



PEACE IS EVERY STEP

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BY THICH NHAT HANH**

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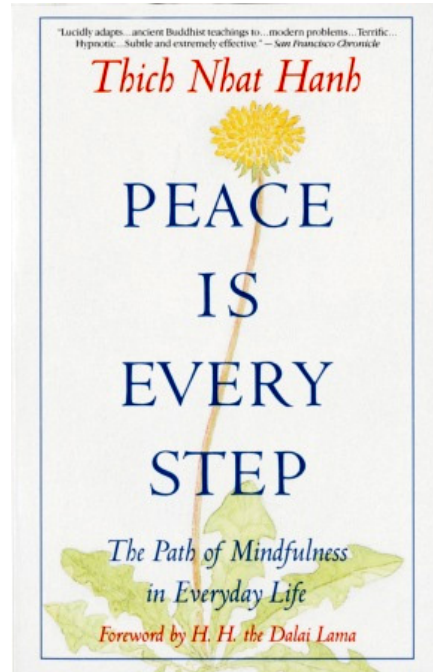
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PEACE IS EVERY STEP

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Foreword

BY H.H. THE DALAI LAMA

Although attempting to bring about world peace through the internal transformation of individuals is difficult, it is the only way. Wherever I go, I express this, and I am encouraged that people from many different walks of life receive it well. Peace must first be developed within an individual. And I believe that love, compassion, and altruism are the fundamental basis for peace. Once these qualities are developed within an individual, he or she is then able to create an atmosphere of peace and harmony. This atmosphere can be expanded and extended from the individual to his family, from the family to the community and eventually to the whole world.

Peace Is Every Step is a guidebook for a journey in exactly this direction. Thich Nhat Hanh begins by teaching mindfulness of breathing and awareness of the small acts of our daily lives, then shows us how to use the benefits of mindfulness and concentration to transform and heal difficult psychological states. Finally he shows us the connection between personal, inner peace and peace on Earth. This is a very worthwhile book. It can change individual lives and the life of our society.



Thich Nhat Hanh and H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama

Editor's Introduction

As I walked slowly and mindfully through a green oak forest this morning, a brilliant red-orange sun rose on the horizon. It immediately evoked for me images of India, where a group of us joined Thich Nhat Hanh the year before last to visit the sites where the Buddha taught. On one walk to a cave near Bodh Gaya, we stopped in a field surrounded by rice paddies and recited this poem:

*Peace is every step.
The shining red sun is my heart. Each flower smiles with me.
How green, how fresh all that grows. How cool the wind blows.
Peace is every step.
It turns the endless path to joy.*

These lines summarize the essence of Thich Nhat Hanh's message—that peace is not external or to be sought after or attained. Living mindfully, slowing down and enjoying each step and each breath, is enough. Peace is already present in each step, and if we walk in this way, a flower will bloom under our feet with every step. In fact the flowers will smile at us and wish us well on our way.

I met Thich Nhat Hanh in 1982 when he attended the Reverence for Life conference in New York. I was one of the first American Buddhists he had met, and it fascinated him that I looked, dressed, and, to some extent, acted like the novices he had trained in Vietnam for two decades. When my teacher, Richard Baker-roshi, invited him to visit our meditation center in San Francisco the following year, he happily accepted, and this began a new phase in the extraordinary life of this gentle monk, whom Baker-roshi characterized as "a cross between a cloud, a snail, and a piece of heavy machinery—a true religious presence."

Thich Nhat Hanh was born in central Vietnam in 1926 and was ordained a Buddhist monk in 1942, at the age of sixteen. Just eight years later, he co-founded what was to become the foremost center of Buddhist studies in South Vietnam, the An Quang Buddhist Institute.

In 1961, Nhat Hanh came to the United States to study and teach comparative religion at Columbia and Princeton Universities. But in 1963, his monk-colleagues in Vietnam telegraphed him to come home to join them in their work to stop the war following the fall of the oppressive Diem regime. He immediately returned and helped lead one of the great nonviolent resistance movements of the century, based entirely on Gandhian principles.

In 1964, along with a group of university professors and students in Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh founded the School of Youth for Social Service, called by the American press the "little Peace Corps," in which teams of young people went into the countryside to establish schools and health clinics, and later to rebuild villages that had been bombed. By the time of the fall of Saigon, there were more than 10,000 monks, nuns, and young social workers involved in the work. In the same year, he helped set up what was to become one of the most prestigious publishing houses in Vietnam, La Boi Press. In his books and as editor-in-chief of the official publication of the Unified Buddhist Church, he called for reconciliation between the warring parties in Vietnam, and because of that his writings were censored by both opposing governments.

In 1966, at the urging of his fellow monks, he accepted an invitation from the Fellowship of

Reconciliation and Cornell University to come to the U.S. "to describe to [us] the aspirations and the agony of the voiceless masses of the Vietnamese people" (*New Yorker*, June 25, 1966). He had a densely packed schedule of speaking engagements and private meetings, and spoke convincingly in favor of a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement. Martin Luther King, Jr. was so moved by Nhat Hanh and his proposals for peace that he nominated him for the 1967 Nobel Peace Prize, saying, "I know of no one more worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize than this gentle monk from Vietnam." Largely due to Thich Nhat Hanh's influence, King came out publicly against the war at a press conference, with Nhat Hanh, in Chicago.

When Thomas Merton, the well-known Catholic monk and mystic, met Thich Nhat Hanh at his monastery, Gethsemani, near Louisville, Kentucky, he told his students, "Just the way he opens the door and enters a room demonstrates his understanding. He is a true monk." Merton went on to write an essay, "Nhat Hanh Is My Brother," an impassioned plea to listen to Nhat Hanh's proposals for peace and lend full support for Nhat Hanh's advocacy of peace. After important meetings with Senators Fullbright and Kennedy, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and others in Washington, Thich Nhat Hanh went to Europe, where he met with a number of heads of state and officials of the Catholic church, including two audiences with Pope Paul VI, urging cooperation between Catholics and Buddhists to help bring peace to Vietnam.

In 1969, at the request of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh set up the Buddhist Peace Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks. After the Peace Accords were signed in 1973, he was refused permission to return to Vietnam, and he established a small community a hundred miles southwest of Paris, called "Sweet Potato." In 1976-77, Nhat Hanh conducted an operation to rescue boat people in the Gulf of Siam, but hostility from the governments of Thailand and Singapore made it impossible to continue. So for the following five years, he stayed at Sweet Potato in retreat—meditating, reading, writing, binding books, gardening, and occasionally receiving visitors.

In June 1982, Thich Nhat Hanh visited New York, and later that year established Plum Village, a larger retreat center near Bordeaux, surrounded by vineyards and fields of wheat, corn, and sunflowers. Since 1983 he has traveled to North America every other year to lead retreats and give lectures on mindful living and social responsibility, **"making peace right in the moment we are alive."**

Although Thich Nhat Hanh cannot visit his homeland, handwritten copies of his books continue to circulate illegally in Vietnam. His presence is also felt through his students and colleagues throughout the world who work full-time trying to relieve the suffering of the desperately poor people of Vietnam, clandestinely supporting hungry families and campaigning on behalf of writers, artists, monks, and nuns who have been imprisoned for their beliefs and their art. This work extends to helping refugees threatened with repatriation, and sending material and spiritual aid to refugees in the camps of Thailand, Malaysia, and Hong Kong.

Now sixty-four years old, yet looking twenty years younger, Thich Nhat Hanh is emerging as one of the great teachers of the twentieth century. In the midst of our society's emphasis on speed, efficiency, and material success, Thich Nhat Hanh's ability to walk calmly with peace and awareness and to teach us to do the same has led to his enthusiastic reception in the West. Although his mode of expression is simple, his message reveals the quintessence of the deep understanding of reality that comes from his meditations, his Buddhist training, and his work in the world.

His way of teaching centers around conscious breathing the awareness of each breath—and, through

conscious breathing, mindfulness of each act of daily life. Meditation, he tells us, is not just in a meditation hall. It is just as sacred to wash the dishes mindfully as to bow deeply or light incense. He also tells us that forming a smile on our face can relax hundreds of muscles in our body-he calls it "mouth yoga"-and in fact, recent studies have shown that when we flex our facial muscles into expressions of joy, we do indeed produce the effects on our nervous system that go with real joy. Peace and happiness are available, he reminds us, if we can only quiet our distracted thinking long enough to come back to the present moment and notice the blue sky, the child's smile, the beautiful sunrise. "If we are peaceful, if we are happy, we can smile, and everyone in our family, our entire society, will benefit from our peace."

Peace Is Every Step is a book of reminders. In the rush of modern life, we tend to lose touch with the peace that is available in each moment. Thich Nhat Hanh's creativity lies in his ability to make use of the very situations that usually pressure and antagonize us. For him, a ringing telephone is a signal to call us back to our true selves. Dirty dishes, red lights, and traffic jams are spiritual friends on the path of mindfulness. The most profound satisfactions, the deepest feelings of joy and completeness lie as close at hand as our next aware breath and the smile we can form right now.

Peace Is Every Step was assembled from Thich Nhat Hanh's lectures, published and unpublished writings, and informal conversations, by a small group of friends- Therese Fitzgerald, Michael Katz, Jane Hirshfield, and myself-working closely with Thay Nhat Hanh (pronounced "tie"-the Vietnamese word for "teacher") and with Leslie Meredith, our attentive, thorough, and sensitive editor at Bantam. Patricia Curtan provided the beautiful dandelion. Special thanks to Marion Tripp, who wrote the "Dandelion Poem."

This book is the clearest and most complete message yet of a great *bodhisattva*, who has dedicated his life to the enlightenment of others. Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching is simultaneously inspirational and very practical. I hope the reader enjoys this book as much as we have enjoyed making it available.

Arnold Kotler
Thenac, France July 1990

PART ONE

Breathe! You Are Alive

Twenty-four Brand New Hours; The Dandelion Has My Smile; Conscious Breathing; Present Moment, Wonderful Moment; Thinking Less; Nourishing Awareness in Each Moment; Sitting Anywhere; Sitting Meditation; Bells of Mindfulness; Cookie of Childhood; Tangerine Meditation; The Eucharist; Eating Mindfully; Washing Dishes; Walking Meditation; Telephone Meditation; Driving Meditation; Decompartmentalization; Breathing and Scything; Aimlessness; Our Life Is a Work of Art; Hope As An Obstacle; Flower Insights; Breathing Room; Continuing the Journey



Twenty-Four Brand-New Hours

Every morning, when we wake up, we have twenty-four brand-new hours to live. What a precious gift! We have the capacity to live in a way that these twenty-four hours will bring peace, joy, and happiness to ourselves and others.

Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves and in everything we do and see. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it. We don't have to travel far away to enjoy the blue sky. We don't have to leave our city or even our neighborhood to enjoy the eyes of a beautiful child. Even the air we breathe can be a source of joy.

We can smile, breathe, walk, and eat our meals in a way that allows us to be in touch with the abundance of happiness that is available. We are very good at preparing to live, but not very good at living. We know how to sacrifice ten years for a diploma, and we are willing to work very hard to get a job, a car, a house, and so on. But we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive. Every breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment.

This small book is offered as a bell of mindfulness, a reminder that happiness is possible only in the present moment. Of course, planning for the future is a part of life. But even planning can only take place in the present moment. This book is an invitation to come back to the present moment and find peace and joy. I offer some of my experiences and a number of techniques that may be of help. But please do not wait until finishing this book to find peace. Peace and happiness are available in every moment. Peace is every step. We shall walk hand in hand. Bon voyage.



The Dandelion Has My Smile

If a child smiles, if an adult smiles, that is very important. If in our daily lives we can smile, if we can be peaceful and happy, not only we, but everyone will profit from it. If we really know how to live, what better way to start the day than with a smile? Our smile affirms our awareness and determination to live in peace and joy. The source of a true smile is an awakened mind.

How can you remember to smile when you wake up? You might hang a reminder--such as a branch, a leaf, a painting, or some inspiring words--in your window or from the ceiling above your bed, so that you notice it when you wake up. Once you develop the practice of smiling, you may not need a reminder. You will smile as soon as you hear a bird singing or see the sunlight streaming through the window. Smiling helps you approach the day with gentleness and understanding.

When I see someone smile, I know immediately that he or she is dwelling in awareness. This half-smile, how many artists have labored to bring it to the lips of countless statues and paintings? I am sure the same smile must have been on the faces of the sculptors and painters as they worked. Can you imagine an angry painter giving birth to such a smile? Mona Lisa's smile is light, just a hint of a smile. Yet even a smile like that is enough to relax all the muscles in our face, to banish all worries and fatigue. A tiny bud of a smile on our lips nourishes awareness and calms us miraculously. It returns to us the peace we thought we had lost.

Our smile will bring happiness to us and to those around us. Even if we spend a lot of money on gifts for everyone in our family, nothing we buy could give them as much happiness as the gift of our

awareness, our smile. And this precious gift costs nothing. At the end of a retreat in California, a friend wrote this poem:

I have lost my smile,
but don't worry.
The dandelion has it.

If you have lost your smile and yet are still capable of seeing that a dandelion is keeping it for you, the situation is not too bad. You still have enough mindfulness to see that the smile is there.

You only need to breathe consciously one or two times and you will recover your smile. The dandelion is one member of your community of friends. It is there, quite faithful, keeping your smile for you.

In fact, everything around you is keeping your smile for you. You don't need to feel isolated. You only have to open yourself to the support that is all around you, and in you. Like the friend who saw that her smile was being kept by the dandelion, you can breathe in awareness, and your smile will return.



Conscious Breathing

There are a number of breathing techniques you can use to make life vivid and more enjoyable. The first exercise is very simple. As you breathe in, you say to yourself, "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in." And as you breathe out, say, "Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out." Just that. You recognize your in-breath as an in-breath and your out-breath as an out-breath. You don't even need to recite the whole sentence; you can use just two words: "In" and "Out." This technique can help you keep your mind on your breath. As you practice, your breath will become peaceful and gentle, and your mind and body will also become peaceful and gentle. This is not a difficult exercise. In just a few minutes you can realize the fruit of meditation.

Breathing in and out is very important, and it is enjoyable. Our breathing is the link between our body and our mind. Sometimes our mind is thinking of one thing and our body is doing another, and mind and body are not unified. By concentrating on our breathing, "In" and "Out," we bring body and mind back together, and become whole again. Conscious breathing is an important bridge.

To me, breathing is a joy that I cannot miss. Every day, I practice conscious breathing, and in my small meditation room, I have calligraphed this sentence: "Breathe, you are alive!" Just breathing and smiling can make us very happy, because when we breathe consciously we recover ourselves completely and encounter life in the present moment.



Present Moment, Wonderful Moment

In our busy society, it is a great fortune to breathe consciously from time to time. We can practice conscious breathing not only while sitting in a meditation room, but also while working at the office or at home, while driving our car, or sitting on a bus, wherever we are, at any time throughout the day.

There are so many exercises we can do to help us breathe consciously. Besides the simple "In-Out" exercise, we can recite these four lines silently as we breathe in and out:

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

"Breathing in, I calm my body." Reciting this line is like drinking a glass of cool lemonade on a hot day—you can feel the coolness permeate your body. When I breathe in and recite this line, I actually feel my breath calming my body and mind.

"Breathing out, I smile." You know a smile can relax hundreds of muscles in your face. Wearing a smile on your face is a sign that you are master of yourself.

"Dwelling in the present moment." While I sit here, I don't think of anything else. I sit here, and I know exactly where I am.

"I know this is a wonderful moment!" It is a joy to sit, stable and at ease, and return to our breathing, our smiling, our true nature. Our appointment with life is in the present moment. If we do not have peace and joy right now, when will we have peace and joy—tomorrow, or after tomorrow? What is preventing us from being happy right now? As we follow our breathing, we can say, simply, "Calming, Smiling, Present moment, Wonderful moment."

This exercise is not just for beginners. Many of us who have practiced meditation and conscious breathing for forty or fifty years continue to practice in this same way, because this kind of exercise is so important and so easy.



Thinking Less

While we practice conscious breathing, our thinking will slow down, and we can give ourselves a real rest. Most of the time, we think too much, and mindful breathing helps us to be calm, relaxed, and peaceful. It helps us stop thinking so much and stop being possessed by sorrows of the past and worries about the future. It enables us to be in touch with life, which is wonderful in the present moment.

Of course, thinking is important, but quite a lot of our thinking is useless. It is as if, in our head, each of us has a cassette tape that is always running, day and night. We think of this and we think of that, and it is difficult to stop. With a cassette, we can just press the stop button. But with our thinking, we do not have any button. We may think and worry so much that we cannot sleep. If we go to the doctor for some sleeping pills or tranquilizers, these may make the situation worse, because we do not really rest during that kind of sleep, and if we continue using these drugs, we may become addicted. We continue to live tensely, and we may have nightmares.

According to the method of conscious breathing, when we breathe in and out, we stop thinking, because saying "In" and "Out" is not thinking—"In" and "Out" are only words to help us concentrate on our breathing. If we keep breathing in and out this way for a few minutes, we become quite refreshed. We recover ourselves, and we can encounter the beautiful things around us in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here. If we do not go back to ourselves in the present moment, we cannot be in touch with life.

When we are in touch with the refreshing, peaceful, and healing elements within ourselves and around us, we learn how to cherish and protect these things and make them grow. These elements of peace are available to us anytime.



Nourishing Awareness in Each Moment

One cold, winter evening I returned home from a walk in the hills, and I found that all the doors and windows in my hermitage had blown open. When I had left earlier, I hadn't secured them, and a cold wind had blown through the house, opened the windows, and scattered the papers from my desk all over the room. Immediately, I closed the doors and windows, lit a lamp, picked up the papers, and arranged them neatly on my desk. Then I started a fire in the fireplace, and soon the crackling logs brought warmth back to the room.

Sometimes in a crowd we feel tired, cold and lonely. We may wish to withdraw to be by ourselves and become warm again, as I did when I closed the windows and sat by the fire, protected from the damp, cold wind. Our senses are our windows to the world, and sometimes the wind blows through them and disturbs everything within us. Some of us leave our windows open all the time, allowing the sights and sounds of the world invade us, penetrate us, and expose our sad, troubled selves. We feel so cold, lonely, and afraid. Do you ever find yourself watching an awful TV program, unable to turn it off? The raucous noises, explosions of gunfire, are upsetting. Yet you don't get up and turn it off. Why do you torture yourself in this way? Don't you want to close your windows? Are you frightened of solitude – the emptiness and loneliness you may find when you face yourself alone?

Watching a bad TV program, we *become* the TV program. We are what we feel and perceive. If we are angry, we are the anger. If we are in love, we are love. If we look at a snow-covered mountain peak, we are the mountain. We can be anything we want, so why do we open our windows to bad TV programs made by sensationalist producers in search of easy money, programs that make our hearts pound, our fists tighten, and leave us exhausted? Who allows such TV programs to be made and seen by even the very young? We do! We are too undemanding, too ready to watch whatever is on the screen, too lonely, lazy, or bored to create our own lives. We turn on the TV and leave it on, allowing someone else to guide us, shape us, and destroy us. Losing ourselves in this way is leaving our fate in the hands of others who may not be acting responsibly. We must be aware of which programs do harm to our nervous system, minds, and hearts, and which programs benefit us.

Of course, I am not talking only about television. All around us, how many lures are set by our fellows and ourselves? In a single day, how many times do we become lost and scattered because of them? We must be very careful to protect our fate and our peace. I am not suggesting that we just shut all our windows, for there are many miracles in the world we call "outside." We can open our windows to these miracles and look at any one of them with awareness. This way, even while sitting beside a clear, flowing stream, listening to beautiful music, or watching an excellent movie, we need not lose ourselves entirely in the stream, the music or the film. We can continue to be aware of ourselves and our breathing. With the sun of awareness shining in us, we can avoid most dangers. The stream will be purer, the music more harmonious, and the soul of the filmmaker completely visible.

As beginning meditators, we may want to leave the city and go off to the countryside to help close those windows that trouble our spirit. There we can become one with the quiet forest, and rediscover and restore ourselves, without being swept away by the chaos of the "outside world." The fresh and

silent woods help us remain in awareness, and when our awareness is well-rooted and we can maintain it without faltering, we may wish to return to the city and remain there, less troubled. But sometimes we cannot leave the city, and we have to find the refreshing and peaceful elements that can heal us right in the midst of our busy lives. We may wish to visit a good friend who can comfort us, or go for a walk in a park and enjoy the trees and the cool breeze. Whether we are in the city, the countryside, or the wilderness, we need to sustain ourselves by choosing our surroundings carefully and nourishing our awareness in each moment.



Sitting Anywhere

When you need to slow down and come back to yourself, you do not need to rush home to your meditation cushion or to a meditation center in order to practice conscious breathing. You can breathe anywhere, just sitting on your chair at the office or sitting in your automobile. Even if you are at a shopping center filled with people or waiting in line at a bank, if you begin to feel depleted and need to return to yourself, you can practice conscious breathing and smile just standing there.

Wherever you are, you can breathe mindfully. We all need to go back to ourselves from time to time, in order to be able to confront the difficulties of life. We can do this in any position – standing, sitting, lying down, or walking. If you can sit down, however, the sitting position is the most stable.

One time, I was waiting for a plane that was four hours late at Kennedy Airport in New York, and I enjoyed sitting cross-legged right in the waiting area. I just rolled up my sweater and used it as a cushion, and I sat. People looked at me curiously, but after a while they ignored me, and I sat in peace. There was no place to rest, the airport was full of people, so I just made myself comfortable where I was. You may not want to meditate so conspicuously, but breathing mindfully in any position at any time can help you recover yourself.



Sitting Meditation

The most stable posture for meditation is sitting cross-legged on a cushion. Choose a cushion that is the right thickness to support you. The half-lotus and full-lotus positions are excellent for establishing stability of body and mind. To sit in the lotus position, gently cross your legs by placing one foot (for the half-lotus) or both feet (for the full lotus) on the opposite thighs. If the lotus position is difficult, it is fine just to sit cross-legged or in any comfortable position. Allow your back to be straight, keep your eyes half closed, and fold your hands comfortably on your lap. If you prefer, you can sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor and your hands resting on your lap. Or you can lie on the floor, on your back, with your legs straight out, a few inches apart, and your arms at your sides, preferably palms up.

If your legs or feet fall asleep or begin to hurt during sitting meditation so that your concentration becomes disturbed, feel free to adjust your position. If you do this slowly and attentively, following your breathing and each movement of your body, you will not lose a single moment of concentration. If the pain is severe, stand up, walk slowly and mindfully, and when you are ready sit down again.

In some meditation centers, practitioners are not permitted to move during periods of sitting meditation. They often have to endure great discomfort. To me, this seems unnatural. When a part of our body is numb or in pain, it is telling us something, and we should listen to it. We sit in meditation to help us cultivate peace, joy, and nonviolence, not to endure physical strain or to injure our bodies.

To change the position of our feet or do a little walking meditation will not disturb others very much, and it can help a lot.

Sometimes, we can use meditation as a way of hiding from ourselves and from life, like a rabbit going back to his hole. Doing this, we may be able to avoid some problems for a while, but when we leave our "hole," we will have to confront them again. For example, if we practice our meditation very intensely, we may feel a kind of relief as we exhaust ourselves and divert our energy from confronting our difficulties. But when our energy returns, our problems will return with them.

We need to practice meditation gently, but steadily, throughout daily life, not wasting a single opportunity or event to see deeply into the true nature of life, including our everyday problems. Practicing in this way, we dwell in profound communion with life.



Bells of Mindfulness

In my tradition, we use the temple bells to remind us to come back to the present moment. Every time we hear the bell, we stop talking, stop our thinking, and return to ourselves, breathing in and out and smiling. Whatever we are doing, we pause for a moment and just enjoy our breathing. Sometimes we also recite this verse:

Listen, listen.

This wonderful sound brings me back to my true self.

When we breathe in, we say, "Listen, listen," and when we breathe out we say, "This wonderful sound brings me back to my true self."

Since I have come to the West, I have not heard many Buddhist temple bells. But fortunately, there are church bells all over Europe. There do not seem to be as many in the United States; I think that is a pity. Whenever I give a lecture in Switzerland, I always make use of the church bells to practice mindfulness. When the bells ring, I stop talking, and all of us listen to the full sound of the bell. We enjoy it so much. (I think it is better than the lecture!) When we hear the bell, we can pause and enjoy our breathing and get in touch with the wonders of life that are around us – the flowers, the children, the beautiful sounds. Every time we get back in touch with ourselves, the conditions become favorable for us to encounter life in the present moment.

One day in Berkeley, I proposed to professors and students at the University of California that every time the bell on the campus sounds, the professors and students should pause in order to breathe consciously. Everyone should take the time to enjoy being alive! We should not just be rushing around all day. We have to learn to really enjoy our church bells and our school bells. Bells are beautiful, and they can wake us up.

If you have a bell at home, you can practice breathing and smiling with its lovely sound. But you do not have to carry a bell into your office or factory. You can use any sound to remind you to pause, breath in and out, and enjoy the present moment. The buzzer that goes off when you forget to fasten the seat belt in your car is a bell of mindfulness. Even non-sounds, such as the rays of sunlight coming through the window, are bells of mindfulness that can remind us to return to ourselves, breathe, smile, and live fully in the present moment.



Cookie of Childhood

When I was four years old, my mother used to bring me a cookie every time she came home from the market. I always went to the front yard and took my time eating it, sometimes half an hour or forty-five minutes for one cookie. I would take a small bite and look up at the sky. Then I would touch the dog with my feet and take another small bite. I just enjoyed being there, with the sky, the earth, the bamboo thickets, the cat, the dog, the flowers. I was able to do that because I did not have much to worry about. I did not think of the future, I did not regret the past. I was entirely in the present moment, with my cookie, the dog, the bamboo thickets, the cat, and everything.

It is possible to eat our meals as slowly and joyfully as I ate the cookie of my childhood. Maybe you have the impression that you have lost the cookie of your childhood, but I am sure it is still there, somewhere in your heart. Everything is still there, and if you really want it, you can find it. Eating mindfully is a most important practice of meditation. We can eat in a way that we can restore the cookie of our childhood. The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it.



Tangerine Meditation

If I offer you a freshly picked tangerine to enjoy, I think the degree to which you enjoy it will depend on your mindfulness. If you are free of worries and anxiety, you will enjoy it more. If you are possessed by anger and fear, the tangerine may not be very real to you.

One day, I offered a number of children a basket filled with tangerines. The basket was passed around, and each child took one tangerine and put it in his or her palm. We each looked at our tangerine, and the children were invited to meditate on its origins. They saw not only their tangerine, but also its mother, the tangerine tree. With some guidance, they began to visualize the blossoms in the sunshine and in the rain. They saw petals falling down and the tiny green fruit appear. The sunshine and the rain continued, and the tiny tangerine grew. Now someone has picked it, and the tangerine is here. After seeing this, each child was invited to peel the tangerine slowly, noticing the mist and the fragrance of the tangerine, and then bring it up to his or her mouth and have a mindful bite, in full awareness of the texture and taste of the fruit and the juice coming out. We ate slowly like that.

Each time you look at a tangerine, you can see deeply into it. You can see everything in the universe in one tangerine. When you peel it and smell it, it's wonderful. You can take your time eating a tangerine and be very happy.



The Eucharist

The practice of the Eucharist is a practice of awareness. When Jesus broke the bread and shared it with his disciples, he said, "Eat this. This is my Flesh." He knew that if his disciples would eat one piece of bread in mindfulness, they would have real life. In their daily lives, they may have eaten their bread in forgetfulness, so the bread was not bread at all; it was a ghost. In our daily lives, we may see the people around us, but if we lack mindfulness, they are just phantoms, not real people, and we ourselves are also ghosts. Practicing mindfulness enables us to become a real person. When we are a real person, we see real people around us, and life is present in all its richness. The practice of eating bread, a tangerine, or a cookie is the same.

When we breathe, when we are mindful, when we look deeply at our food, life becomes real at that very moment. To me, the rite of the Eucharist is a wonderful practice of mindfulness. In a drastic way, Jesus tried to wake up his disciples.



Eating Mindfully

A few years ago, I asked some children, "What is the purpose of eating breakfast?" One boy replied, "To get energy for the day." Another said, "The purpose of eating breakfast is to eat breakfast." I think the second child is more correct. The purpose of eating is to eat.

Eating a meal in mindfulness is an important practice. We turn off the TV, put down our newspaper, and work together for five or ten minutes, setting the table and finishing whatever needs to be done. During these few minutes, we can be very happy. When the food is on the table and everyone is seated, we practice breathing: "Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile," three times. We can recover ourselves completely after three breaths like this.

Then, we look at each person as we breathe in and out in order to be in touch with ourselves and everyone at the table. We don't need two hours to see another person. If we are really settled within ourselves, we only need to look for one or two seconds, and that is enough to see. I think that if a family has five members, only about five or ten seconds are needed to practice this "looking and seeing."

After breathing, we smile. Sitting at the table with other people, we have a chance to offer an authentic smile of friendship and understanding. It is very easy, but not many people do it. To me, this is the most important practice. We look at each person and smile at him or her. Breathing and smiling together is a very important practice. If the people in a household cannot smile at each other, the situation is very dangerous.

After breathing and smiling, we look down at the food in a way that allows the food to become real. This food reveals our connection with the earth. Each bite contains the life of the sun and the earth. The extent to which our food reveals itself depends on us. We can see and taste the whole universe in a piece of bread! Contemplating our food for a few seconds before eating, and eating in mindfulness, can bring us much happiness.

Having the opportunity to sit with our family and friends and enjoy wonderful food is something precious, something not everyone has. Many people in the world are hungry. When I hold a bowl of rice or a piece of bread, I know that I am fortunate and I feel compassion for all those who have no food to eat and are without friends or family. This is a very deep practice. We do not need to go to a temple or a church in order to practice this. We can practice it right at our dinner table. Mindfully eating can cultivate seeds of compassion and understanding that will strengthen us to do something to help hungry and lonely people be nourished.

In order to aid mindfulness during meals, you may like to eat silently from time to time. Your first silent meal may cause you to feel a little uncomfortable, but once you become used to it, you will realize that meals in silence bring much peace and happiness. Just as we turn off the TV before eating, we can "turn off" the talking in order to enjoy the food and the presence of one another.

I do not recommend silent meals every day. Talking to each other can be a wonderful way to be together in mindfulness. But we have to distinguish among different kinds of talk. Some subjects can separate us: for instance, if we talk about other people's shortcomings. The carefully prepared food will have no value if we let this kind of talk dominate our meal. When instead we speak about things that nourish our awareness of the food and our being together, we cultivate the kind of happiness that is necessary for us to grow. If we compare this experience with the experience of talking about other people's shortcomings, we will realize that the awareness of the piece of bread in our mouth is much more nourishing. It brings life in and makes life real.

So, while eating, we should refrain from discussing subjects that can destroy our awareness of our family and the food. But we should feel free to say things that can nourish awareness and happiness. For instance, if there is a dish that you like very much, you can notice if other people are also enjoying it, and if one of them is not, you can help him or her appreciate the wonderful dish prepared with loving care. If someone is thinking about something other than the good food on the table, such as his difficulties in the office or with friends, he is losing the present moment and the food. You can say, "This dish is wonderful, don't you agree?" to draw him out of his thinking and worries and bring him back to the here and now, enjoying you, enjoying the wonderful dish. You become a bodhisattva, helping a living being become enlightened. Children, in particular, are very capable of practicing mindfulness and reminding others to do the same.



Washing Dishes

To my mind, the idea that doing dishes is unpleasant can occur only when you aren't doing them. Once you are standing in front of the sink with your sleeves rolled up and your hands in the warm water, it is really quite pleasant. I enjoy taking my time with each dish, being fully aware of the dish, the water, and each movement of my hands. I know that if I hurry in order to eat dessert sooner, the time of washing dishes will be unpleasant and not worth living. That would be a pity, for each minute, each second of life is a miracle. The dishes themselves and the fact that I am here washing them are miracles!

If I am incapable of washing dishes joyfully, if I want to finish them quickly so I can go and have dessert, I will be equally incapable of enjoying my dessert. With the fork in my hand, I will be thinking about what to do next, and the texture and flavor of the dessert, together with the pleasure of eating it, will be lost. I will always be dragged into the future, never able to live in the present moment.

Each thought, each action in the sunlight of awareness becomes sacred. In this light, no boundary exists between the sacred and the profane. I must confess it takes me a bit longer to do the dishes, but I live fully in every moment, and I am happy. Washing the dishes is at the same time a means and an end—that is, not only do we do the dishes in order to have clean dishes, we also do the dishes just to do the dishes, to live fully in each moment while washing them.



Walking Meditation

Walking meditation can be very enjoyable. We walk slowly, alone or with friends, if possible in some beautiful place. Walking meditation is really to enjoy the walking—walking not in order to arrive, but just to walk. The purpose is to be in the present moment and, aware of our breathing and our walking, to enjoy each step. Therefore we have to shake off all worries and anxieties, not thinking of the future, not thinking of the past, just enjoying the present moment. We

can take the hand of a child as we do it. When we walk, we make steps as if we are the happiest person on Earth.

Although we walk all the time, our walking is usually more like running. When we walk like that, we print anxiety and sorrow on the Earth. We have to walk in a way that we only print peace and serenity on the Earth. We can all do this, provided that we want it very much. Any child can do it. If we can take one step like this, we can take two, three, four, and five. When we are able to take one step peacefully and happily, we are working for the cause of peace and happiness for the whole of humankind. Walking meditation is a wonderful practice.

When we do walking meditation outside, we walk a little slower than our normal pace, and we coordinate our breathing with our steps. For example, we may take three steps with each in-breath and three steps with each out-breath. So we can say, "In, in, in. Out, out, out." "In" is to help us to identify the in-breath. Every time we call something by its name, we make it more real, like saying the name of a friend.

If your lungs want four steps instead of three, please give them four steps. If they want only two steps, give them two. The lengths of your in-breath and out-breath do not have to be the same. For example, you can take three steps with each inhalation and four with each exhalation. If you feel happy, peaceful, and joyful while you are walking, you are practicing correctly.

Be aware of the contact between your feet and the Earth. Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet. We have caused a lot of damage to the Earth. Now it is time for us to take good care of her. We bring our peace and calm to the surface of the Earth and share the lesson of love. We walk in that spirit. From time to time, when we see something beautiful, we may want to stop and look at it—a tree, a flower, some children playing.

As we look, we continue to follow our breathing, lest we lose the beautiful flower and get caught up in our thoughts. When we want to resume walking, we just start again. Each step we take will create a cool breeze, refreshing our body and mind. Every step makes a flower bloom under our feet. We can do it only if we do not think of the future or the past, if we know that life can only be found in the present moment.



Telephone Meditation

The telephone is very convenient, but we can be tyrannized by it. We may find its ring disturbing or feel interrupted by too many calls. When we talk on the phone, we may forget that we are talking on the telephone, wasting precious time (and money). Often we talk about things that are not that important. How many times have we received our phone bill and winced at the amount of it? The telephone bell creates in us a kind of vibration, and maybe some anxiety: "Who is calling? Is it good news or bad news?" Yet some force in us pulls us to the phone and we cannot resist. We are victims of our own telephone.

I recommend that the next time you hear the phone ring, just stay where you are, breathe in and out consciously, smile to yourself, and recite this verse: "Listen, listen. This wonderful sound brings me back to my true self." When the bell rings for the second time, you can repeat the verse, and your smile will be even more solid. When you smile, the muscles of your face relax, and your tension quickly vanishes. You can afford to practice breathing and smiling like this, because if the person calling has

something important to say, she will certainly wait for at least three rings. When the phone rings for the third time, you can continue to practice breathing and smiling, as you walk to the phone slowly, with all your sovereignty. You are your own master. You know that you are smiling not only for your own sake, but also for the sake of the other person. If you are irritated or angry, the other person will receive your negativity. But because you have been breathing consciously and smiling, you are dwelling in mindfulness, and when you pick up the phone, how fortunate for the person calling you!

Before making a phone call, you can also breathe in and out three times, then dial. When you hear the other phone ring, you know that your friend is practicing breathing and smiling and will not pick it up until the third ring. So you tell yourself, "She is breathing, why not me?" You practice breathing in and out, and she does too. That's very beautiful!

You don't have to go into a meditation hall to do this wonderful practice of meditation. You can do it in your office and at home. I don't know how phone operators can practice while so many phones ring simultaneously. I rely on you to find a way for operators to practice telephone meditation. But those of us who are not operators have the right to three breaths. Practicing telephone meditation can counteract stress and depression and bring mindfulness into our daily lives.

PART TWO

Transformation and Healing

The River of Feelings; Non-Surgery; Transforming Feelings; Mindfulness of Anger; Pillow-Pounding; Walking Meditation When Angry; Cooking Our Potatoes; The Roots of Anger; Internal Formations; Living Together; Suchness; Look into Your Hand; Parents; Nourishing Healthy Seeds; What's Not Wrong?; Blaming Never Helps; Understanding; Real Love; Meditation on Compassion; Meditation on Love; Hugging Meditation; Investing in Friends; It Is a Great Joy to Hold Your Grandchild; Community of Mindful Living; Mindfulness Must Be Engaged



Nourishing Healthy Seeds

Consciousness exists on two levels: as seeds and as manifestations of these seeds. Suppose we have a seed of anger in us. When conditions are favorable, that seed may manifest as a zone of energy called anger. It is burning, and it makes us suffer a lot. It is very difficult for us to be joyful at the moment the seed of anger manifests.

Every time a seed has an occasion to manifest itself, it produces new seeds of the same kind. If we are angry for five minutes, new seeds of anger are produced and deposited in the soil of our unconscious mind during those five minutes. That is why we have to be careful in selecting the kind of life we lead and the emotions that we express. When I smile, the seeds of smiling and joy have come up. As long as they manifest, new seeds of smiling and joy are planted. But if I don't practice smiling for a number of years, that seed will weaken, and I may not be able to smile anymore.

There are many kinds of seeds in us, both good and bad. Some were planted during our lifetime, and some were transmitted by our parents, our ancestors, and our society. In a tiny grain of corn, there is the knowledge, transmitted by previous generations, of how to sprout and how to make leaves, flowers, and ears of corn. Our body and our mind also have knowledge that has been transmitted by

previous generations. Our ancestors and our parents have given us seeds of joy, peace, and happiness, as well as seeds of sorrow, anger, and so on.

Every time we practice mindful living, we plant healthy seeds and strengthen the healthy seeds already in us. Healthy seeds function similarly to antibodies. When a virus enters our bloodstream, our body reacts and antibodies come and surround it, take care of it, and transform it. This is true with our psychological seeds as well. If we plant wholesome, healing, refreshing seeds, they will take care of the negative seeds, even without our asking them. To succeed, we need to cultivate a good reserve of refreshing seeds.

One day, in the village where I live, we lost a very close friend, a Frenchman who helped us considerably in setting up Plum Village. He had a heart attack and died during the night. In the morning we learned of his passing. He was such a gracious person, and he gave us a lot of joy every time we spent a few minutes with him. We felt that he was joy and peace itself. The morning we found out about his death, we regretted very much that we had not spent more time with him.

That night, I couldn't sleep. The loss of a friend like him was so painful. But I had to deliver a lecture the next morning, and I wanted to sleep, so I practiced breathing. It was a cold, winter night, and I was lying in bed visualizing the beautiful trees in the yard of my hermitage. Years before, I had planted three beautiful cedars, a variety from the Himalayas. The trees are now very big, and, during walking meditation, I used to stop and hug these beautiful cedars, breathing in and out. The cedars always responded to my hugging, I am sure of it. So I lay in bed, and just breathed in and out, becoming the cedars and my breath. I felt much better, but still I couldn't sleep. Finally I invited into my consciousness the image of a delightful Vietnamese child named Little Bamboo. She came to Plum Village when she was two years old, and she was so cute that everyone wanted to hold her in their arms, especially the children. They didn't let Little Bamboo walk on the ground! Now she is six years old, and holding her in your arms, you feel very fresh, very wonderful. So I invited her to come up into my consciousness, and I practiced breathing and smiling on her image. In just a few moments, I fell soundly asleep.

Each of us needs a reserve of seeds that are beautiful, healthy, and strong enough to help us during difficult moments. Sometimes, because the block of pain in us is so big, even though a flower is right in front of us, we cannot touch it. At that moment, we know that we need help. If we have a strong storehouse of healthy seeds, we can invite several of them to come up and help us. If you have a friend who is very close to you, who understands you, if you know that when you sit close to her, even without saying anything, you will feel better, then you can invite her image up into your consciousness, and the "two" of you can "breathe together." Doing just this may be a big help in difficult moments.

But if you have not seen your friend in a long time, her image may be too weak in your consciousness to come easily to you. If you know that she is the only person who can help you reestablish your balance and if your image of her is already too weak, there is only one thing to do: buy a ticket and go to her, so that she is with you not as a seed, but as a real person.

If you go to her, you have to know how to spend the time well, because your time with her is limited. When you arrive, sit close to her, and right away you will feel stronger. But you know that soon you will have to return home, so you have to take the opportunity to practice full awareness in each precious moment while you are there. Your friend can help you re-establish the balance within you, but that is

not enough. You yourself must become strong inside, in order to feel all right when you are alone again. That is why, sitting with her or walking with her, you need to practice mindfulness. If you don't, if you just use her presence to ameliorate your suffering, the seed of her image will not become strong enough to sustain you when you return home. We need to practice mindfulness all the time so that we plant healing, refreshing seeds in ourselves. Then, when we need them, they will take care of us.



What's Not Wrong?

We often ask, "What's wrong?" Doing so, we invite painful seeds of sorrow to come up and manifest. We feel suffering, anger, and depression, and produce more such seeds. We would be much happier if we tried to stay in touch with the healthy, joyful seeds inside of us and around us. We should learn to ask, "What's not wrong?" and be in touch with that. There are so many elements in the world and within our bodies, feelings, perceptions, and consciousness that are wholesome, refreshing, and healing. If we block ourselves, if we stay in the prison of our sorrow, we will not be in touch with these healing elements.

Life is filled with many wonders, like the blue sky, the sunshine, the eyes of a baby. I enjoy breathing every day. But many people appreciate the joy of breathing only when they have asthma or a stuffed-up nose. We don't need to wait until we have asthma to enjoy our breathing. Awareness of the precious elements of happiness is itself the practice of right mindfulness. Elements like these are within us and all around us. In each second of our lives we can enjoy them. If we do so, seeds of peace, joy, and happiness will be planted in us, and they will become strong. The secret to happiness is happiness itself. Wherever we are, any time, we have the capacity to enjoy the sunshine, the presence of each other, the wonder of our breathing. We don't have to travel anywhere else to do so. We can be in touch with these things right now.



Blaming Never Helps

When we plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don't blame the lettuce. You look into the reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce. Yet if we have problems with our friends or our family, we blame the other person. But if we know how to take care of them, they will grow well, like lettuce. Blaming has no positive effect at all, nor does trying to persuade using reason and arguments. That is my experience. No blame, no reasoning, no argument, just understanding. If you understand, and you show that you understand, you can love, and the situation will change.

One day in Paris, I gave a lecture about not blaming the lettuce. After the talk, I was doing walking meditation by myself, and when I turned the corner of a building, I overheard an eighty-year-old girl telling her mother, "Mommy, remember to water me. I am your lettuce." I was so pleased that she had understood my point completely. Then I heard her mother reply, "Yes, my daughter, and I am your lettuce also. So please don't forget to water me too." Mother and daughter practicing together, it was very beautiful.



Understanding

Understanding and love are not two things, but just one. Suppose your son wakes up one morning and sees that it is already quite late. He decides to wake up his younger sister, to give her enough time to eat breakfast before going to school. It happens that she is grouchy and instead of saying, "Thank you for waking me up," she says, "Shut up! Leave me alone!" and kicks him. He will probably get angry, thinking, "I woke her up nicely. Why did she kick me?" He may want to go to the kitchen and tell you about it, or even kick her back.

But then he remembers that during the night his sister coughed a lot, and he realizes that she must be sick. Maybe she behaved so meanly because she has a cold. At that moment, he understands, and he is not angry at all anymore. When you understand, you cannot help but love. You cannot get angry. To develop understanding, you have to practice looking at all living beings with the eyes of compassion. When you understand, you cannot help but love. And when you love, you naturally act in a way that can relieve the suffering of people.



Real Love

We really have to understand the person we want to love. If our love is only a will to possess, it is not love. If we only think of ourselves, if we know only our own needs and ignore the needs of the other person, we cannot love. We must look deeply in order to see and understand the needs, aspirations, and suffering of the person we love. This is the ground of real love. You cannot resist loving another person when you really understand him or her.

From time to time, sit close to the one you love, hold his or her hand, and ask, "Darling, do I understand you enough? Or am I making you suffer? Please tell me so that I can learn to love you properly. I don't want to make you suffer, and if I do so because of my ignorance, please tell me so that I can love you better, so that you can be happy." If you say this in a voice that communicates your real openness to understand, the other person may cry.

That is a good sign, because it means the door of understanding is opening and everything will be possible again.

Maybe a father does not have time or is not brave enough to ask his son such a question. Then the love between them will not be as full as it could be. We need courage to ask these questions, but if we don't ask, the more we love, the more we may destroy the people we are trying to love. True love needs understanding. With understanding, the one we love will certainly flower.

PART THREE

Peace is Every Step

Interbeing; Flowers and Garbage; Love in Action; Not Two; Healing the Wounds of War; The Sun My Heart; Looking Deeply; The Art of Mindful Living; Nourishing Awareness; A Love Letter to Your Congressman; Citizenship; Ecology of Mind; The Roots of War; Like a Leaf, We Have Many Stems; We Are All Linked to Each Other; Reconciliation; Call Me By My True Names; Suffering Nourishes Compassion; The River; Entering the Twenty-First Century



Interbeing

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper *inter-are*. "Interbeing" is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix "inter-" with the verb "to be," we have a new verb, inter-be.

If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. Without sunshine, the forest cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow without sunshine. And so, we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine inter-are. And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see wheat. We know that the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. The logger's father and mother are in it too. When we look in this way, we see that without all of these things, this sheet of paper cannot exist.

Looking even more deeply, we can see ourselves in this sheet of paper too. This is not difficult to see, because when we look at a sheet of paper, it is part of our perception. Your mind is in here and mine is also. So we can say that everything is in here with this sheet of paper. We cannot point out one thing that is not here time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat. Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper. That is why I think the word inter-be should be in the dictionary. "To be" is to inter-be. We cannot *just be* by ourselves alone. We have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because everything else is.

Suppose we try to return one of the elements to its source. Suppose we return the sunshine to the sun. Do you think that this sheet of paper will be possible? No, without sunshine nothing can be. And if we return the logger to his mother, then we have no sheet of paper either. The fact is that this sheet of paper is made up only of "non-paper" elements. And if we return these non-paper elements to their sources, then there can be no paper at all. Without non-paper elements, like mind, logger, sunshine and so on, there will be no paper. As thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe in it.



Flowers and Garbage

Defiled or immaculate. Dirty or pure. These are concepts we form in our mind. A beautiful rose we have just cut and placed in our vase is pure. It smells so good, so fresh. A garbage can is the opposite. It smells horrible, and it is filled with rotten things.

But that is only when we look on the surface. If we look more deeply we will see that in just five or six days, the rose will become part of the garbage. We do not need to wait five days to see it. If we just look at the rose, and we look deeply, we can see it now. And if we look into the garbage can, we see that in a few months its contents can be transformed into lovely vegetables, and even a rose. If you are a good organic gardener, looking at a rose you can see the garbage, and looking at the garbage you can see a rose. Roses and garbage inter-are. Without a rose, we cannot have garbage; and without garbage, we cannot have a rose. They need each other very much. The rose and the garbage are equal. The garbage is just as precious as the rose. If we look deeply at the concepts of defilement and immaculateness, we return to the notion of interbeing.

In the city of Manila there are many young prostitutes; some are only fourteen or fifteen years old. They are very unhappy. They did not want to be prostitutes, but their families are poor and these young girls went to the city to look for some kind of job, like street vendor, to make money to send back to their families. Of course this is true not only in Manila, but in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, in New York City, and in Paris also. After only a few weeks in the city, a vulnerable girl can be persuaded by a clever person to work for him and earn perhaps one hundred times more money than she could as a street vendor. Because she is so young and does not know much about life, she accepts and becomes a prostitute. Since that time, she has carried the feeling of being impure, defiled, and this causes her great suffering. When she looks at other young girls, dressed beautifully, belonging to good families, a wretched feeling wells up in her, a feeling of defilement that becomes her hell.

But if she could look deeply at herself and at the whole situation, she would see that she is the way she is because other people are the way they are. How can a "good girl," belonging to a good family, be proud? Because the "good family's" way of life is the way it is, the prostitute has to live as a prostitute. No one among us has clean hands. No one of us can claim that it is not our responsibility. The girl in Manila is that way because of the way we are. Looking into the life of that young prostitute, we see the lives of all the "non-prostitutes." And looking at the nonprostitutes and the way we live our lives, we see the prostitute. Each thing helps to create the other.

Let us look at wealth and poverty. **The affluent society and the deprived society inter-are.** The wealth of one society is made of the poverty of the other. "This is like this, because that is like that." Wealth is made of non-wealth elements, and poverty is made by non-poverty elements. It is exactly the same as with the sheet of paper. So we must be careful not to imprison ourselves in concepts. The truth is that everything contains everything else. We cannot just be, we can only inter-be. We are responsible for everything that happens around us.

Only by seeing with the eyes of interbeing can that young girl be freed from her suffering. Only then will she understand that she is bearing the burden of the whole world. What else can we offer her? Looking deeply into ourselves, we see her, and we will share her pain and the pain of the whole world. Then we can begin to be of real help.



Waging Peace

If the Earth were your body, you would be able to feel the many areas where it is suffering. War, political and economic oppression, famine, and pollution wreak havoc in so many places. Every day, children are becoming blind from malnutrition, their hands searching hopelessly through mounds of trash for a few ounces of food. Adults are dying slowly in prisons for trying to oppose violence. Rivers are dying, and the air is becoming more and more difficult to breathe. Although the two great superpowers are becoming a little more friendly, they still have enough nuclear weapons to destroy the Earth dozens of times.

Many people are aware of the world's suffering; their hearts are filled with compassion. They know what needs to be done, and they engage in political, social, and environmental work to try to change things. But after a period of intense involvement, they may become discouraged if they lack the strength needed to sustain a life of action. Real strength is not in power, money, or weapons, but in deep, inner peace.

Practicing mindfulness in each moment of our daily lives, we can cultivate our own peace. With clarity, determination, and patience-the fruits of meditation-we can sustain a life of action and be real instruments of peace. I have seen this peace in people of various religious and cultural backgrounds who spend their time and energy protecting the weak, struggling for social justice, lessening the disparity between rich and poor, stopping the arms race, fighting against discrimination, and watering the trees of love and understanding throughout the world.



Love In Action

During our journey together, I have presented a number of practices to help us maintain mindfulness of what is going on inside us and immediately around us. Now, as we make our way through the wider world, some additional guidelines can help us and protect us. Several members of our community have been practicing the following principles, and I think you may also find them useful in making choices as to how to live in our contemporary world. These are the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

The First Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

The Second Mindfulness Training

Aware of suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants and minerals. I will practise generosity by sharing my time, energy and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

The Third Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticise or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family and my society by practising mindful eating, drinking and consuming. I will ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being and joy in my body, in my consciousness and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programmes, magazines, books, films and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger and confusion in myself and in society by practising a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.