



THE LOTUS BUD

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Dear Sangha,

The theme of this edition is Beginner's Mind. At heart this means looking at things anew, with a fresh mind. However many times you have looked before. You may see something new.

In that spirit we invite you to look again in the coming days at our practices of sitting, walking and eating mindfully. Maybe they seem 'old hat' to you these days. Maybe you say to yourself, 'Oh, I know how to do that; there is nothing new for me here'.

If so, perhaps it is time to look again, as if this was the first time, and re discover the miracle of mindfulness. 

Best wishes

The Lotus Buds team

Beginner's Mind

IN THE ZEN TRADITION, we often speak of the beginner's mind. The beginner's mind is something very beautiful. It is like our first love. It should be protected and nourished.

I was ordained as a novice at the age of sixteen. I loved living in the monastery. There wasn't much thinking, only a feeling that something there was very good and true. In the mind of the young person, something beautiful must be true at the same time, and something true must also be beautiful. You don't analyze; you just sense if something is beautiful and try following in that direction. You are falling in love with what is good. That kind of love is the beginner's mind.

The beginner's mind is like a young plant, and it needs good conditions in order to grow strong. If the conditions aren't supportive, then you lose your beginner's mind. That is a pity. To have supportive conditions doesn't mean that everything

must go well on the path of practice. You don't have to have everyone's encouragement. In fact, on every path of practice there are many obstacles to discourage you. Every time you overcome an obstacle, your beginner's mind gets stronger. So these obstacles are not really obstacles; they are there to help you get stronger. 

Every one of us has a beginner's mind. In each of us, there is that capacity to recognize what is good, what is beautiful, what is true. We should find any means,



every kind of occasion, every kind of opportunity, and every kind of factor that can help nourish our beginner's mind.

Our person is like a garden, filled with many flowering plants. But in the garden there are things other than flowers and plants. If we neglect the garden, it will be overrun with weeds, and our flowers will wither and die. 

Suppose you live with someone you appreciate very much. That person has goodness, talent, and kindness, and you feel very lucky to be able to live with such a person. You recognize him or her as someone wonderful. And yet sometimes you don't cherish her presence or his presence. Sometimes you say something rude or impatient. And sometimes you want to be alone, far away from this person. And yet deep inside you, you know that if that person died or went away, you would suffer tremendously. We all have that tendency to neglect and forget.

Every time I turn on the water tap, I practice mindfulness and I see that the water that flows through my fingers is a miracle. It has come from deep down in the earth or high in the mountains, and it has arrived in my bathroom. And because of mindfulness I know that there are areas on earth where water is very rare, and families have to travel three or five kilometers to get a bucket of water to bring home so they can cook and wash. Although part of us recognizes that the water is precious, another part of us tends to neglect that.



We call it forgetfulness, the opposite of mindfulness. Forgetfulness is the other side of ourselves. We have both mindfulness and forgetfulness at the same time. And sometimes forgetfulness gets the upper hand and you lose your happiness. You are capable of being grateful, and when you feel grateful, you're happy. But sometimes you just forget, you don't feel grateful anymore, and every time you don't feel grateful, you suffer. 

We all have that tendency to be ungrateful, just as we all have gratefulness within. We are made of these conflicts. We are made of flowers and compost at the same time, because we are a garden.

When we are learning something for the first time, before our mind is filled with preconceptions, we pay full attention. We are in our beginner's mind and we have our full mindfulness available. If we practice diligently and creatively, we can keep our practice fresh and our beginner's mind intact. 

Thich Nhat Hahn
Unified Buddhist Church. SHAMBHALA SUN
SEPTEMBER 2007

Living with Beginners Mind

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few.

Zen Master Shunryo Suzuki

Let's take a look at Beginner's Mind and see how they can transform our life:

1. Take one step at a time. When we go grocery shopping, our mind is on what we need to buy and where to shop. We're likely to skip over all the little experiences on the way: locking the front door, seeing the neighbour standing at the window, rain splattering on the windscreen, the noise of traffic, and so on. The same thing happens when we learn something new. We're always looking towards what we'll know or be able to do in the future, instead of focusing on the next step right now.

Tip: Take one step at a time without worrying about the journey. 

2. Fall down seven times, get up eight times. Yesterday a friend of mine brought her toddler to visit. The little girl, Stephanie, is just learning to walk. She would pull herself up, wobble along a few steps and then plop down on her bottom. She had a determined look on her face and got up again, over and over. When did we last learn something with such determination and such little obvious success?

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Tip: Celebrate falling down as well as getting up: it's all part of learning.

3. Use *Don't Know* mind. In martial arts, a *don't know* mind is the wisdom of the warrior. Because we can easily get it wrong by prejudging a situation. When faced with a big opponent or a big challenge, we might assume that we will lose out. And when faced with an opponent who seems smaller or weaker, or a challenge that seems surmountable, we might assume that we will be on top. In both scenarios our judgment might be wrong. *Don't know* means keeping an open mind and responding according to circumstances, not according to how we assume things will be.

Tip: Let go of knowing - that's real wisdom. 

4. Live without *shoulds*. I could write a whole book about how I *should* be, what I *should* have done and what I *should* be doing, couldn't you? The world seems to be full of experts on my life who like to tell me what I *should* be doing. Living with Beginner's Mind means letting go of *shoulds*. I'm not advocating living without our own moral standards. I think that most of our *shoulds* reflect other peoples' ideas on what our life *should* look like. We can let go of them.

Tip: Shake off *shoulds* and own your life.

5. Let go of being an expert. We are all experts. Experts in our job, in raising children, in crossing the road, in

signing our name. It's difficult to let go of being an expert. Because it means confessing that we really know nothing. What we know belongs to the past. Whereas this moment now is new and offers its unique challenges. If I let go of being an expert, I can listen to others with an open mind. Then I can find that even a beginner has something to teach me.

Tip: Letting go of being an expert enables you to keep learning. 

6. Experience the moment fully. Most of the time we live in a daydream in which we think of the past, and dream of the future. Meanwhile life runs on without us. Without us being present, that is. We miss so much when we live in a daze. Beginner's Mind allows us to take it all in. Then even ordinary things begin to shine.

Tip: Live life to the full one moment at a time.

7. Disregard common sense. Common sense is what the culture we live in regards as 'normal'. If inventors like Da Vinci or Edison had stayed with a 'common sense' mindset, our life would be very different because their inventions changed the world.

Tip: Release yourself from common sense and become creative.

8. Discard fear of failure. When did you last start something new? Was it maybe a while back? As children we are always starting something new. Then, as we go through our twenties, thirties, and further, we become more hesitant about

being a beginner again. Why? Maybe because we don't want to look silly when we fail. There are always plenty of people ready to snigger when we take the first wobbly steps. But it's our choice whether to take notice or not.

Tip: Immerse yourself in your actions and forget the watchers.

9. Use the spirit of enquiry. Beginner's Mind is about using the spirit of enquiry without getting stuck in preconceived ideas. There's a Zen story about this: *A professor once visited a Japanese master to inquire about Zen. The master served tea. When the visitor's cup was full, the master kept pouring. Tea spilled out of the cup and over the table. The cup is full! said the professor. No more will go in! Like this cup, said the master, you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup? The spirit of enquiry is the mind that is open to the unknown, and empty of pre-conceived ideas.*

Tip: Focus on questions, not on answers. 

This is an edited version of a blog entry by Mary Jaksch, a Zen master, psychotherapist, and author.

The full versions can be found at: <http://zenhabits.net/how-to-live-life-to-the-max-with-beginners-mind/>

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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Notices...

Wednesday night Lotus Bud Sangha at the Buddhist library in Camperdown All welcome.

Please note your calendars for **October Long Weekend** Health Retreat - Waterfall, Sydney and the following weekend the **Retreat in Nhap Luu Centre** - Beaufort, Victoria.

How to contribute

Email to: cbarker@uow.edu.au

Post to: Chris Barker, Faculty of Arts,
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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.

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.

Mindfulness Days at Nhap Luu (Entering the Stream) Meditation Centre
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Beaufort VIC 3733
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Ian Roberts is a neighbour of Nhap Luu and a member of the Present Moment Sangha Melbourne 03 5349 2729