tangerine will become a very wonderful thing. And you, the one who eats the tangerine, will become a wonderful person; awake, deep, solid. And the encounter between you and the tangerine will be a deep one. Life is present in that moment.

The same thing is true when you hold your baby. Your child is coming like a flower, smiling, sparkling eyes, and if you are not there, well, you sit there, but you are not really there, your mind is on something else, then you will not be available to your child. But if you know how to breathe in and out, and go back to the present moment, you receive the child deeply. At that moment you become available to him, you open your arms, and you hug your child.

"Breathing in, my child is in my arms, breathing out, I feel happy." And if you feel happy, the child will feel happy at the same time.

So mindfulness, present, will improve the situation, will transform the situation, will reveal to you the marvel, the wonders of life that are in you and around you.

Suppose you touch your eyes and breathe in,

"Breathing in, I am aware of my eyes, breathing out, I smile to my eyes."

And then your eyes will reveal themselves to you as wonderful things. You know of course that your eyes are very important. You need only to open them in order to see the blue sky, the beautiful trees, your beloved ones.

And, you know that the people who cannot see things, they suffer. They say that if they can recover their eyesight they would be like in paradise. It means that all of us who have eyes, we are in paradise, but we are not aware of that.

So breathing in and out may bring us to paradise. We need only to open our eyes in order to see all kinds of forms and

colors. And we enter into the pure land, the land of bliss, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God.

One time in a church, I said something like this: "You don't have to die in order to enter the kingdom of God, in fact you have to be alive in order to do so."

The kingdom of God is available only in the present moment. So breathe in and out, smile, and you see that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of peace and happiness, is available to you. Just make one step and enter the kingdom of God with mindfulness.

And if we know how to get in touch with the refreshing, healing things in us, like our eyes, like the beautiful sunset, a little child, the beautiful rivers, the air we breathe, well, we will get nourished by these things, and peace is available in the present moment to some extent. And we have to profit from it.

So the first function of mindfulness is to help you to get in touch with the refreshing and healing elements in you and around you so that you may be nourished. And that is the practice of peace itself. Because if you are not healthy, you are not peaceful, you cannot do anything to help anyone, including your beloved ones.

I think a tree can look happy. When you look at a tree you can see if a tree is happy or not. A tree is happy when it is a real tree; solid, fresh. And we human beings, we are like that too. If we practice we become more fresh, more solid, truly a human being, and then we are happy. And before we do anything in order to help other people, we already help. I think that the best thing that a tree can do for us is to be a tree, to be a real

tree, a healthy, happy tree. Because if a tree is less than a tree, then all of us will be in trouble.

The same thing is true with a human being. So a human being should be a real, a true human being. And if a human being is less than a human being, then the whole cosmos will suffer, will be in trouble. And that is why we need to be ourselves; refreshing, solid, peaceful.

(Bell)

When we are not happy, we try to escape ourselves. We try to think that our happiness is in the future, and that we should run to the future. But we know that running to the future means to deny the present moment. But life can only be found in the present moment. If you do not want to miss your appointment with life, you have to go back to the present moment. Everything you look for, peace, happiness, calm, buddha, kingdom of God, they are all in the present moment.

If you are running to the future it means that you are not happy in the present moment. If someone takes refuge in the drugs and alcohol, it means that she is not happy, he is not happy and peaceful. And if someone is taking refuge in action, even peace action, he is not peaceful and happy.

If someone is doing a lot of things to protect the environment, to protest the war, it may be that that someone is not happy, and they take refuge in the action in order to forget their unhappiness. But if they do things like that, they do things in that situation, they will not help, because their happiness, their solidity should be the base for the action. So action should be

based on non-action, it means based on being. And the quality of our being determines the quality of our action. And therefore, let us not take refuge in action in order to escape being.



## From No Death, No Fear

### On the Gatha

*I have arrived,  
I am home  
In the here,  
In the now  
I am solid,  
I am free  
In the ultimate,  
I dwell*

### The Only Moment We Can Be Alive

We cannot enjoy life if we spend a lot of time worrying about what happened yesterday and what will happen tomorrow. We worry about tomorrow because we are afraid. If we are afraid all the time, we cannot appreciate that we are alive and can be happy now.

In our daily life, we tend to believe that happiness is only possible in the future. We are always looking for better things, the right conditions to make us happy. We run away from what is happening right in front of us. We try to find things that make us feel more solid, more safe and secure. But we are afraid all the time of what the future will bring. We are afraid we'll lose our jobs, our possessions, the people around us whom we love. So we wait for the magical moment- sometime in the future- when everything will be as we like, as we want it to be.

But life is available only in the present moment. The Buddha said, "It is possible to live happily in the present moment. It is the only moment we have."

When you come back to the here and the now, you will recognize the many conditions of happiness that already exist. The practice of mindfulness is the practice of coming back to the here and the now to be in touch deeply with ourselves, with life. We have to train ourselves in order to do this. Even if we are very intelligent and we understand it right away, we still have to train ourselves to live this way. We have to train ourselves to recognize that the conditions for happiness are already here.

### True Home

Our true home is in the here and the now. The past is already gone and the future is not yet here. "I have arrived, I am home, in the here, in the now." This is our practice.

You can recite this gatha, or poem, during walking meditation or sitting meditation. You can practice this poem when you drive to your office. You may not have arrived at your office, but even while driving you have already arrived at your true home, the present moment. And when you arrive at your office, this is also your true home. When you are in your office, you are also in the here and the now.

Just practicing the first line of the poem "I have arrived, I am home" can make you very happy. Whether you are sitting, whether you are walking, whether you are watering the vegetables in the garden, or whether you are feeding your child, it is always possible to practice "I have arrived, I am home." I am not running anymore; I have run all my life; now I am determined to stop and to really live my life.

What Are You Waiting For? The French have a song called What are you waiting for to be happy?. When I practice breathing in and I say, "I have arrived," that is an achievement. Now I am fully present, one

hundred percent alive. The present moment has become my true home.

When I breathe out I say, "I am home." If you do not feel you are home, you will continue to run. And you will continue to be afraid. But if you feel you are already home, then you do not need to run anymore. This is the secret of the practice. When we live in the present moment, it is possible to live in true happiness.

### Appreciating Earth

For many years I have told this story. Suppose two astronauts go to the moon. When they arrive, they have an accident and find out that they have only enough oxygen for two days. There is no hope of someone coming from Earth in time to rescue them. They have only two days to live. If you asked them at that moment, "What is your deepest wish?" they would answer, "To be back home walking on the beautiful planet Earth." That would be enough for them; they would not want anything else. They would not want to be the head of a large corporation, a big celebrity or president of the United States. They would not want anything except to be back on Earth-to be walking on Earth, enjoying every step, listening to the sounds of nature and holding the hand of their beloved while contemplating the moon.

We should live every day like people who have just been rescued from the moon. We are on Earth now, and we need to enjoy walking on this precious, beautiful planet. The Zen master Lin Chi said, "The miracle is not to walk on water but to walk on the Earth." I cherish that teaching. I enjoy just walking, even in busy places like airports and railway stations. In walking like that, with each step caressing our Mother Earth, we can inspire other people to do the same. We can enjoy every minute of our lives.

If you want to know where God, the Buddhas and all the great beings live, I can tell you. Here is their address: in the here and now. It has everything you need, including the zip code.

If you can breathe in and out and walk in the spirit of "I have arrived, I am home, in the here, in the now," then you will notice that you are becoming more solid and more free immediately. You have established yourself in the present moment, at your true address. Nothing can push you to run anymore, or make you so afraid. You are free from worrying about the past. You are not stuck, thinking about what has not happened yet and what you cannot control. You are free from guilt concerning the past and you are free from your worries about the future.

Only a free person can be a happy person. The amount of happiness that you have depends on the amount of freedom that you have in your heart. Freedom here is not political freedom. Freedom here is freedom from regret, freedom from fear, from anxiety and sorrow. "I have arrived, I am home, in the here, in the now."

"I am solid, I am free." This is what you feel, what you become, when you arrive in the here and now. You're not just telling yourself this—you will see it; you will feel it. And when you do, you will be at peace. You will experience nirvana, or the kingdom of God, or whatever you may like to call it. Even if you are not caught by a lot of worries, if you are not solid and free, how can you be happy? To cultivate solidity and freedom in the present moment is the greatest gift we can give ourselves.

### Dwelling in the Ultimate

"In the ultimate I dwell." The ultimate is the foundation of our being, the ground of being. The ultimate, or God, or the divine, is not separate from us. We are in it all the time. It is not somewhere up

there beyond the sky. But we have to live in our true home in order to dwell in the ultimate, in order to live in the ultimate.

It is like the wave and water. If we look into a wave, we see that a wave can have a beginning and an end. A wave can be high or low. A wave can be like other waves, or it can be different. But the wave is always made of water. Water is the foundation of the wave. A wave is a wave, but it is also water. The wave may have a beginning and an end, it may be big or small, but with water there is no beginning, no end, no up, no down, no this, no that. When the wave realizes and understands this, it is free from the fear of beginning and end, up and down, big and small, this and that.

In the historical dimension, we have time and space, and pairs of opposites: right and wrong, young and old, coming and going, pure and impure. We look forward to beginning and we are afraid of ending. But the ultimate dimension does not have any of these things. There is no beginning or end, no before or after. The ultimate is the ground that makes the historical dimension possible. It is the original, continuing source of being. It is nirvana. It is the kingdom of God.

Our foundation is nirvana, the ultimate reality. You can call it God or the kingdom of God. This is the water in which we live. You are a wave, but at the same time you are also water. You have a historical dimension and you also have an ultimate dimension. If we understand that our true nature is of no birth, no death, no coming, no going, then our fear will depart and our pain and suffering will vanish.

A wave does not have to die in order to become water. She is water right here and now. We also do not have to die in order to enter the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is our very foundation here and now. Our deepest practice is to see and touch the ultimate

dimension in ourselves every day, the reality of no birth and no death. Only this practice can remove our fear and suffering entirely. Rather than saying, "In the ultimate I dwell," you may like to say, "In the kingdom of God I dwell" or "In the Buddha land I dwell."

### Releasing Sorrow

Suppose someone was able to transport you by jet to the kingdom of God or the Pure Land of the Buddha. When you arrived, how would you walk? In such a beautiful place, would you walk under pressure, running and anxious like we do so much of the time? Or would you enjoy every moment of being in paradise? In the kingdom of God, or the Pure Land, people are free and they enjoy every moment. So they do not walk like we do.

The Pure Land is not somewhere else; it is right here, in the present. It is in every cell of our bodies. When we run away from the present, we destroy the kingdom of God. But if we know how to free ourselves from our habit energy of running, then we will have peace and freedom and we will all walk like a Buddha in paradise.

What we carry with us determines in which dimension we dwell. If you carry a lot of sorrow, fear and craving with you, then wherever you go you will always touch the world of suffering and hell. If you carry with you compassion, understanding and freedom, then wherever you go you will touch the ultimate dimension, the kingdom of God.

Wherever the practitioner goes, she knows she is touching the kingdom of God under her feet. There is not one day when I do not walk in the kingdom of God. Because I practice freedom and compassion wherever I go, my feet touch the kingdom of God, the ultimate dimension everywhere. If we cultivate this kind of touching,

then the important elements of solidity and freedom will be available to us twenty-four hours every day.

"I have arrived, I am home." The home of the wave is water. It's right there. She does not have to travel thousands of miles in order to arrive at her true home. It's so simple and so powerful. I would like to invite you to memorize this little poem and to practice and remember it many times a day. In this way you will touch the ultimate dimension and always remember your true home.

## Walking Meditation

Wherever we walk, we can practice meditation. This means that we know that we are walking. We walk just for walking. We walk with freedom and solidity, no longer in a hurry. We are present with each step. And when we wish to talk we stop our movement and give our full attention to the other person, to our words and to listening.

Walking in this way should not be a privilege. We should be able to do it in every moment. Look around and see how vast life is, the trees, the white clouds, the limitless sky. Listen to the birds. Feel the fresh breeze. Life is all around and we are alive and healthy and capable of walking in peace.

Let us walk as a free person and feel our steps get lighter. Let us enjoy every step we make. Each step is nourishing and healing. As we walk, imprint our gratitude and our love on the earth.

We may like to use a gatha as we walk. Taking two or three steps for each in-breath and each out-breath,

Breathing in "I have arrived"; Breathing out "I am home"

Breathing in "In the here"; Breathing out "In the now"

Breathing in "I am solid"; Breathing out "I am free"

Breathing in "In the ultimate"; Breathing out "I dwell"



Thay - Instructions on Walking Meditation, April, 1989

When you practice kin-hin, slow walking meditation in the hall, you do like that, breathing in, you make a step.

And each step should bring you happiness, otherwise it would not be worth practicing. You practice the gatha, 'In, out, in, out,' and so on. And these steps are very healing. It has the healing power. So enjoy your walking in the meditation hall.

If you have 100 steps to make, these 100 steps are 100 gems. And all of them have to bring peace and happiness to you. All of them have the power to bring healing to you.

And the same thing can be applied when we practice walking meditation outside, only we walk more quickly, because if we go slow like this in the park, people will think it is too queer. So instead of making one breath, one word, instead of making 'in, out', you can do like this- 'in, in, out, out',- it means one breath may be measured by two steps.

And if your lungs want three, you give them three, 'in, in, in, out, out, out', it means my in breath goes with three steps, and my out breath goes with three steps.

And maybe later, when I climb the slope of the hill, my lungs will say that two are enough. So you say, 'in, in, out, out'. So listen to the needs of your lungs, and give them the exact number of steps they need. And you can enjoy repeating that gatha several times before you go back to 'in, in, out, out'.

And practicing walking meditation you combine the breathing and your steps, because between the steps and the breath there is the

counting. The counting, 'one, two', 'one, two'. So the counting is an element that combines the breath and the step into one, and you only have one object of concentration.

And walk as if you breathe with your own feet. Concentrate your mind on the sole of your feet. And walk as if you kiss the earth with your feet. All the pleasant feeling should come through the sole of your feet. Even though you breathe here, the concentration may be on the sole of your feet. And if you see something too beautiful to neglect, please feel free to stop and to contemplate it, to be in touch.

You stop, but let people continue, but with the condition that you should continue the breathing.

*'Breathing in, the pine is so beautiful,  
breathing out, so green,  
Breathing in, I am the pine,  
breathing out, the pine is me'*

You create your own gathas when you breathe like that, otherwise the pine tree will vanish and the thinking will be resettled here. So, mindful breathing is to nourish the mindfulness of what is in the present moment. And that is the technique, the secret of success.

Inside here, we just take one breath, one step. And you know that the wooden floor, it is as wonderful as the grass outside. It is the sunshine that has made the floor. It is the cloud that brings the water to the trees that grow. So when you walk on the wooden floor you may have the feeling that you are walking on the rain, on the clouds, on the sunshine. It depends on how deep is your power of concentration, your mindfulness. The deeper the mindfulness is the more pleasant the contact between you and the floor will be. So mindfulness, awareness, is the base of your peace and your happiness.

It's like when you have a toothache, you got enlightened- you know that not having a toothache is a wonderful thing. Right? But that enlightenment you don't keep very long. When you do not have a toothache, you don't feel very happy. Because you don't nourish the mindfulness that not having a toothache is a wonderful thing.

We shall go out and practice, and enjoy our walking, walking, but not arriving. We don't need to arrive.

From *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, by Thich Nhat Hanh

### The Pebble

Why should you meditate? First of all, because each of us needs to realize total rest. Even a night of sleep doesn't provide total rest. Twisting and turning, the facial muscles tense, all the while dreaming- hardly rest! Nor is lying down rest when you still feel restless and twist and turn. Lying on your back, with your arms and legs straight but not stiff, your head unsupported by a pillow- this is a good position to practice breathing and to relax all the muscles; but this way it is also easier to fall asleep. You cannot go as far in meditation lying down as by sitting. It is possible to find total rest in a sitting position, and in turn to advance deeper in meditation in order to resolve the worries and troubles that upset and block your consciousness.

Among our workers in Vietnam there are many who can sit in the lotus position, the left foot placed on the right thigh and the right foot placed on the left thigh. Others can sit in the half lotus, the left foot placed on the right thigh, or the right foot placed on the left thigh. In our meditation class in Paris, there are people who do not feel comfortable in either of the above two positions and so I have shown them how to sit in the Japanese manner, the knees bent, resting on their two legs. By placing a pillow beneath one's feet, it is possible to sit that way for more than an hour and a half. Even so, anyone can learn to sit in the half lotus, though at the beginning it may be somewhat painful. But after a few weeks of practice, the position gradually becomes quite comfortable. During the initial period, when the pain can be bothersome, alternate the position of the legs or change to another sitting position. If one sits in the lotus or half-lotus position, it is necessary to use a cushion to sit on so that both knees touch the floor. The three points of bodily contact with the floor created by this position provide an extremely stable position.

Keep your back straight. This is very important. The neck and head should be aligned with the spinal column; they should be straight but not stiff or wood-like. Keep your eyes focused a yard or two in front of you. If you can, maintain a half smile.

Now begin to follow your breath and to relax all of your muscles. Concentrate on keeping your spinal column straight and on following your breath. As for everything else, let it go. Let go of everything. If you want to relax the worry-tightened muscles in your face, let the half smile come to your face. As the half smile appears, all the facial muscles begin to relax. The longer the half smile is maintained, the better. It is the same smile you see on the face of the Buddha.

Place your left hand, palm side up, in your right palm. Let all the muscles in your hands, fingers, arms, and legs relax. Let go of everything. Be like the water-plants which flow with the current, while beneath the surface of the water the riverbed remains motionless. Hold on to nothing but your breath and the half smile.

For beginners, it is better to sit no longer than 20 or 30 minutes. During that time, you can readily obtain total rest. The technique for obtaining this rest lies in two things—watching and letting go: watching your breath, and letting go of everything else. Release every muscle in your body. After about 15 minutes or so, it is possible to reach a deep quiet filled with inner peace and joy. Maintain this quiet and peace.

Some people look on meditation as a toil and want the time to pass quickly in order to rest afterwards. Such persons do not know how to sit yet. If you sit correctly, it is possible to find total relaxation and peace right in the position of sitting. Often it helps to meditate on the image of a pebble thrown into a river.

How is one helped by the image of the pebble? Sit down in whatever position suits you best, the half lotus or lotus, back straight, the half smile on your face. Breathe slowly and deeply, following each breath, becoming one with the breath. Then let go of everything. Imagine yourself as a pebble which has been thrown into a river. The pebble sinks through the water effortlessly. Detached from everything, it falls by the shortest distance possible, finally reaching the bottom, the point of perfect rest. You are like a pebble which has let itself fall into the river, letting go of everything. At the center of your being is your breath. You don't need to know the length of time it takes before reaching the point of complete rest on the bed of fine sand beneath the water. When you feel yourself resting like a pebble which has reached the riverbed, that is the point when you begin to find your own rest. You are no longer pushed or pulled by anything.

If you cannot find joy in peace in these very moments of sitting, then the future itself will only flow by as a river flows by, you will not be able to hold it back, you will be incapable of living the future when it has become the present. Joy and peace are the joy and peace possible in this very hour of sitting. If you cannot find it here, you won't find it anywhere. Don't chase after your thoughts as a shadow follows its object. Don't run after your thoughts. Find joy and peace in this very moment .

This is your own time. This spot where you sit is your own spot. It is on this very spot and in this very moment that you can become enlightened. You don't have to sit beneath a special tree in a distant land. Practice like this for a few months, and you will begin to know a profound and renewing delight. The ease of sitting depends on whether you practice mindfulness a little or a lot each day. And it depends on whether or not you sit regularly. Whenever possible, join with friends or relatives and organize an hour of sitting each night, say from 10 to 11. Whoever wishes could come to sit for a half hour, or even an entire hour.

From Understanding Our Mind, by Thich Nhat Hanh

pages 142 to 144

In sitting meditation, we make the effort to close the doors of our five sense gates (ayatanas) in order to concentrate our mind consciousness, to bring about an independently operating mind consciousness. When images and sounds try to invade us, we do our best not to become attached to them.

Dispersion is the third way our mind consciousness operates. In fact, it is our most frequent state of mind. We live in dispersion and forgetfulness much of the time. Our mind consciousness has the tendency to be scattered, unable to stop thinking, caught by the past and future, running in every direction. When our mind consciousness is in a state of dispersion, mindfulness is not present. We are not really alive. When we are thinking about one thing after another, when we are anxious, sad, suspicious, or imagining things, and there is no coordination of mind consciousness with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or tactile consciousness, it is called "distracted mind consciousness." Mind consciousness is operating alone, in dispersion.

The Buddha described this type of mind consciousness as a monkey, grasping this branch and that, always changing, free-associating, jumping from thought to thought. Each of us has to recognize and embrace the monkey within ourselves with mindfulness. With mindful breathing, mindful walking, and so on, we can quiet the monkey and bring it to stillness. Mind consciousness can also be compared to a swarm of bees, buzzing around wildly and not concentrating in any one spot. Only when the queen is present will all of them gather together.

In Buddhist meditation, we practice concentration, bringing everything into sharp, clear focus. This practice is called one-

pointedness of mind (ekagrata). The object of our concentration- the queen bee around which our swarming thoughts can gather- may be our breathing, a leaf, a pebble, a flower, or the object of our meditative focus. In the practice, we are given methods to help us concentrate the energy of our mind consciousness, to not let it become distracted. This practice is like putting a spotlight on the object of our concentration, just as when a singer or dancer is performing on stage and the spotlight is focused only on her. We focus our minds intently on the object of our concentration. When we use a lens to focus sunlight on one point, its energy is concentrated so effectively that we can burn a hole in a piece of cloth. In the same way, we focus our mind consciousness on one point in order to get a breakthrough.

Mindfulness leads us to the fourth manner of operation of mind consciousness, concentration. To solve a complex problem we have to concentrate our minds. We cannot afford to be in dispersion. With the practice of mindful breathing, we can end the state of dispersion and create a concentrated state of mind. When we use our breathing to bring all the energy of mind consciousness to one point, our confusion stops, and we are able to sustain the energy of our mind consciousness on one object. If we continue to practice, the energy of concentration will help us penetrate deeply into the heart of the object of our focus, and we will gain insight and understanding. Mind consciousness is then in a "state of concentration." The stronger and the clearer our mindfulness, the more stable our concentration. Mindfulness always brings about concentration. When we are quite concentrated, it is called "operating alone in concentration."



## From Transformation and Healing

### **Mindfully Observing the Body**

The First Establishment of Mindfulness is the body, which includes the breath, the positions of the body, the actions of the body, the parts of the body, the four elements of which the body is composed, and the dissolution of the body.

#### *First Exercise - Conscious Breathing*

*He goes to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty room, sits down cross-legged in the lotus position, holds his body straight, and establishes mindfulness in front of him. He breathes in, aware that he is breathing in. He breathes out, aware that he is breathing out.*

The first practice is the full awareness of breathing. When we breathe in, we know that we are breathing in. When we breathe out, we know that we are breathing out. Practicing in this way, our breathing becomes conscious breathing.

This exercise is simple, yet its effects are profound. To succeed, we must put the whole mind into our breathing and nowhere else. As we follow our in-breath, for example, we need to be watchful of distracting thoughts. As soon as a thought such as, "I forgot to turn off the light in the kitchen," arises, our breathing is no longer conscious breathing as we are thinking about something else. To succeed, our minds need to stay focused on our breathing for the entire length of each breath. As we breathe, our minds are one with our breath, and we become one with our breath. That is the meaning of "mindfulness of the body in the body."

Anyone can succeed in the practice of a single conscious breath. If we continue to breathe consciously for ten breaths, without our minds

going astray, then we have taken a valuable step on the path of practice. If we can practice conscious breathing for ten minutes, an important change will take place in us. How can a practice as simple as this bring about such important results and what are the results that it can bring about?

The first result of conscious breathing is returning to ourselves. In everyday life, we often get lost in forgetfulness. Our minds chase after thousands of things, and we rarely take the time to come back to ourselves. When we have been lost in forgetfulness like that for a long time, we lose touch with ourselves, and we feel alienated from ourselves. This phenomenon is very common in our times. Conscious breathing is a marvelous way to return to ourselves. When we are aware of our breath, we come back to ourselves as quick as a flash of lightning. Like a child who returns home after a long journey, we feel the warmth of our hearth, and we find ourselves again. Coming back to ourselves is already a remarkable success on the path of the practice.

The second result of conscious breathing is that we come in contact with life in the present moment, the only moment when we can touch life. The life in us and around us is wonderful and abundant. If we are not free, we cannot be in contact with it, and we are not really living our lives. We should not be imprisoned by regrets about the past, anxieties for the future, or attachment and aversion in the present.

To breathe with full awareness is a miraculous way to untie the knots of regret and anxiety and to be in touch with life in the present moment. When we follow our breathing, we are already at ease, no longer dominated by our anxieties and longings. As we breathe consciously, our breath becomes more regular, and peace and joy arise and become more stable with every moment. Relying on our breathing, we come back to ourselves and are able to restore the

oneness of the body and mind. This integration allows us to be in real contact with what is happening in the present moment, which is the essence of life.

### ***Second Exercise - Following the Breath***

*When he breathes in a long breath, he knows, 'I am breathing in a long breath.' When he breathes out a long breath, he knows, 'I am breathing out a long breath.' When he breathes in a short breath, he knows, 'I am breathing in a short breath.' When he breathes out a short breath, he knows, 'I am breathing out a short breath.'*

The practitioner follows his breathing very closely and becomes one with his breathing for the entire length of the breath, not allowing any stray thought or idea to enter. This method is called "following the breath."

While the mind is following the breath, the mind *is* the breath and only the breath. In the process of the practice, our breathing naturally becomes more regular, harmonious, and calm, and our minds also become more regular, harmonious, and calm. This brings about feelings of joy, peace, and ease in the body. When the mind and the breathing become one, it is only a small step for the body and mind to become one also.

### ***Third Exercise - Oneness of Body and Mind***

*'Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.'*

The third exercise is to bring body and mind into harmony. The element used to bring this about is the breath. In meditation practice, the distinction between body and mind dissolves, and we talk of the oneness of body and mind. In this exercise, the object of our mindfulness is no longer simply the breath, but the whole body itself, as it is unified with the breath.

Some practitioners and commentators, because they attach so much importance to the realization of the states of concentration (Pali: jhana; Sanskrit: dhyana) of the Four Form Jhanas and the Four Formless Jhanas, have explained the term “whole body” to mean the “whole breath body” and not the physical body of the practitioner.

*The Patisambhida Magga, Vimutti Magga, and Visuddhi Magga*, all well-known commentaries, tell us to concentrate on the tip of the nose, the place where the air enters and goes out from the body, as we breathe. We are not told to follow our breath into our bodies, because the commentators fear that our bodies may be too large an object for us to concentrate on. This kind of reasoning has led the commentators to interpret the word “body” (*kaya*) in the sutra as “breath body.”

But as we read the sutra, we see that the practice of being mindful of the whole “breath body” was already dealt with in the second exercise: “Breathing in a long breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing in a long breath.’ Breathing out a short breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing out a short breath.’” Why then do we need to repeat this exercise?

The first four exercises of *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing (Anapanasati)* teach us to focus our attention on the body, so it is natural for the third exercise in *The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness (Satipatthana)* also to focus on the full awareness of the physical body. Nowhere in either sutra are we taught to concentrate on the breath at the tip of the nose. Nowhere are we taught that we should *not* concentrate on the whole physical body.

In recent times, the Burmese meditation master Mahasi Sayadaw taught the method of being attentive to the inflation and contraction of the abdomen caused by the in-breath and the out-breath. Using this method, the practitioner can realize concentration easily, but it is not described by the Mahasi as a method of awareness of breathing. The basic reason for doing this practice, according to the Mahasi, is that understanding (*prajñā*) arises naturally when there is concentration. Perhaps the reason Mahasi Sayadaw does not describe this method as a practice of awareness of breathing is because of traditional prejudice that conscious breathing should not follow the breath into the body and down into the abdomen.

Here it may be useful to say something about the purpose of concentration. Right Concentration (*samyak samadhi*), one stage of the Noble Eightfold Path, leads to an awareness and deep observation of the object of concentration and eventually to awakened understanding.

The Pali compound word *samatha-vipassana* (Sanskrit: *shamatha-vipashyana*) means “stopping-observing,” “calming-illuminating,” or “concentrating-understanding.”

There are also states of concentration that encourage the practitioner to escape from the complexities of suffering and existence, rather than face them directly in order to transform them. These can be called “wrong concentration.” The Four Form Jhanas and the Four Formless Jhanas are states of meditational concentration that the Buddha practiced with teachers such as Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputra, and he rejected them as not leading to liberation from suffering. These states of concentration probably found their way back into the sutras around two hundred years after the Buddha passed into mahaparinirvana. The results of these concentrations are to hide reality from the practitioner, so we can assume that they

should not be considered Right Concentration. To dwell in these concentrations for a duration of time for the sake of healing may be one thing, but to escape in them for a long time is not what the Buddha recommended.

In the third exercise, the practitioner uses her breathing to bring body and mind together as one, so the object of concentration is simultaneously body, mind, and breath. This condition, known as “oneness of body and mind,” is one of total integration.

In our daily lives, we often find our minds and our bodies separated. The body may be here, while the mind is somewhere else, perhaps lost in the distant past or floating in a distant future. Through mindfulness, we can realize the oneness of body and mind, and we are able to restore the wholeness of ourselves. In this condition, every practice will take us back to the source, which is the oneness of body and mind, and we open to a real encounter with life.

When body and mind are one, the wounds in our hearts, minds, and bodies begin to heal. As long as there is separation between body and mind, these wounds cannot heal. During sitting meditation, the three elements of breath, body, and mind are calmed, and gradually they become one. When peace is established in one of the three elements, the other two will soon have peace also. For example, if the body is in a very stable position and all the muscles and the nervous system are relaxed, then the mind and breath are immediately influenced, and they too gradually become calmed.

Similarly, if we practice conscious breathing in the right way, our breathing becomes more regular, calm, and harmonious with every moment, and this regularity, calmness, and harmony of the breathing will spread to our bodies and minds, and the body and mind will benefit from it. It is only by these kinds of processes that the oneness of body and mind will be achieved. When there is oneness of body

and mind, the breathing serves as “harmonizer,” and we realize peace, joy, and ease, the first fruits of meditation practice.

#### *Fourth Exercise - Calming*

‘Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I calm my body.’

This exercise, a continuation of the third, uses the breath to realize peace and calm in the whole body. When our bodies are not at peace, it is hard for our minds to be at peace. Therefore, we should use our breathing to help the functions of our bodies be smooth and peaceful. If we are gasping for breath or if our breath is irregular, we cannot calm the functions of our bodies. So the first thing is to harmonize our breathing. Our in-breaths and out-breaths should flow smoothly and lightly. When our breath is harmonious, our bodies are also. Our breath needs to be light and even and not audible. It should flow smoothly, like a small stream of water running down fine sand into the ocean.

The more subtle our breath is, the more peaceful our bodies and minds will be. When we breathe in, we can feel the breath entering our bodies and calming all the cells of our bodies. When we breathe out, we feel the exhalation taking with it all our tiredness, irritation, and anxiety.

As we breathe, we can recite the following gatha to ourselves:

*Breathing in, I calm my body.  
Breathing out, I smile.  
Dwelling in the present moment,  
I know this is a wonderful moment.*

We know that when we are meditating, body and mind are one, so we only need to calm the body in order to calm the mind. When we smile, we demonstrate the peace and joy of body and mind. Feelings of peace and joy are the nourishment of the practitioner and help the practitioner go far on the path of practice. To learn more about this, you are encouraged to practice the fifth and sixth exercises of *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*. (*The Anapanasati Sutta*)

These two exercises are designed to help the practitioner nourish herself with the joy of meditational concentration. The essence of meditation practice is to come back to dwell in the present moment and to observe what is happening in the present moment.

“A wonderful moment” means that the practitioner can see the wonders of life in her body, mind, and breathing and can make the feelings of peace and happiness stable and strong.

Although we are now discussing the part of the sutra that teaches full awareness of the body in the body, since there are very close links between the body and the feelings, we should not hesitate to cross freely the boundary between the Establishment of the body and the Establishment of the feelings. As we already know, the peace of the body is the peace of the mind.

In exercises three and four, the practitioner follows the breath while returning to be one with the body and calming the whole of the body. Obviously, while practicing these breathing exercises, all your organs of sense perception- eyes, ears, nose, and tongue- are closed off so that the images of the world around do not come in and agitate the peace within. To return to the body in this way is also to return to the mind.

From time to time, we feel tired, and everything we do or say seems to come out wrong and create misunderstanding. We may think, “Today is not my day.” At times like this, it is best simply to return to



the body, cut off all contact, and close the doors of the senses. Following our breathing, we can collect the mind, body, and breath, and they will become one. We will have a feeling of warmth, like someone sitting inside by a fireplace while the wind and rain are raging outside. This method can be practiced anywhere at any time, not just in the meditation hall. We come back in contact with ourselves and make ourselves whole again.

We should not think that to close the doors of the sense perceptions is to close ourselves off from life and the world, to sever our contact with life. When we are not truly ourselves, when we are divided and dispersed, we are not really in contact with life. The contact is profound only when we are really ourselves. If we are not ourselves in the present moment, when we look at the blue sky, we do not really see the blue sky. When we hold the hand of a child, we are not really holding the hand of a child. When we drink tea, we are not really drinking tea. Therefore, the wholeness of ourselves is the basis of any meaningful contact.

We can realize the wholeness of ourselves by means of conscious breathing, which brings us back to the body and mind. Realizing the wholeness of ourselves is also to renew ourselves in every moment. We become fresh, and others enjoy being with us. When we renew ourselves, we see everything else as new. The Bamboo Forest Zen Master once said: "Everything I touch becomes new."

### ***Fifth Exercise - Awareness of Bodily Positions***

*Moreover, when a practitioner walks, he is aware, 'I am walking.' When he is standing, he is aware, 'I am standing.' When he is sitting, he is aware, 'I am sitting.' When he is lying down, he is aware, 'I am lying down.' In whatever position his body happens to be, he is aware of the position of his body.*

This exercise is the observation in mindfulness of the positions of the body. This is not just an exercise to be practiced at the time of sitting meditation or in the meditation hall. The meditation practices taught in *The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* can be used all the day long to help the practitioner remain in mindfulness.

When doing walking meditation in the meditation hall or outside, the practitioner can combine her breathing with her steps in order to remain steadily established in mindfulness. Before beginning any kind of walking meditation, we can recite the following gatha:

*The mind can go in a thousand directions,  
But on this beautiful path, I walk in peace.  
With each step, a gentle wind blows.  
With each step, a flower blooms.*

Any time we sit down, we can follow our breath and use this gatha:

*Sitting here  
is like sitting under the Bodhi tree.  
My body is mindfulness itself,  
entirely free from distraction.*

We can use our breathing in order to be aware of the positions of sitting and standing. When we are standing in a line waiting to buy a ticket, or when we are just sitting down and waiting for anything, we can recite the gatha, "Breathing in, I calm my body," in order to continue dwelling in mindfulness and to calm the body and mind.

### ***Sixth Exercise - Awareness of Bodily Actions***

*Moreover, when the practitioner is going forward or backward, he applies full awareness to his going forward or backward. When he looks in front or looks*

*behind, bends down or stands up, he also applies full awareness to what he is doing. He applies full awareness to wearing the sanghati robe or carrying the alms bowl. When he eats or drinks, chews or savors the food, he applies full awareness to all this. When passing excrement or urinating, he applies full awareness to this. When he walks, stands, lies down, sits, sleeps or wakes up, speaks or is silent, he shines his awareness on all this.*

This exercise is the observation and awareness of the actions of the body. This is the fundamental practice of the monk. When I was first ordained as a novice over sixty years ago, the first book my master gave me to learn by heart was a book of short verses (gathas) to be practiced while washing your hands, brushing your teeth, washing your face, putting on your clothes, sweeping the courtyard, relieving yourself, having a bath, and so on.

On hearing the sound of the bell, we would breathe consciously and recite this gatha:

*Hearing the sound of the bell,  
the afflictions are lifted.  
Understanding grows strong,  
and the awakened mind is born.*

Practicing breathing in combination with reciting a gatha helps us dwell more easily in mindfulness. Mindfulness makes every action of our bodies more serene, and we become master of our bodies and minds. Mindfulness nurtures the power of concentration in us. Many of the gathas in the book I was given, *Gathas for Everyday Use*, a text by Chinese master Du Ti, were taken from *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. I have written a book of gathas in the same spirit, *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment*. These gathas are very easy to use and can also be combined with conscious breathing.

Without mindfulness, our actions are often hurried and abrupt. As we practice the sixth exercise, we may find that our actions slow down. If a novice applies himself to the practice of the sixth exercise, he will see that his everyday actions become harmonious, graceful, and measured. Mindfulness becomes visible in his actions and speech. When any action is placed in the light of mindfulness, the body and mind become relaxed, peaceful, and joyful. The sixth exercise is one to be used day and night throughout our entire lives.

### ***Tenth Exercise - Healing Wounds with the Awareness of Joy***

*Further, bhikkhus, a practitioner is aware of body as body, when, thanks to having put aside the Five Desires, a feeling of bliss arises during his concentration and saturates every part of his body.*

*Further, bhikkhus, a practitioner who is aware of body as body feels the joy which arises during concentration saturate every part of his body. There is no part of his body this feeling of joy, born during concentration, does not reach.*

*Further, bhikkhus, a practitioner who is aware of body as body experiences a feeling of happiness which arises with the disappearance of the feeling of joy and permeates his whole body. This feeling of happiness which arises with the disappearance of the feeling of joy reaches every part of his body.*

*Further, bhikkhus, a practitioner who is aware of body as body envelops the whole of his body with a clear, calm mind, filled with understanding.*

The purpose of this exercise is to bring about ease, peace, and joy; to heal the wounds of the body as well as of the heart and mind; to nourish us as we grow in the practice of joy; and to enable us to go far on the path of practice.

When the practitioner is able to put an end to agitation, desire, and hatred, he sits down in the lotus position and concentrates on his breath, and he feels a sense of ease and freedom. As a result, a feeling of joy arises in his body. You can practice according to the exercises which follow:

1. I am breathing in and making my whole body calm and at peace. I am breathing out and making my whole body calm and at peace. (Please see again the fourth exercise.)
2. I am breathing in and feeling joyful. I am breathing out and feeling joyful. (This is the fifth exercise of the Anapanasati.)
3. I am breathing in and feeling happy. I am breathing out and feeling happy. (This is the sixth exercise of the Anapanasati.)
4. I am breathing in and making my mind happy and at peace. I am breathing out and making my mind happy and at peace. (This is the tenth exercise of the Anapanasati.)

While practicing in this way, the practitioner feels the elements of joy and peace permeate every cell of his body. Please read the following excerpt from the second version:

*Like the bath attendant, who, after putting powdered soap into a basin, mixes it with water until the soap paste has water in every part of it, so the practitioner feels the bliss that is born when the desires of the sense realms is put aside, saturate every part of his body.*

The feeling of joy that is born when the practitioner lets go of his life of agitation, desire, and hatred will strengthen and penetrate more deeply when he has mastered the way of applying his mind:

*Like a spring within a mountain whose clear, pure water flows out and down all sides of that mountain and bubbles up in places where water has not previously entered, saturating the entire mountain, in the same way joy, born during concentration, permeates the whole of the practitioner's body; it is present everywhere.*

When the state of happiness is really present, the joy of the mind settles down to allow happiness to become steadier and deeper. For as long as the joy is still there, there goes with it, to a greater or lesser extent, conceptualization and excitement. "Joy" is a translation of the Sanskrit word *piti*, and "happiness" is a translation of *sukha*. The following example is often used to compare joy with happiness: Someone traveling in the desert who sees a stream of cool water experiences joy. When he drinks the water, he experiences happiness.

*Just as the different species of blue, pink, red, and white lotus, which grow up from the bottom of a pond of clear water and appear on the surface of that pond, have their tap roots, subsidiary roots, leaves, and flowers all full of the water of that pond, and there is no part of the plant which does not contain the water, so the feeling of happiness which arises with the disappearance of joy permeates the whole of the practitioner's body, and there is no part which it does not penetrate.*

At the time of the meditation, the practitioner feels happy and at peace. He lets his consciousness of this peace and happiness embrace his whole body, so that his body is saturated by it:

*Just as someone who puts on a very long robe which reaches from his head to his feet, and there is no part of his body which is not covered by this robe, so the practitioner with a clear, calm mind envelops his whole body in understanding and leaves no part of the body uncovered. This is how the practitioner is aware of the body as the body, both within and without, and establishes mindfulness in the body with recognition, insight, clarity, and realization. This is called being aware of the body as the body.*

As we have already seen, the function of this exercise is to nourish us with joy and happiness and to heal the wounds within us. But we have no doubts about letting go of this joy in order to embark on the work of observation. Joy and happiness come about because of physical and psychological conditions and are as impermanent as all other physical and psychological phenomena. Only when, thanks to mindful observation, we realize the impermanent, selfless, and interdependent nature of all that is, can we achieve freedom and liberation.

From the Commentary on The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing, by Thich Nhat Hanh

*The First Subject of Full Awareness:*

*Following the breath in daily life-eliminating forgetfulness and unnecessary thinking (Methods 1-2)*

Most of the readers of this book do not live in forests under trees, or in monasteries. In our daily lives, we drive cars and wait for buses, work in factories and offices, talk on the telephone, clean our houses, cook meals, wash clothes, and so on. Therefore, it is most important that we learn to practice Full Awareness of Breathing during our daily lives. Usually, when we perform these tasks, our thoughts wander, and our joys, sorrows, anger, and unease follow close behind. Although we are alive, we are not able to bring our minds into the present moment, and we live in forgetfulness.

We can begin by becoming aware of our breath, by following our breathing. Breathing in and breathing out, we know we are breathing in and out, and we can smile to affirm that we are ourselves, that we are in control of ourselves. Through awareness of breathing, we can be awake in and to the present moment. By being attentive, we have already established "stopping." i.e. concentration of mind. Breathing with full awareness helps our mind stop wandering in confused, never-ending thoughts.

Most of our daily activities can be accomplished while following our breath according to the Instructions in the sutra. When our work demands special attentiveness in order to avoid confusion or an accident, we can unite Full Awareness of Breathing with the task itself. For example, when we are carrying a pot of boiling water or doing electrical repairs, we can be aware of every movement of our



hands, and we can nourish this awareness by means of our breath: "I am breathing out, and I am aware my hands are carrying a pot of boiling water," or "I am breathing in and I am aware that my right hand is holding an electrical wire," or even "I am breathing in and I am aware that I am passing another car. I am breathing out and I know that the situation is under control." We can practice like this.

In fact, it is not enough to combine awareness of breathing only with tasks which require so much attention. We must also combine Full Awareness of our Breathing with all the movements of our body: "I am breathing in and I am sitting down." "I am breathing in and wiping the table." "I am breathing in and smiling at myself." "I am breathing in and lighting the stove." Stopping the random progression of thoughts and living in forgetfulness is a giant step forward in meditation practice. We can realize this step by following our breath and combining it with awareness of our daily activities.

There are people who have no peace or joy and even go insane simply because they cannot stop unnecessary thinking. They are forced to take sedatives to lull themselves to sleep. just to give their thoughts a rest. But even in their dreams, they continue to feel fears, anxieties, and unease. Thinking too much can cause headaches, and your spirit will suffer.

By following your breath and combining the Full Awareness of Breathing with your daily activities, you can cut across the stream of disturbing thoughts and light the lamp of awakening. Full awareness of an out-breath and an in-breath is something wonderful that anyone can practice. Even if you live in a monastery or a meditation center, you can practice in this way.

Combining full awareness of breathing with full awareness of the movements of the body during daily activities-walking, standing, lying, sitting, working-is a basic Dharma practice to cultivate

concentration and to live in an awakened state. During the first few minutes of sitting meditation, you can use this method to harmonize your breathing, and if it seems necessary, you can continue following your breath with full awareness throughout the entire period.

***The Second Subject of Full Awareness:***

*Awareness of the Body (Method 3)*

During the practice of meditation, body and mind become one. In the sitting, lying, standing, or walking position, we can practice awareness of the body, beginning by taking the different parts of our body one by one, and then taking the organism as a whole. We can start with our hair, and then go down to the tips of our toes. For example, when in the position of sitting meditation, after regulating your breathing, you begin by breathing out and you observe. "I am breathing out and am aware of the hair on my head." "I am breathing in and am aware of the contents of my skull." You can continue like this until you reach the tips of your toes.

In the process of the practice, feelings and considerations may arise. For example, I am passing my heart and suddenly I notice anxiety rising up in me with regard to a close friend's heart condition. I do not push this feeling away, I am cognizant of it: "I am breathing in and am aware that I am anxious about my friend's heart condition." Then you continue your journey of observation of your body under the supervision of the Full Awareness of Breathing.

Here is another example: When I am passing through the digestive organs, I see millions of minute living beings which are living along with me in my intestines. I do not push this perception away, I am simply cognizant of it: "I am breathing in and am aware of the minute organisms, living along with me and in me." If you see that your awareness of your symbiosis with these organisms is a rich subject for

meditation, you can recognize it as such and make an appointment with yourself to return to this subject later, and then continue with your journey of observation through the rest of your body.

You know that we give very little attention to the organs of our body. We are conscious of them only when they cause us pain and when we are starting to be ill. You can pass half your life seeking riches and fame without ever holding your little toe between your fingers in awakened awareness. Your little toe is very important, you know. It has been very kind to you for many years. If one day in the future there is a sign of cancer in it, what will you do?

Perhaps you think that to be aware of the body is not very important. But that is not true. Any physiological, psychological, or physical phenomenon can be a door which leads you to truth. You can meditate on your toe and reach the goal of realization. The secret of this practice is to concentrate the mind in order to observe each organ of the body in full awareness.

If you practice in this way, one day (perhaps tomorrow or even this afternoon) you may see deep and wonderful things which can change your view and way of life. The hair on your head seems very ordinary, but you should know that your hair is an ambassador of truth. Please receive the credentials of this hair. Observe them well and discover every message that each hair bears in itself. Are your eyes common physiological phenomena? They are the windows which open onto the miracle of reality. Do not neglect anything. Look deeply, and you will see. That is the practice of meditation.

### *The Third Subject of Full Awareness:*

*Realizing the Unity of Body and Mind (Method 4)*

During another period of meditation, observe your whole body without discriminating between different parts: "I am breathing in and am aware of my whole body." (Method 3). At this point, let your breathing, your body, and your observing mind all become one. Breathing and body are one. Breathing and mind are one. Mind and body are one.

At the time of observation, mind is not an entity which exists independently, outside of your breathing and your body. The boundary between the subject of observation and the object of observation no longer exists. We observe "the body in the body." The mind does not stand outside of the object in order to observe it. The mind is one with the object it observes. This is the first principle-"subject and object are empty (subject and object are not two)" which has been developed extensively in the Mahayana tradition.

Practicing this way for 10 or 20 minutes, the flow of your breathing and your body become very calm, and your mind becomes much more at rest. When you first begin these practices, it seems quite rough, like coarsely milled wheat, like riding a horse for the first time, or like the sound of a church bell after its first jarring ring. But the flour becomes finer and finer, the horse rides more and more smoothly, and the sound of the bell becomes more and more beautiful. The fourth breathing method accompanies you on this path: "I am breathing in and making my whole body calm and at peace." It is like drinking a cool glass of lemonade on a hot day and feeling your body become cool inside.

When you breathe in, the air enters your body and calms all the cells of your body. At the same time, each "cell" of your breathing becomes more peaceful and each "cell" of your mind also becomes more peaceful. The three are one and each one is all three. This is the key to meditation.

If the horse trots peacefully, the rider rides peacefully. And the more relaxed the rider feels, the more relaxed the horse becomes. The same is true of the bell, the ear drum of the hearer, and the hearer himself.

Breathing brings the sweet joy of meditation to you. "The sweet joy of meditation" is the great happiness which meditation brings. It is food. If you are nourished by the sweet Joy of meditation, you become joyful, fresh, and tolerant, and everyone around you will benefit from your joy.

Although the aim of the fourth method of breathing offered by the Buddha-breathing in and out to make your body calm and at peace is to bring calmness to the movements of your body, its effect is to bring calmness to your breathing and to your mind also. The calmness of one brings calmness to all three. In the calmness of meditation, discrimination between body and mind does not exist, and you dwell at rest in the state of "body and mind at one," no longer feeling that the subject of meditation exists outside the object of meditation.

***The Fourth Subject of Full Awareness:***

*The Food of the Joy of Meditation (Methods 5-6)*

Those who practice meditation should know how to nourish themselves on the joy of meditation, on the peace and joy of meditative concentration, in order to reach real maturity and help the world. Life in this world is both painful and miraculous. The Buddhist traditions of the Southern schools stress the painful side, while the Buddhist traditions of the Northern schools help us realize and appreciate the marvels of life.

The violet bamboo, the yellow flowers, the white clouds, and the full moon are all wondrous expressions of the Dharmakaya, the body of the Dharma. The body of a human being, although impermanent, without an independent self, and bound to suffering, is also wondrous, infinitely wondrous.

The initial joy of meditation is like leaving the city, with its hyperactivity and all its disturbing encounters, going off to the countryside to sit beneath a tree, alone. We feel totally at ease, peaceful and joyful. What a joy, what a relief, like when you complete a difficult examination and feel that you have laid aside all anxiety forevermore.

At the end of a busy day, you can turn off the TV, light a stick of incense to make the room fragrant, sit cross-legged, and begin to practice breathing. with a half-smile. You will feel great joy! This is the initial sensation of the peace and joy of meditation. The fifth breathing method, "I am breathing in and feeling joyful. I am breathing out and feeling joyful," helps us become aware of this sensation. If you can set aside the stresses and complications of your day, you will enter a meditation filled with joy. From this state, it is easy to arrive at the state of peace and happiness.

The sixth method establishes awareness of peace and happiness: "I am breathing in and feeling happy. I am breathing out and feeling happy." This happiness arises when we become free of incessant worrying and preoccupation, and from the fact that the body and mind are at ease.

When we have a toothache, we know that not having a toothache is a pleasurable feeling. But when we do not have a toothache, most of us are unaware of this pleasant feeling. Only after we become blind will we be aware that having eyes to see the blue sky and the white clouds is miraculous. While we can see, we are rarely aware of this miracle.

Practicing meditation is to be aware of both what is painful and what is miraculous. Happiness is the nourishment of the meditator, and it is not necessary to look for it outside of ourselves. We only need to be aware of the existence of happiness in order to have it immediately. Pleasant feelings are like the air around us- we can enjoy them as we need them. In Buddhist psychology, it is said there are three kinds of feelings: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral (neither pleasant nor unpleasant). But when we practice meditation, we know that we can transform neutral feelings into pleasant ones, and nourish ourselves. Pleasant feelings transformed from neutral ones are more healthy and lasting than other pleasant feelings.

When we are constantly nourished by the happiness of meditation, we become at ease with ourself and others. We become tolerant and compassionate, and our happiness is transmitted to all those around us. Only if we have peace ourselves can we share peace with others. Only then do we have enough strength and patience to work helping others, facing many hardships with patience and perseverance.

## Fourteen Verses on Meditation

Written by Thich Nhat Hanh

1.

Like the two wings of a bird,  
the practices of stopping (shamatha) and looking deeply (vipashyana)  
rely upon each other  
and belong together, side by side.

2.

The practice of shamatha is to stop,  
so that I may recognize and touch,  
nourish and heal,  
settle down and concentrate.

3.

The practice of vipashyana is to look deeply  
into the nature of the five skandhas,  
so that I may develop understanding  
and transform suffering.



4.

My breathing and my steps  
enable me to generate the energy of mindfulness,  
so that I can be aware of and touch  
the wonders of life within and around me.

5.

Calming body and mind,  
receiving nourishment and healing,  
protecting my six senses,  
I maintain concentration.

6.

Looking deeply into the heart of reality  
to see the true nature of things,  
practicing vipashyana enables me to let go  
of everything I am searching for, my desires, and my fears.

7.

Dwelling peacefully in the present moment,  
transforming habit energies  
gives rise to understanding,  
freeing me from afflictions and pain.

8.

Impermanence is one with nonself.  
Nonself is one with interdependent origination,  
is one with emptiness, is one with conventional designation,  
is one with the middle way, is one with interbeing.

9.

Emptiness, signlessness, and aimlessness  
liberate me from suffering,  
so that in my daily practice  
I am not caught in mere intellectual understanding.

10.

Nirvana is nonattainment.  
Sudden or gradual enlightenment are not different.  
True realization is to live in freedom  
right now in this moment.

11.

The essential sutras,  
such as the Discourses on the Full Awareness of Breathing  
and the Four Establishments of Mindfulness,  
show me the path to transform body and mind,  
step by step.

12.

The Mahayana sutras and teachings  
open many fresh, wide gateways  
allowing me to enter the depths of the stream of meditation  
flowing from the Original Source of the Buddha's teachings.

13.

Not discriminating  
between the practice offered by the Tathagata  
and that of the ancestral teachers,  
the Four Noble Truths perfectly interwoven  
should serve as the foundation of an authentic transmission.

14.

Supported by the Sangha Body  
my practice flows easier,  
allowing me to swiftly realize  
my great determination to love and understand all beings.