



THE LOTUS BUD

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The moment is perfect

By *Thich Nhat Hanh*

No matter what we experience when we're meditating, it only has meaning when we take it out into our daily lives. There is nothing we experience—from the simple act of eating to the complications of work and relationships—that we cannot approach with the mindfulness and compassion we develop in our meditation. 🧘

Take the time to eat an orange in mindfulness. If you eat an orange in forgetfulness, caught in your anxiety and sorrow, the orange is not really there. But if you bring your mind and body together to produce true presence, you can see that the orange is a miracle. Peel the orange. Smell the fruit. See the orange blossoms in the orange, and the rain and the sun that

have gone through the orange blossoms. The orange tree that has taken several months to bring this wonder to you. Put a section in your mouth, close your mouth mindfully, and with mindfulness feel the juice coming out of the orange. Taste the sweetness. Do you have the time to do so? If you think you don't have time to eat an orange like this, what are you using that time for? Are you using your time to worry or using your time to live?

Spiritual practice is not just sitting and meditating. Practice is looking, thinking, touching, drinking, eating, and talking. Every act, every breath, and every step can be practice and can help us to become more ourselves. 🧘

The quality of our practice depends on its energy of mindfulness and concentration. I define *mindfulness* as the practice of being fully present and



alive, body and mind united. Mindfulness is the energy that helps us to know what is going on in the present moment. I drink water and I know that I am drinking the water. Drinking the water is what is happening.

Mindfulness brings concentration. When we drink water mindfully, we concentrate on drinking. If we are concentrated, life is deep, and we have more joy and stability. We can drive mindfully, we can cut carrots mindfully, we can shower mindfully. When we do things this way, concentration grows. When concentration grows, we gain insight into our lives. The moment is perfect. 🧘

Extract from: The Moment is Perfect, Thich Nhat Hanh, Shambhala Sun, May 2008.

Entry into Zen

A Zen Master was walking in silence with one of his disciples along a mountain trail. When they came to an ancient cedar tree, they sat down for a simple meal of some rice and vegetables. After the meal, the disciple, a young monk who had not yet found the mystery of Zen, broke the silence by asking the Master, "Master, how do I enter Zen?"

The Master remained silent. Almost five minutes passed while the disciple anxiously waited for an answer. He was about to ask another question when the Master suddenly spoke. "Do you hear the sound of that mountain stream?"

The disciple had not been aware of any mountain stream. He had been too busy thinking about the meaning of Zen. Now, as he began to listen for the sound, his noisy mind subsided. At first he heard nothing. Then his thinking gave way to heightened alertness, and suddenly he did hear the hardly perceptible murmur of a small stream in the far distance.

"Yes, I can hear it now" he said

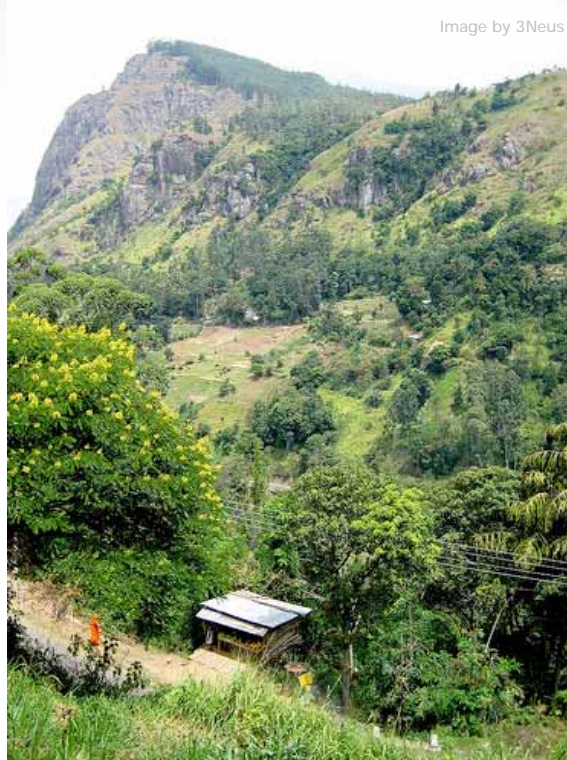
The Master raised his finger and, with a look in his eyes that in some way was both fierce and gentle, said "Enter Zen from there."

The disciple was stunned. It was his first flash of awakening. 🍵

They continued on their journey in silence. The disciple was amazed at the aliveness of the world around him. He experienced everything as if for the first time. Gradually, however, he started thinking again. The alert stillness became covered up again by mental noise, and before long he had another question.

"Master" he said, "I have been thinking. What would you have said if I hadn't been able to hear the mountain stream?" The Master stopped, looked at him, raised his finger and said, "Enter Zen from there"

So, what is Zen? Zen is not easily defined but here are two definitions. 🍵



The first definition is "A state of consciousness – alert stillness"

A second definition is portrayed in a story "A fish went to a queen fish and asked "I have always heard about the sea, but what is this sea? Where is it?" The queen fish explained "You live, move and have your being in the sea. The sea is within you and without you, and you are made of the sea, and you will end in the sea. The sea surrounds you as your own being."

What are the barriers to entry into Zen?

The greatest barrier to entry into Zen is identification with your mind – not being able to stop thinking. This incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness. Identification with mind creates an opaque veil of concepts, categories and judgments.

Remember the young monk. He could not hear the sound of the mountain stream because he was too busy thinking about how to enter Zen. The alert stillness arising from listening mindfully to the small stream in the far distance was covered up again by mental noise as the young monk dreamt up a new question that he introduces by saying "Master I have been thinking..." 🍵

So how can you enter Zen? The trick is to create gaps in the voice in your head. How can you do that? In fact we do it naturally a lot of the time.

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Start listening to the voice in your head as often as you can. Pay particular attention to any repetitive thought patterns. Be there as a witnessing presence. When you listen to that voice listen to it impartially. That is to say, do not judge. Try to be aware: there is the voice, and here I am listening to it now. Then try to be aware, who is the 'I' listening to the voice?

Watch out for your thoughts. Try this exercise. Close your eyes and say to yourself: "I wonder what the next thought is going to be?" Then be very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like the cat watching a mouse hole. What thought is going to come out of the mouse hole? Or be like a guard watching intently who is coming through a gate. 🍵

Well? You may have had to wait a long time before a thought entered your head.

In that state you are free of thought, but highly alert. Watching thought or listening to the voice in your head creates a gap in thought. The mental noise subsides. The instant your conscious attention sinks below a certain point, the mental noise returns.

Listening to silence can be a way to enter Zen. Paying very close attention to sounds and the silence from which they spring creates a gap in the mental noise, quietens the voice in our head. As the young monk in our story discovered, listening to the hardly perceptible murmur of the small stream in the far distance stills the mind, and creates a space in a noisy mind that throws up lots of questions. But listening to silence does so equally.



Being aware of the silence, the stillness and solidity of a tree is a gateway to Zen. There are millions of trees living in Sydney. Observe their stillness, their solidity and listen to their silence and enter Zen from there. 🍵

You can also create a gap in the mind stream simply by directing the focus of your attention into the Now. Just become intensely conscious of the present moment. In your **everyday life** you can practice this by taking any routine activity and giving it your fullest attention, so that it becomes an end in itself – and not just a means to an end. Walking to the shop to buy milk, pay close attention to every step, every moment, your breathing. Be totally

present. In this way you create a gap in the voice in your head in which you are highly alert but not thinking.

Make it your practice to withdraw attention from past and future whenever they are not needed. If you find this hard to do, observe the habitual tendency of the mind to want to escape from the Now. Notice how often your attention is in the past or future – or somewhere else. Don't judge or analyse. Just observe. The moment you realise you are not present, you are present. Be aware of the still, observing presence behind the content of your mind. 🍵

Rob Stevens

Join The Lotus Bud Online

Dear Sangha

We invite you to join the 'The Lotus Bud' online. We have set up a site where we can share together as a Sangha. It is a supplement to the monthly magazine, with the advantage of allowing members to directly post content. You can put up your poems and songs; you can share your experiences; you can pass around your photographs; you can ask questions and spread news. And anyone on the site can respond. This is a place where we can share our thoughts with each other. Indeed, the success of the site depends on it.

*to join go to:
<http://lotusharing.ning.com/>*

WHO WE ARE

The Communities of Mindful Living are inspired by the Buddhist teachings of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (pictured).



We aspire to live fully in each moment for the peace and happiness of ourselves and all beings. We meet regularly to observe the art of mindful living and to foster a supportive community of practitioners. 🍵

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Our main activities

Wednesday Mindfulness Meditation at Camperdown

We welcome all to come join us for meditation practice - We meet at 7:30 pm each Wednesday at the Buddhist Library, Church St, Camperdown, Sydney.

Mindfulness Days - monthly

Once a month we offer a day of mindful practice and contemplation. The day normally consists of chanting sitting meditation, outdoor walking meditation (If weather permits), a dharma talk and lunch.

How to contribute to *The Lotus Bud*

In person at the Wednesday night group

- By e-mail to: cbarker@uow.edu.au
 - By post to: Chris Barker, Faculty of Arts, Uni of Wollongong, 2500
- Contributions can be short or long but need to be under 600 words.

Reading bell

As you read this magazine you have an opportunity to go back to the present moment.

You will notice a bell: 🍵 throughout the magazine.

When you come to each bell, you may like to stop reading, clear your mind and return to your breath before continuing.

Coming events...

Mindfulness Day
Sunday, 13 September, 9:30am - 4pm
@ 49 Ferngrove Rd., Canley Heights
Please bring a plate to share

Public Meeting with Monks and Nuns
of Plum Village
Wed 30 September, 7:30pm
Buddhist Library, Church St,
Camperdown

Retreat with the Monks and Nuns
of Plum Village
From 8am Friday 2nd October to
4pm Monday 5th October 2009
Camp Coultts, Waterfall, NSW