



THE LOTUS BUD

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Dear Sangha,

In this edition of the Lotus Buds we explore the idea of ‘equanimity,’ or ‘non-discrimination’ as Thay often calls it, and we do so in relation to issues of strong emotion in particular. “Upeksa” or “equanimity” is one of the four “Sublime Attitudes” in Buddhism — also called “the Four Immeasurables,” or “the four sublime attitudes” (the others being loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy).

We begin with Thay talking about how to maintain our balance through mindfulness when faced with strong emotions. We then hear from Leo Babauta of ‘Zen Habits’ who we have encountered in the The Lotus Buds before. Zen habits does not claim to be in the Thich Naht Hanh tradition, but it is compatible with it. 🧘



Calming strong emotions

Many of us suffer from painful emotions and don’t know how to handle them. When you notice that there’s a feeling in you that isn’t calm or peaceful, you can repeat to yourself, “Breathing in, I am present for my feelings. Breathing out, I calm my feeling.” When you say this, your emotions begin to calm down. This is important. The emotion may be despair, fear, or anger, but whatever it is, mindful breathing will calm it. 🧘

When you notice a strong emotion arising, go back to yourself and begin the practice of mindful breathing to generate the energy of mindfulness for your protection. Be there for your

emotion and don’t let it just overtake you. Don’t become a victim of your emotions. 🧘

It’s like when you know a heavy storm is coming. You have to do everything you can to protect your house so that it won’t be damaged by the wind. Strong emotions come from within, from the depths of our consciousness. The energy of mindfulness also comes from the depths of our consciousness. So you sit in a stable position, in a chair with your feet flat on the floor or cross-legged on a cushion, or you lie down, and you prepare yourself for the emotion. You begin to breathe in

and out, and you focus your attention on your abdomen. Why your abdomen? When you see a tree in a storm and you focus your attention on the top of the tree, you feel vulnerable. You have the impression that the tree is too fragile to withstand the storm, because the little branches and the leaves on the top of the tree sway violently in the wind. You have the impression that the tree will be blown away. But if you focus your attention on the trunk of the tree, you get a different impression. You can see that the tree is solid and rooted deeply in the soil, so you know the tree will withstand the storm.

You are also a tree, and that strong emotion is the storm that is approaching. If you don't prepare for it, you may be blown away. To prepare means to begin mindful breathing and to bring your attention down from the level of thinking to the level of the belly, just below the navel. This is called belly breathing. Just focus all your attention on your belly and become aware of the rise and fall of your abdomen, which is the trunk of your tree. Don't stay on the level of the brain because that is where the storm winds are blowing the hardest. It's dangerous to stay at the level of your thinking.

Go down and embrace the trunk of the tree below the navel, where you will be safe.

This is a simple practice, but it is effective. You're aware that an emotion is only an emotion. It's just a small part of your whole being. You are much more than your emotion. An emotion comes, stays for a while, and goes away, just like a storm. If you're aware of that, you won't be afraid of your emotions.

When you focus your attention on your abdomen for fifteen or twenty minutes and take refuge in your practice, your emotion will subside. Then you'll feel peaceful and happy because you know there's a way to handle your emotions. You know the next time an emotion arises, you can do exactly the same thing.

I advise you not to wait until a strong emotion comes before beginning the practice. You'll surely forget to do it. Learn it right now. Then, when a strong emotion arises, you'll remember the practice and you will succeed in soothing your emotion. Each time your emotion becomes a little less powerful. You don't have to fight; you just allow the energy of mindfulness to embrace your emotion. Then it will weaken and go back to the depths of your consciousness.


Thich Nhat Hanh. (2008). The Art of Power. New York: HarperOne



How equanimity can save your sanity


While I don't always succeed (I get angry or irritated like everyone else), equanimity is a concept I strive for as much as possible. And here's a tip: the more you practice this, the better you get, and the happier and saner you will become.


For example, if negative things said about me I have several choices:

1. I can respond with similar negativity, and thereby increase the animosity between myself and the commenter, and the general community..
2. I can ignore the comments, which is a valid option but allows them to go unanswered.
3. I can answer the comments but remain positive. This is the choice I try to take in all cases. 

This philosophy of remaining positive, even under attack, applies to all parts of life, not just in responding to comments. I've used it in my everyday dealings with people. It takes two to argue, and even if the person refuses to rise to your level, that's his problem, not yours.

How can you develop equanimity? Here, as always, are my suggestions:

- Learn to meditate, even just a little. This is such a deep topic that I won't get into it here, but basically even the simplest meditation can bring you a peace of mind and the perspective needed for equanimity.
- Learn to detach yourself and be an observer. Try this exercise: imagine yourself leaving your body, floating above it, and going higher until you are looking down on yourself and the world and people around you. You are an observer, not involved in the situation. As an observer, you don't get angry or emotionally involved ... you simply observe without judgment. This exercise can help you remove yourself from the heat of things and see with a greater perspective.
- Take deep breaths. If you find yourself getting angry or emotional over an issue, take a deep breath, and step back. Often it's best not to respond when you're in an emotional state — you might regret it later. I often will leave an email without responding to it, and come back to it later, if it provokes an emotional response. The same thing when getting into an argument with someone in real life — tell them you need a minute, get some fresh air, and step back from the situation. You'll often find that you come back to it with a completely different approach. 
- Be Teflon. Let things roll off you. Understand that there will always be people who are angry or rude or who are having a bad day. Their problems do not have to be yours. If they are mean, you don't need to be mean also. Let their anger and comments and meanness roll off you like water on a duck's back. Only by letting them engage you will you allow that anger to take seed in your body and grow. If you can let it roll off you, and ignore it, and smile, things will often get better.

- Seek understanding. If someone says something mean to you, instead of taking it as a personal insult, understand that you are not the center of this person's world — often they are coming off a very bad morning, or are having marital problems, or perhaps they don't understand the issue very well. There's always a reason for anger and rudeness — and if you can understand it, it's easier to deal with. 

by Leo Babauta

<http://zenhabits.net/calm-as-a-monk-how-equanimity-can-save-your-sanity/>

Koan: Everything is best

When Banzan was walking through a market he overheard a conversation between a butcher and his customer.

"Give me the best piece of meat you have," said the customer.

"Everything in my shop is the best," replied the butcher.

"You cannot find here any piece of meat that is not the best."

At these words Banzan became enlightened.

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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