



THE LOTUS BUD

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Perfect just as you are

Dear Friends, when asked 'what's wrong with the pursuit of happiness?' the Thai Forest Monk Ajan Chan is said to have answered 'the pursuit'.

So often we strive for things to be different- and make ourselves unhappy- when we would be better off accepting that we are 'perfect as we are'.

In this edition of *The lotus bud* we explore that idea, first by reminding ourselves of Master Linji's teaching that if we have nothing to do and nowhere to go we will be more content.

We follow this with some practical suggestions from Leo Babauta of the Zen habits website. This site is not solely in the tradition of Thay's teachings but it is compatible and complementary. 🧘



Nothing to do, nowhere to go

Master Linji invented the term the 'businessless person', the person who has nothing to do and nowhere to go. This was his ideal example of what a person could be. The Businessless person is someone who doesn't run after enlightenment or grasp at anything, even if that thing is the Buddha. This person has simply stopped. She is no longer caught by anything, even theories or teachings. The businessless person is the true person inside us.

When we stop and be truly alive in the present moment we are in touch with what is going on within and around us. We aren't carried away by the past, the future, our thinking, ideas, emotions, and projects. 🧘

The person who has nothing to do is sovereign of herself. She doesn't need to put on airs or leave any trace behind. The true person is an active participant, engaged in her environment while remaining unoppressed by it. She lives in awareness as an ordinary person, whether standing, walking, lying down or sitting. A Buddha is a person who has no more business to do and isn't looking for anything. In doing nothing, in simply stopping, we can live freely and true to ourselves and our liberation will contribute to the liberation of all beings. 🧘

Thich Nhat Hanh (2007) 'Nothing to do, Nowhere to go' Parallax Press pgs 11-12.

The little guide to contentedness

He who is contented is rich.

There has been little in my life that has made as much an impact as learning to be content – with my life, where I am, what I’m doing, what I have, who I’m with, who I am.

This little trick changes everything.

Let’s take a look at my life before contentedness: I was addicted to junk food and fast food, and overweight and unhealthy. I bought too many things on impulse, owned too much clutter, and was deeply in debt and struggling to make it to the next payday. I was unhappy with who I was, wanted desperately to change, tried a thousand different programs and books. I was always worried I was missing out on exciting things, and wanted so much to be out doing the fun things everyone else was doing. I was always changing the way I did things, because it seemed everyone else had a better system or tools. I strove to meet goals, because they would get me to a better life. 🍵

And as I learned to be content, here was what changed:

I learned to be happy with healthier food, with less food, and my health improved and waistline shrunk. I relied on a good book, spending time with people I loved, going for a nice run... and my debt began to be reduced as I learned I didn’t need to spend money to enjoy myself. I learned to be happier with who I was, and what I was

doing, and so no longer needed self-improvement books and programs, no longer needed to try all kinds of new systems and tools. I became happy with myself, with those around me, and with what I had – and so didn’t need to strive to change everything. Letting go of goals helped me to simplify things so I had less to worry about, less to do.

That’s just the start. There is no way to account for the tremendous change that happens when you learn to accept who you are, when you tell yourself you are perfect just as you are, when you love yourself and everything about yourself. You stop criticizing yourself, you are happier, you are a better person to be around, and you can now help others and work without the insecurities you had before.

This is not a magical state, and doesn’t require any new tools or books. It’s simple, and I’ll share what has worked for me.

Learning to be content

I’ve been in situations where you might think things were bad, and sometimes I was very unhappy, and other times I was happy. The difference wasn’t in the external circumstances, but in my mindset – I learned to appreciate what I had, instead of focusing on the things I didn’t have or didn’t like. I was grateful for my health, for the people in my life, for having food and being alive. 🍵

If you can learn to develop the right mindset, you can be happy now, without changing anything else. You don’t need to wait until you’ve changed everything



Image by Alan Cleaver

and made your life perfect before you’re happy you have everything you need to be happy right now.

-The mindset of waiting for happiness is a never-ending cycle. You get a better job (yay!) and then immediately start thinking about what your next promotion will be. You get a nicer house and immediately start looking at how nice your neighbors’ houses are, or the faults in the house you have. You try to change your spouse or kids, and if that works (good luck), you’ll find other things about them that need to be changed. It keeps going, until you die.

Instead, learn that you can be content now, without any external changes. 🍵

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Here's how to start:

Take a moment to be grateful for something. What in your life is amazing? Even if everything seems to suck, there must be one good thing. It might simply be that you have beauty somewhere nearby, or that you are alive, or that your kids are healthy. Find something, and give thanks for that.

Catch yourself thinking, 'This sucks.' It's amazing how often people think this thought. 'This sucks! My co-worker is the worst – he sucks!' 'My wife doesn't understand me – this suuuucks!' It might be in different words, but if you catch yourself thinking something like that, pause. Reverse the thinking. Find a way to be thankful for the situation. 'My wife is a caring and sweet person – maybe I should give her a hug'. 'My co-worker might be annoying sometimes, but he has a good heart, and maybe I should get to know him better.' 'My room might be messy but at least I have a roof over my head.' 

Find the little things that can give you simple joys. What do you need to be happy? I love simple things, like taking a walk, spending time with a loved one, reading a book, eating some berries, drinking tea. These cost very little, and require very little, and can make me very happy. Find the simple things that give you similar happiness, and focus on those rather than what you don't have.

Find the things about yourself that you're happy with. We tend to criticize ourselves easily, but what if we turned it around and asked, 'What do I do right?

What am I good at? What is loveable about me?' Make a list. Start to focus on these things. 

Do the same with others in your life. Instead of criticizing them, ask yourself, 'What is good about this person? What do I love about them?' Make a list, and focus on these things above all else.

Assume that you, others, and life are perfect. You are great, and don't need improvement. You aren't a piece of clay that must be shaped and molded into something better – you are already perfect. Other people are also just as perfect, and don't need improvement. You just need to appreciate them for who they are. The moment we are living in is not a stepping stone to something better – it is exactly wonderful, and we have already arrived at the perfect moment. 

The Contented Life

It might be useful to look at what life would be like if you learned to be content:

Self image. We compare ourselves with the images in our head of perfection – movie stars, models in magazines, other people who seem to have it all together – and we can never measure up to those perfect images. But those images are not real. They are an imagined ideal. When we let go of this image of perfection, we realize that we are already exactly who we should be. We are happy with ourselves, and nothing else is needed.

Relationships. If you are content with yourself, you are more likely to be a good friend, partner, parent. You are more

likely to be happy and friendly and loving, more likely to be as accepting of others as you are of yourself. Relationships improve, when others learn to be content with themselves, from your example. 

Health. Much of our culture's unhealthiness comes from unhappiness – eating junk food to give ourselves comfort and relieve stress, not exercising because we think we can't, being glued online because we think we might miss something if we turn off the computer. When you realize that you aren't missing anything, and you don't need junk food to be happy, and you are good enough to exercise, you can slowly return to health.

Possessions. The overload of possessions in our lives comes from unhappiness – we buy things because we think they'll give us comfort, happiness, security, an exciting life. When we become content with ourselves and our lives, we realize none of that is necessary, and we can start getting rid of these extraneous crutches.

Busy-ness. Much of our busy-ness comes from fear that we should be doing more, that we might be missing out, that we aren't enough already. But we are enough, and we don't need more, and we aren't *missing out*. So we can let go of a lot of unnecessary activity, and just focus on doing what we love, and enjoy a contented life. Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you. 

Lao Tzu - Leo Babauta from zenhabits.net

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.



How to contribute

Email to: cbarker@uow.edu.au

Post to: Chris Barker, Faculty of Arts, Uni of Wollongong, 2500

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
streammpc@gmail.com www.plumvillageasia.org