

Awakening Valley Sangha

A mindfulness community
practicing in the Plum Village tradition
of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh



WELCOME TO AWAKENING VALLEY SANGHA

Our mindfulness community (“sangha”) practices living with peace, freedom, and joy. To be mindful is to be truly alive; it is to touch life deeply in each moment. Practicing mindfulness in community reminds us that our lives are inseparably connected. We come to understand that the happiness of those around us is not separate from our own happiness.

If you are joining us for the first time, we hope you will feel at ease. One need not identify as Buddhist to enjoy these practices or to benefit from the peace and harmony they engender. Whatever has brought you here today, may you feel welcome. May you find refuge.

A lotus for you, a Buddha-to-be!

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SANGHA PRACTICE SESSION

BELL MASTER The Dharma body is bringing morning light.
In concentration our hearts are at peace, a half-smile is born upon our lips.
This is a new day. We vow to go through it in mindfulness.
The sun of wisdom has now risen, shining in every direction.
Noble Sangha, diligently bring your mind into meditation.

Namo Shakyamunaye Buddhaya / **Namo Shakyamunaye Buddhaya** (x3)

[BELL + BELL + BELL]

FACILITATOR WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

SANGHA SINGING / RECITATION

[BELL]

SANGHA **Listening to the bell, I feel my afflictions begin to dissolve.
My mind is calm, my body relaxed. A smile is born on my lips.
Following the bell's sound, my breathing guides me back
to the safe island of mindfulness.
In the garden of my heart, the flower of peace blooms beautifully.**

GUIDE TWENTY-MINUTE MEDITATION

[BELL + BELL]

SANGHA SILENT BREAK (Enjoying tea, stretching, or walking meditation)

[BELL]

SANGHA **The Dharma is deep and lovely.
We now have a chance to see, study, and practice it.
We vow to realize its true meaning.**

[BELL]

FACILITATOR DHARMA SHARING & DISCUSSION

SANGHA **May the sound of this bell penetrate deeply into the cosmos,
so that beings, even in those dark places, may hear it
and be free from birth and death.
May all beings realize awakening and find their way home.
Namo Shakyamunaye Buddhaya**

[BELL]

SANGHA (Standing, palms joined) **A Lotus for you...**
(Bowing to Sangha) **...a Buddha-to-be!**

(Turning outward) **A Lotus for you...**
(Bowing out to all beings) **...a Buddha-to-be!**

PRACTICE SONGS

1. BREATHING IN, BREATHING OUT

Breathing in, breathing out,
Breathing in, breathing out.
I am blooming as a flower,
I am fresh as the dew,
I am solid as a mountain,
I am firm as the earth.
I am free.

Breathing in, breathing out,
Breathing in, breathing out.
I am water reflecting
what is real, what is true.
And I feel there is space
deep inside of me.
I am free, I am free, I am free.

2. THE ISLAND WITHIN

Breathing in, I go back
to the island within myself,
There are beautiful trees within the island.
There are clear streams of water,
There are birds, sunshine, and fresh air,
Breathing out, I feel safe,
I enjoy going back to my island.



3. HAPPINESS IS HERE AND NOW

Happiness is here and now.
I have dropped my worries.
Nothing to do. Nowhere to go.
There's no need for hurry.

Happiness is here and now.
I have dropped my worries.
Something to do. Somewhere to go.
But, there's no need for hurry.

4. PLEASE CALL ME BY MY TRUE NAMES

My joy is like spring, so warm
it makes flowers bloom all over the earth.
My pain is like a river of tears,
so vast it fills the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and laughter at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.
Please call me by my true names,
so that I can wake up,
and the door of my heart can be left open.

5. AND WHEN I RISE

And when I rise, let me rise
like a bird, joyfully.
And when I fall, let me fall
like a leaf, gracefully, without regrets.
And when I stand, let me stand,
like a tree, strong and tall.
And when I lie, let me lie,
like a lake, peacefully, calm and still.
And when I work, let me work,
like a bee, wholeheartedly.
And when I play, let me play, like a breeze,
refreshingly, light and clear.

RECITATIONS

The Sangha is invited to come back to our breathing, so that our collective energy of mindfulness will bring us together as an organism, going as a river, with no more separation. Let the whole Sangha breathe as one body, chant as one body, and listen as one body—transcending the frontiers of a delusive self.

INCENSE OFFERING

In gratitude, we offer this incense
throughout space and time
to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
May it be fragrant as Earth herself,
reflecting careful efforts,
wholehearted awareness,
and the fruit of understanding,
slowly ripening.
May we and all beings
be companions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
May we awaken from forgetfulness
and realize our true home.

METTA MEDITATION

May all beings be peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit.
May all beings be safe and free of harm.
May all beings be free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety.

May we learn to look at ourselves with eyes of understanding and love.
May we learn to recognize and touch the seeds of joy and happiness in ourselves.
May we learn to see the sources of anger, craving, and delusion in ourselves.

May we all know how to nourish the seeds of joy in ourselves every day.
May we all be free of attachment and aversion, but not be indifferent.
May we be able to live fresh, solid, and free.

AWAKENING THE SOURCE OF LOVE

We bow respectfully to Avalokiteshvara,
to your great vow always to be there for all beings,
your capacity to look deeply at the world with compassionate eyes,
and to listen deeply to understand and to relieve suffering,
and with your holy willow branch,
to sprinkle the nectar of immortality,
cleansing our mind from all impurities.
We vow to take refuge in you with all my heart.
We vow to build brotherhood and sisterhood.
We vow to practice loving speech.
We vow to look with loving eyes.
We vow to practice deep listening.

Namo Avalokiteshvara,
Please come with us to the war zones to stop
the killing and bombing.
Please walk with us to the places of sickness and suffering,
bringing compassionate nectar and medicine.
Please walk with us to the realm of the hungry ghosts,
bringing the Dharma food of understanding and love.
Please walk with us to the realm of hell
in order to cool the heat of afflictions.
Please walk with us to places of conflict
in order to remove hatred and anger
and help the source of love to flow again.

Homage to the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion
Homage to the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion
Homage to the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion



HYMN TO AVALOKITESHVARA

Namo 'valo ki-tesh va-ra a—ya
Namo 'valo ki-tesh va-ra a—ya
Namo 'valo ki-tesh va-ra a—ya

THE FIVE REMEMBRANCES

I am of the nature to grow old.
There is no way to escape growing old.

I am of the nature to have ill health.
There is no way to escape ill health.

I am of the nature to die.
There is no way to escape death.

All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change.
There is no way to escape being separated from them.

My actions are my only true belongings.
I cannot escape the consequences of my actions.
My actions are the ground upon which I stand.

THE THREE REFUGES

I take refuge in the Buddha,
the one who shows me the way in this life.
I take refuge in the Dharma,
the way of understanding and of love.
I take refuge in the Sangha,
the community that lives in harmony and awareness.

Dwelling in the refuge of Buddha,
I clearly see the path of light and beauty in the world.
Dwelling in the refuge of Dharma,
I learn to open many doors on the path of transformation.
Dwelling in the refuge of Sangha,
shining light that supports me, keeping my practice free of obstruction.

Taking refuge in the Buddha in myself,
I aspire to help all people recognize their own awakened nature,
realizing the Mind of Love.
Taking refuge in the Dharma in myself,
I aspire to help all people fully master the ways of practice
and walk together on the path of liberation.
Taking refuge in the Sangha in myself,
I aspire to help all people build Fourfold Communities,
to embrace all beings and support their transformation.

VERSES OF CONSECRATION

This water's shape is round or square
according to the container that holds it.
In the spring warmth, it is liquid; in the winter cold, it is solid.
When its path is open, it flows.
When its path is obstructed, it stands still.
How vast it is, yet its source is so small it is difficult to find.
How wonderful it is in its streams, which flow endlessly.
In the jade rivulets, the body of the dragon king remains.
In the deep pond, water holds the bright halo of the autumn moon.
On the tip of the king's pen, water becomes
the compassion of clemency.
On the willow branch, it becomes
the clear fresh balm of compassion.
Only one drop of the water of compassion is needed,
and the Ten Directions are all purified.

MEDITATION BEFORE A SANGHA MEETING

We vow to go through this meeting in the spirit of togetherness as we review all ideas and consolidate them into a harmonious understanding. We vow to use the methods of loving speech and deep listening in order to bring about the success of this meeting, as an offering to the Three Jewels. We vow not to hesitate to share our ideas and insights but also vow not to say anything when the feeling of irritation is present in us. We are resolute and determined not to allow tension to build up in this meeting. If any one of us senses the start of tension, we will stop immediately and practice Beginning Anew right away, so as to re-establish the atmosphere of togetherness and harmony in the Sangha.

SHARING THE MERIT

Reciting the trainings, practicing the way of awareness
gives rise to benefits without limit.
We vow to share the fruits with all beings.
We vow to offer parents, teachers, friends, and numerous beings
who give guidance and support along the path.

DISCOURSE ON LOVE

“Metta Sutta”

He or she who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech. He or she will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones.

(And this is what he or she contemplates:)

“May everyone be happy and safe, and may all hearts be filled with joy.

“May all beings live in security and in peace — beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, invisible or visible, near or faraway, already born, or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility.

“Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

“Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. Let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. Our love will know no obstacles. Our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

“Free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing Perfect Understanding, those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death.”

Etena sacca vajjena sotthi te hotu sabbada.

Etena sacca vajjena sotthi te hotu sabbada.

Etena sacca vajjena sotthi te hotu sabbada.

(By the firm determination of this truth, may you ever be well.)

Sutta Nipata 1.8

THE HEART SUTRA

“THE INSIGHT THAT BRINGS US TO THE OTHER SHORE”

Avalokiteshvara
while practicing deeply with
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore,
suddenly discovered that
all of the five Skandhas are equally empty,
and with this realization
he overcame all Ill-being.

Listen Sariputra,
this Body itself is Emptiness
and Emptiness itself is this Body.
This Body is not other than Emptiness
and Emptiness is not other than this Body.
The same is true of Feelings,
Perceptions, Mental Formations,
and Consciousness.

Listen Sariputra,
all phenomena bear the mark of Emptiness;
their true nature is the nature of
no Birth no Death,
no Being no Non-being,
no Defilement no Purity,
no Increasing no Decreasing.

That is why in Emptiness,
Body, Feelings, Perceptions,
Mental Formations and Consciousness
are not separate self-entities.

The Eighteen Realms of Phenomena
which are the six Sense Organs,
the six Sense Objects,
and the six Consciousnesses
are also not separate self-entities.

The Twelve Links of Interdependent Arising
and their Extinction
are also not separate self-entities.

Ill-being, the Causes of Ill-being,
the End of Ill-being, the Path,
insight and attainment,
are also not separate self-entities.

Whoever can see this
no longer needs anything to attain.

Bodhisattvas who practice
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore
see no more obstacles in their mind,
and because there
are no more obstacles in their mind,
they can overcome all fear,
destroy all wrong perceptions
and realize Perfect Nirvana.

All Buddhas in the past, present and future
by practicing
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore
are all capable of attaining
Authentic and Perfect Enlightenment.

Therefore Sariputra,
it should be known that
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore
is a Great Mantra,
the most illuminating mantra,
the highest mantra,
a mantra beyond compare,
the True Wisdom that has the power
to put an end to all kinds of suffering.
Therefore let us proclaim
a mantra to praise
the Insight that Brings Us to the Other Shore:

Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha!
Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha!
Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha!

FIVE MINDFULNESS TRAININGS

Dear Sangha, the Five Mindfulness Trainings represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love, leading to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world. To practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of interbeing, or Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair. If we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are already on the path of a bodhisattva. Knowing we are on that path, we are not lost in confusion about our life in the present or in fears about the future.

Please listen to each mindfulness training with a serene mind. Breathe mindfully and answer "yes" silently every time you see that you have made an effort to study, practice, and observe it.

THE FIRST MINDFULNESS TRAINING: Reverence For Life

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and 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, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.

This is the first of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Have you made an effort to study, practice, and observe it?

[BELL]

THE SECOND MINDFULNESS TRAINING: True Happiness

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after wealth, fame, power and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming.

This is the second of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Have you made an effort to study, practice, and observe it?

[BELL]

THE THIRD MINDFULNESS TRAINING: True Love

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. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. 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. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness – which are the four basic elements of true love – for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

This is the third of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Have you made an effort to study, practice, and observe it?

[BELL]

THE FOURTH MINDFULNESS TRAINING: Loving Speech & Deep Listening

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

This is the fourth of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Have you made an effort to study, practice, and observe it?

[BELL]

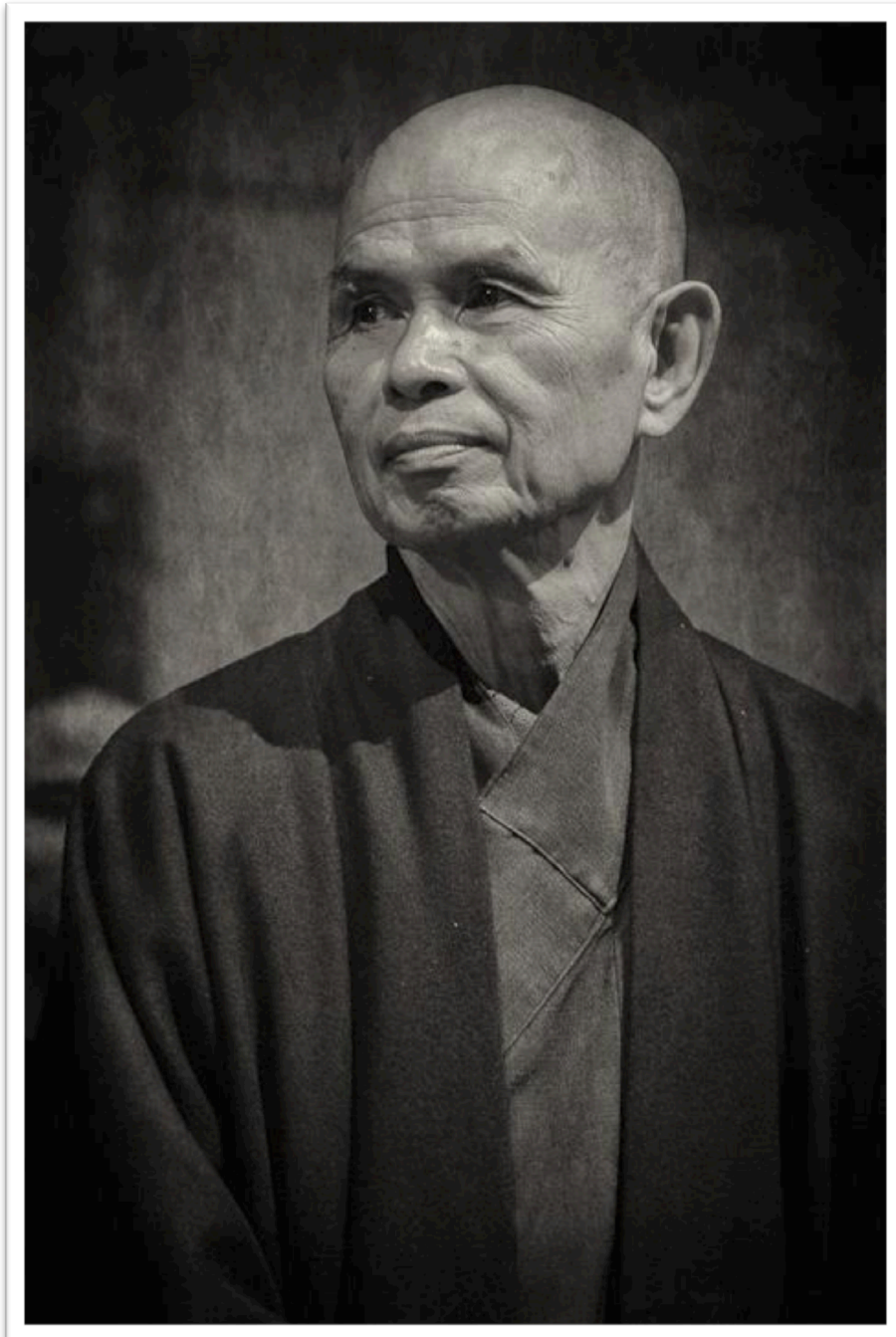
THE FIFTH MINDFULNESS TRAINING: Nourishment and Healing

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 practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriment, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the

refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth.

This is the fifth of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Have you made an effort to study, practice, and observe it?

[BELL]



MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

Mindfulness is the energy of being aware and awake to the present moment. It is the continuous practice of touching life deeply in every moment of daily life. To be mindful is to be truly alive, present and at one with those around you and with what you are doing. We bring our body and mind into harmony while we wash the dishes, drive the car or take our morning shower.

In practicing together as a Sangha, as a community, our practice of mindfulness becomes more joyful, relaxed and steady. We are bells of mindfulness for each other, supporting and reminding each other along the path of practice. With the support of the community, we can practice to cultivate peace and joy within and around us, as a gift for all of those whom we love and care for. We can cultivate our solidity and freedom – solid in our deepest aspiration and free from our fears, misunderstandings and our suffering.

We describe below several foundational mindfulness practices in the Thich Nhat Hanh/Plum Village tradition, and encourage ease for newcomers and long-time practitioners alike as we continue to explore these practices.

SITTING MEDITATION

Sitting meditation is very healing. We realize we can just be with whatever is within us—our pain, anger, and irritation, or our joy, love, and peace. We are with whatever is there without being carried away by it. Let it come, let it stay, then let it go. No need to push, to oppress, or to pretend our thoughts are not there. Observe the thoughts and images of our mind with an accepting and loving eye. Stopping is the first important step when we sit down. When our body has stopped moving, it gives our mind a chance to calm down too. Then we can be free to be still and calm despite the storms that might arise in us.

- Take your seat on a cushion, bench, or chair. Achieve a stable position by maintaining three points of contact.
- Sit uprightly, with dignity and ease.
- Relax your shoulders and arms. Allow your hands to rest in your lap, on your thighs, or formed in a favorite mudra.
- Close your eyes gently, or, if you are sleepy, leave them half-open and soften your gaze.
- If you become uncomfortable or experience pain during your sitting, compassionately and quietly adjust your position.
- Simply become aware of the *sensations* of breathing—the rise and fall of your abdomen or chest; the in-breath and out-breath passing through your nostrils—and allow your awareness to stay anchored in those sensations.
- As thoughts and emotions arise, simply acknowledge them without judgment and then return to your breathing.

BREATHING MEDITATION

Our breathing is a stable solid ground that we can take refuge in. Regardless of our internal weather – our thoughts, emotions and perceptions – our breathing is always with us like a faithful friend. Whenever we feel carried away, or sunken in a deep emotion, or scattered in worries and projects, we return to our breathing to collect and anchor our mind. Mindful breathing helps us go back to the island of self. We feel the flow of air coming in and going out of our nose. We feel how light and natural, how calm and peaceful our breathing functions. At any time, while we are walking, gardening, or typing, we can return to this peaceful source of life.

We may like to recite:

Breathing in “I know that I am breathing in”

Breathing out “I know that I am breathing out”

We do not need to control our breath. Feel the breath as it actually is. It may be long or short, deep or shallow. With our awareness, it will naturally become slower and deeper. Conscious breathing is the key to uniting body and mind and bringing the energy of mindfulness into each moment of our life.



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.

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

(in) I have arrived	(out) I am home
(in) In the here	(out) In the now
(in) I am solid	(out) I am free
(in) In the ultimate	(out) I dwell

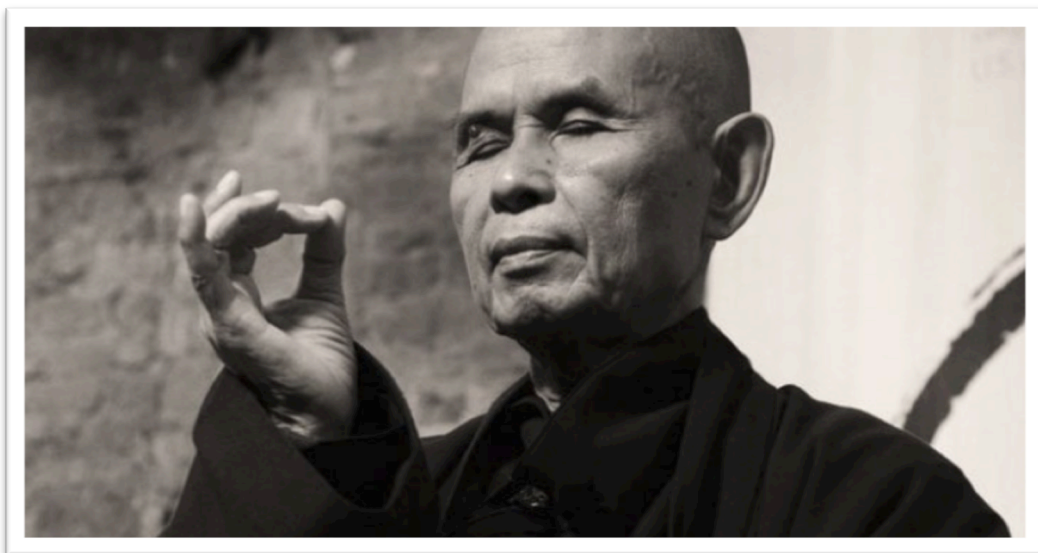
EATING MEDITATION

Eating a meal together is a meditative practice. We should try to offer our presence for every meal. Serving food to ourselves, we can already begin practicing. We realize that many elements, such as the rain, sunshine, earth, air, and love, have come together to form this wonderful meal. In fact, through this food we see that the entire universe is supporting our existence.

We are aware of the whole sangha as we serve ourselves, and we should take an amount of food that is good for us. At lunchtime, the bell will be invited before we eat, and we can enjoy breathing in and out while practicing the five contemplations:

THE FIVE CONTEMPLATIONS

1. This food is a gift of the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work.
2. May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive this food.
3. May we recognize and transform unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed and learn to eat with moderation
4. May we keep our compassion alive by eating in such a way that reduces the suffering of living beings, stops contributing to climate change, and heals and preserves our precious planet.
5. We accept this food so that we may nurture our brotherhood and sisterhood, build our sangha, and nourish our ideal of serving all living beings.



DHARMA SHARING

Many of our events include time for Dharma Sharing. Often a person may give a brief talk or reflection on a given topic, after which the Sangha is invited to share our experiences in relation to that topic or to share more generally from our lives, practices, questions, struggles and insights.

We invite all present to use the following guidelines during Dharma Sharing, as modeled in the Thich Nhat Hanh tradition:

1. When we want to share, we bow into the group. We are recognized by the group with a bow, share what we have to share, and then bow out. We will not be interrupted while speaking. This method of sharing may seem unfamiliar at first and, indeed, it is not a common way of conversing in our society. However, this practice allows us to slow down and pause, to speak and listen mindfully.
2. We want to be aware of allowing a bit of a pause between people sharing. We may want to enjoy three breaths before the next person speaks.
3. We speak from our hearts and from our experiences. We avoid giving advice or corrections. We listen with our hearts, giving the Sangha the gift of full presence and attention. Dharma Sharing is an opportunity to practice the Fourth Mindfulness Training: Deep Listening and Loving Speech.
4. We are mindful of the length of our sharing, recognizing that others may wish to share. We learn to trust that what *needs* to be said *will* be said. We may want to refrain from speaking a second time until everyone has had an opportunity to share.
5. We avoid “cross talk” or responding directly to another person. Instead we stay grounded in our own experiences. This is another way that Dharma Sharing differs from a typical group discussion or exchange of ideas. If we ask a question, it will likely not be directly answered. However, by listening carefully to the collective wisdom of the Sangha, practical answers, inspiration, and insights can arise. (Long-time Sangha members welcome any questions about the practice, the Sangha or Thich Nhat Hanh’s tradition after our meeting ends.)
6. We honor each other’s experiences as confidential during Dharma Sharing. After the gathering, we refrain from speaking to a person about what they said in the group without asking for their permission first. Sometimes a person wants to share an experience in the circle but does not want to talk more about it at a later time.

RECITING GATHAS

Gathas (GAH-tuhs) are short verses that help us practice mindfulness in our daily activities. A gatha can open and deepen our experience of simple acts which we often take for granted. When we focus our mind on a gatha, we return to ourselves and become more aware of each action. When the gatha ends, we continue our activity with heightened awareness.

WAKING UP

Waking up this morning I smile
24 brand new hours are before me.
I vow to live fully in each moment
and to look at all beings with eyes of compassion.

LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

Awareness is a mirror
reflecting the four elements.
Beauty is a heart that generates love
and a mind that is open.

TURNING ON THE TAP

Water comes from high mountain sources.
Water runs deep in the Earth.
Miraculously water comes to us and sustains all life.
My gratitude is filled to the brim.

BRUSHING YOUR TEETH

Brushing my teeth and rinsing my mouth,
I vow to speak purely and lovingly.
When my mouth is fragrant with right speech,
a flower blooms in the garden of my heart.

DRINKING TEA

This cup of tea in my two hands,
mindfulness held perfectly.
My mind and body dwell
in the very here and now.

SITTING DOWN

Sitting here is like sitting under the Bodhi tree.
My body is mindfulness itself—
calm and at ease,
free from all distraction.

BELL OF MINDFULNESS

Listen, listen,
this wonderful sound
brings me back to my true home.

WALKING MEDITATION #1

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

WALKING MEDITATION #2

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.

EXPERIENCING EMOTIONS

Feelings come and go
like clouds in a windy sky.
Conscious breathing
is my anchor.

TURNING ON THE LIGHT

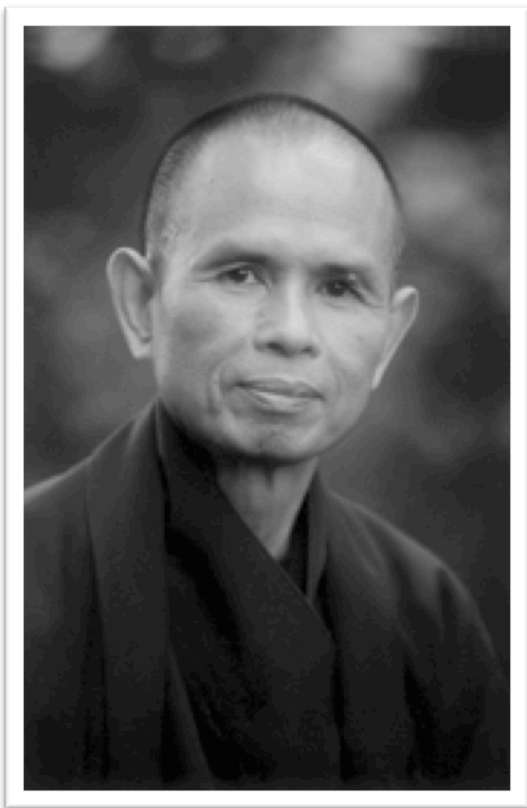
Forgetfulness is the darkness;
Mindfulness is the light
I bring awareness
to shine upon all life.

GOOD NIGHT GATHA

Breathing in, I let go of my worries, my tensions.
Breathing out, I touch Peace

THICH NHAT HANH

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced “Tick-Knot-Hawn”) is a global spiritual leader, poet, and peace activist, revered throughout the world for his teachings on mindfulness. Thich Nhat Hanh’s key teaching is that through mindfulness, we can learn to live happily in the present moment—the only way to truly develop peace, both in one’s self and in the world.



When war came to Vietnam, monks and nuns were confronted with the question of whether to adhere to the contemplative life and stay meditating in the monasteries, or to help those around them suffering under the bombings and turmoil of war. Thich Nhat Hanh was one of those who chose to do both, and in doing so founded the Engaged Buddhism movement. His life has since been dedicated to the work of inner transformation for the benefit of individuals and society. Martin Luther King, Jr., nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967.

Thich Nhat Hanh has published over 100 titles on meditation, mindfulness, and Engaged Buddhism, as well as poems, children’s stories, and commentaries on ancient Buddhist texts. His most influential titles include: *The Miracle of Mindfulness*; *Living Buddha, Living Christ*; *No Mud, No Lotus*; *Peace is Every Step*; *Old Path, White Clouds*, and *You Are Here: Discovering the Magic of the Present Moment*.

Thay has helped millions of people discover a path towards peace. Thay’s teachings are known for their clarity, penetrating insight, and their engagement with the challenges of our time. To his students he is affectionately known as Thay (pronounced “Tie”), which is Vietnamese for “teacher.”

On 11 November 2014, a month after his 88th birthday, and following several months of rapidly declining health, Thich Nhat Hanh suffered a severe stroke. In 2018 he returned to Tu Hieu Temple in Hue, Vietnam with the intention to live out his days in the monastery where he first ordained. Although he is still unable to speak, and is mostly paralyzed on the right side, Thich Nhat Hanh continues to offer his peaceful, serene and valiant presence to his community, participating in walking meditations, mindful meals, sitting meditations, celebrations and ceremonies as far as his health allows.

(Excerpted from ThichNhatHanhFoundation.org and PlumVillage.org)

WHO WAS THE BUDDHA?

by Barbara O'Brien

"Buddha" means "one who is awake." The Buddha who lived 2,600 years ago was not a god. He was an ordinary person, named Siddhartha Gautama, whose profound insights inspired the world.

The traditional story begins with Siddhartha Gautama's birth in about 567 BCE. He was the son of a king, raised in sheltered opulence. He married and had a son. Prince Siddhartha was twenty-nine years old when his life changed. In carriage rides outside his palaces he first saw a sick person, then an old man, then a corpse. This shook him to the core of his being; he realized that his privileged status would not protect him from sickness, old age, and death. When he saw a spiritual seeker — a mendicant "holy man" — the urge to seek peace of mind arose in him.

The prince renounced his worldly life and began a spiritual quest. He sought teachers and punished his body with ascetic practices such as extreme, prolonged fasts. Eventually, he realized that the path to peace was through mental discipline. At Bodh Gaya, in the modern Indian state of Bihar, he sat in meditation beneath a ficus tree, "the Bodhi tree," until he awakened, or realized enlightenment. From that time on, he would be known as the Buddha.

He spent the rest of his life teaching people how to realize enlightenment for themselves. He gave his first sermon in modern-day Sarnath, near Benares, and then walked from village to village, attracting disciples along the way. He founded the original order of Buddhist nuns and monks, many of whom became great teachers also. He died in northern India, about 483 BCE.

DO BUDDHISTS WORSHIP BUDDHA?

The Buddha was not a god. You might think of worship if you see Buddhists bowing to Buddha statues, but there's something else going on. In some schools of Buddhism, bowing and making offerings are physical expressions of the dropping away of a selfish, ego-centered life and a commitment to practice the Buddha's teachings.

WHAT DID THE BUDDHA TEACH?

When the Buddha achieved enlightenment, he also realized something else: that what he'd perceived was so far outside ordinary experience that it couldn't entirely be explained. So, instead of teaching people what to believe, he taught them to realize enlightenment for themselves.

The foundational teaching of Buddhism is the Four Noble Truths. Very briefly, the First Truth tells us that life is *dukkha*, a word often translated as "suffering," but it can also mean "stressful" and "unable to satisfy."

The Second Truth tells us *dukkha* has a cause. The immediate cause is craving, and the craving comes from not understanding reality and not knowing ourselves. Because we misunderstand ourselves we are riddled with anxiety and frustration. We experience life in a narrow, self-centered

way, going through life craving things we think will make us happy. But we find satisfaction only briefly, and then the anxiety and craving start again.

The Third Truth tells us we can know the cause of *dukkha* and be liberated from the hamster wheel of stress and craving. Merely adopting Buddhist beliefs will not accomplish this, however. Liberation depends on one's own insight into the source of *dukkha*. Craving will not cease until you realize for yourself what's causing it.

The Fourth Truth tells us that insight comes through practicing the Noble Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path might be explained as an outline of eight areas of practice — including meditation, mindfulness, and living an ethical life that benefits others — that will help us live happier lives and find the wisdom of enlightenment.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?

People imagine that to be enlightened is to be blissed out all the time, but that's not the case. And achieving enlightenment doesn't necessarily happen all at once. Very simply, enlightenment is defined as thoroughly perceiving the true nature of reality, and of ourselves.

Enlightenment is also described as perceiving buddha-nature, or the fundamental nature of all beings. One way to understand this is to say that the enlightenment of the Buddha is always present, whether we are aware of it or not. Enlightenment, then, is not a quality that some people have and others don't. To realize enlightenment is to realize what already is. It's just that most of us are lost in a fog and can't see it.

IS THERE A BUDDHIST BIBLE?

Not exactly. For one thing, the several schools of Buddhism do not all use the same canon of scriptures. A text esteemed by one school may be unknown in another. Further, Buddhist scriptures are not considered to be the revealed words of a god that must be accepted without question. The Buddha taught us to accept no teaching on authority alone, but to investigate it for ourselves. The many sutras and other texts are there to guide us, not to indoctrinate us.

The important point is that Buddhism is not something you believe, but something you do. It's a path of both personal discipline and personal discovery. People have walked this path for 25 centuries, and by now there are plenty of directions, signposts and markers. And there are mentors and teachers for guidance, as well as many beautiful scriptures.

(Published on *Lion's Roar* website, May 29, 2018)

ABOUT OUR SANGHA

Awakening Valley Sangha formed in 2016 to offer Utah County a mindfulness community in the Plum Village tradition of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. Coming together each week to meditate and to share our experience of living mindfully deepens our practice in ways that cannot be experienced in isolation. We understand that our happiness is not separate from the happiness of those around us. Practicing together in a Sangha is helping us realize the truth of our interconnectedness. Our teacher reminds us:



"Without a community or sangha, we cannot go far. The sangha is our body and we are like the cells of the same organism. When we walk, we walk as one. When we sit, we sit as one. We practice collectively and move forward on our spiritual path as one body of water."

Awakening Valley Sangha exists so we can help one another. Thank you for the many ways your *dana*, or generosity, expresses itself: bringing a box of your favorite tea, opening your heart during Dharma Sharing, offering rides and smiles and encouraging words, bringing in fresh flowers to beautify our altar, and especially for radiating a heart overflowing with loving-kindness.

Financial donations help us pay the rent for our beautiful space, for website hosting, bringing in Dharma teachers to lead retreats, and for other Sangha activities. Our Awakening Valley Sangha has no paid members and is volunteer led. If you would like to contribute, scan the QR code below to be taken to our secure donation platform.



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For more information, or to subscribe to our weekly newsletter, please visit us at

AWAKENINGVALLEYSANGHA.ORG