



THE LOTUS BUD

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Dear Sangha,

This edition of *The Lotus Bud* is devoted to the question of paid employment – work – which most of us need to do in order to survive in this world.

If we are lucky we enjoy our work, but this is not the case for many people, and even if we do love what we do it can still sometimes be stressful, so in this edition we consider how to deal with difficulties at work, with a reminder of Thay's discussion of work as right livelihood. 🧘



The Zen of work

At work, we often face stressful situations, dreaded projects, irritating co-workers, frustrating bosses, an overwhelming number of tasks and messages, boring work we don't enjoy. These problems have one simple cause: we're holding on.

The work itself isn't stressful – it's just action that's taken or that needs to be taken. It's our reaction to the work that causes the stress: our holding on to a wish that things were different. It's not the constant stream of interruptions that is frustrating – they are just events that happen around us, like a leaf falling or a bird flying by. It's our holding on, in our minds, to the task we were doing before we were interrupted that causes the frustration. We wish we weren't interrupted from the task, and we resent anything that interrupts us, and our minds are still half on the previous task.

Our co-workers and boss aren't the problem either: they're just other human beings trying to do the best they can in this world. It's our holding on to the idea that they should somehow behave a certain way, that they should do their best to *make us happy*, that causes us anger and irritation. 🧘

It's not that we have an overwhelming number of tasks and messages that causes us to be stressed out – it's our reaction to that number. It's just a list of things, or a phone ringing, or an inbox with a list of messages. Those things are harmless. But when we hold on to the idea that we can do everything, and that we have to deal with all this at once, we become stressed, because obviously we can't.

We can only do one thing, though our minds are on all of them.

So what's the solution? It's letting go.

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When you let go of these ideas of how things should be, how other people should behave to make you happy, how you can do everything at once – then the problems go away. They just don't exist.

There are other problems, of course – you still need to do the work. But the frustrations, stress, anger, irritation, feelings of being overwhelmed – those are all caused by holding on, and they're in our minds.

We also hold on to things that happened earlier – something someone did that wasn't nice, a meeting where we said something embarrassing, a mistake we made on our project – and of course this only compounds the pain, keeps the pain replaying on an endless loop.

Letting go allows the problems to disappear. It's that simple, and yet letting go isn't always easy.

It's a learning process. First you have to learn mindfulness, which is the key to the whole shebang. Mindfulness allows us to see these thought processes that are causing us pain, allows us to delve into what we're holding on to.

Mindfulness also helps us return to the moment, so that all those things running around in our heads can fade away, and we live in what's actually happening now.

We do a task without holding on to other tasks, or offences made by other people. We do a task, and then let go of it, and move on to the next task. 

By Leo Babauta zenhabits.net/zen-work/
Editor's note: The Zen habits website isn't devoted to the Thich Naht Hanh tradition although we consider these teachings to be compatible with Thay's teachings.

Stress and work

Q & A with Thich Naht Hanh

Q: How do you maintain mindfulness in a busy work environment? At times it seems there is not even enough time to breathe mindfully.

A: This is not a personal problem only; this is a problem of the whole civilization. That is why we have to practice not only as individuals; we have to practice as a society. We have to make a revolution in the way we organize our society and our daily life, so we will be able to enjoy the work we do every day.

Meanwhile, we can incorporate a number of things that we have learned in this retreat in order to lessen our stress. When you drive around the city and come to a red light or a stop sign, you can just sit back and make use of these twenty or thirty seconds to relax-to breathe in, breathe out, and enjoy arriving in the present moment. There are many things like that we can do. 

Years ago I was in Montreal on the way to a retreat, and I noticed that the license plates said *Je me souviens* – 'I remember.' I did not know what they wanted to remember, but to me it means that I remember to breathe and to smile. So I told a friend who was driving the car that I had a gift for the sangha in Montreal: every time you see *Je me souviens*, you remember to breathe and smile and go back to the present moment.

Many of our friends in the Montreal sangha have been practicing that for more than ten years.

I think we can enjoy the red light; we can also enjoy the stop sign. Every time we see it we profit: instead of being angry at the red light, of being burned by impatience, we just practice breathing in, breathing out, smiling. That helps a lot. And when you hear the telephone ringing you can consider it to be the sound of the mindfulness bell. You practice telephone meditation. Every time you hear the telephone ringing you stay exactly where you are. You breathe in and breathe out and enjoy your breathing. Listen, listen – this wonderful sound brings you back to your true home. Then when you hear the second ring you stand up and you go to the telephone with dignity. That means in the style of walking meditation. You know that you can afford to do that, because if the other person has something really important to tell you, she will not hang up before the third ring. That is what we call telephone meditation. We use the sound as the bell of mindfulness.

And waiting at the bus stop you might like to try mindful breathing, and waiting in line to go into a bank, you can always practice mindful breathing. Walking from one building to another building, why don't you use walking meditation, because that improves the quality of our life. That brings more peace and serenity, and the quality of the work we do will be improved just by that kind of practice. So it is possible to integrate the practice into our daily life. We just need a little bit of creative imagination to do so. 

Found at: www.sinc.sunysb.edu/Clubs/buddhism/dailylife/thayq-a.html

Right Livelihood

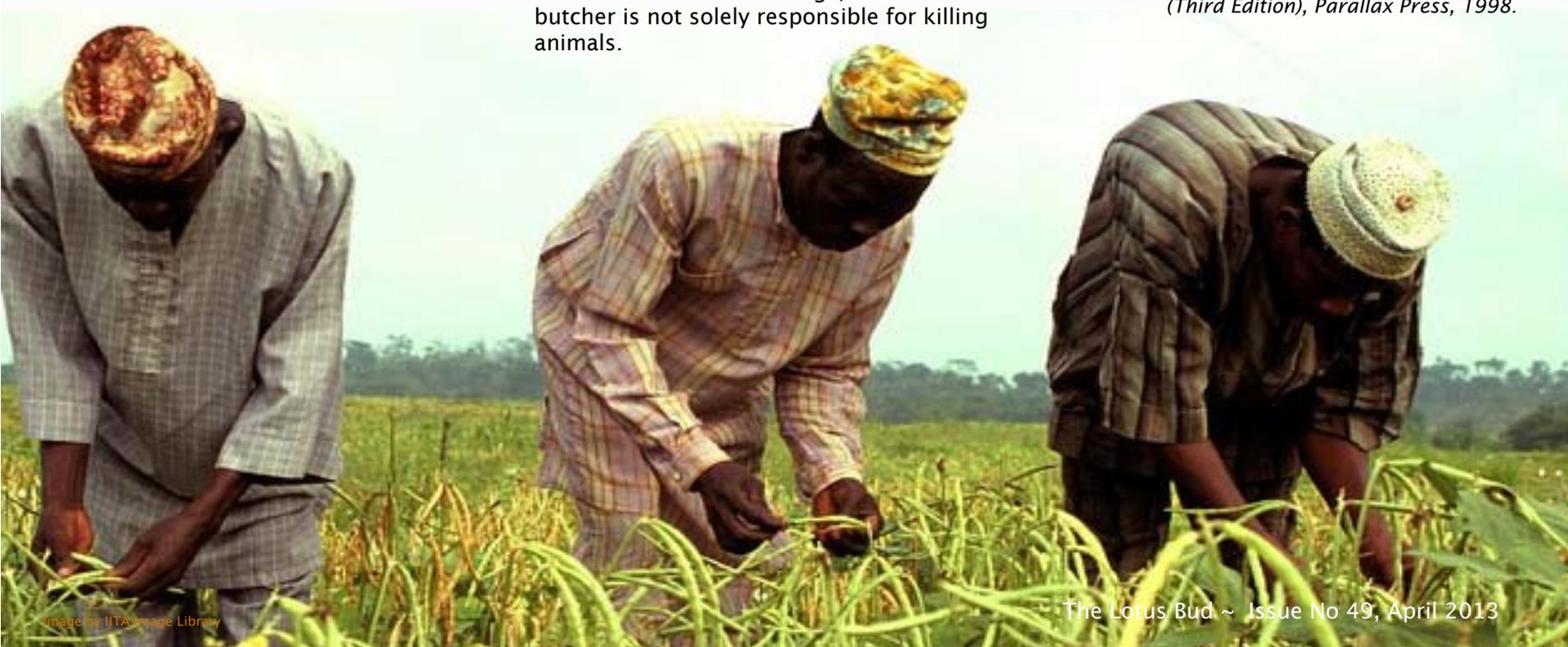
Right Livelihood is an element of the Noble Eightfold Path. It urges us to practice a profession that harms neither humans nor nature, physically or morally. Practicing mindfulness at work helps us discover whether our livelihood is right or not. We live in a society where jobs are hard to find and it is difficult to practice Right Livelihood. Still, if it happens that our work entails harming life, we should try our best to find another job. We should not drown in forgetfulness. Our vocation can nourish our understanding and compassion, or it can erode them. Our work has much to do with our practice of the Way. 🙏

Many modern industries, including food manufacturing, are harmful to humans and nature. Most current farming practices are far from Right Livelihood. The chemical poisons used by modern farmers harm the environment. Practising Right Livelihood has become a difficult task for farmers. If they do not use chemical pesticides, it may be hard to compete commercially. Not many farmers have the courage to practice organic farming. Right Livelihood has ceased to be a purely personal matter. It is our collective karma. Suppose I am a school teacher and I believe that nurturing love and understanding in children is a beautiful occupation, an example of Right Livelihood. I would object if someone asked me to stop teaching and become, for example, a butcher. However, if I meditate on the interrelatedness of all things, I will see that the butcher is not solely responsible for killing animals.

He kills them for all of us who buy pieces of raw meat, cleanly wrapped and displayed at our local supermarket. The act of killing is a collective one. In forgetfulness, we may separate ourselves from the butcher, thinking his livelihood is wrong, while ours is right.

However, if we didn't eat meat, the butcher wouldn't kill or would kill less. This is why Right Livelihood is a collective matter. The livelihood of each person affects all of us, and vice versa. The butcher's children may benefit from my teaching, while my children, because they eat meat, share some responsibility for the butcher's livelihood of killing. 🙏

*Reprinted from Interbeing:
Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism
(Third Edition), Parallax Press, 1998.*



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