



THE LOTUS BUD

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Dear Sangha,

As we approach Christmas once more we may hear the Christian message of peace, love and compassion amidst the rustle of shopping bags and the swiping of credit cards. As Thay reminds us these qualities are not simply to be practiced once a year event but rather, 'peace is every step'. Here at The Lotus Bud we are going to pause and take a special look at compassion as Christmas comes upon us.

We hear first from Thich Nhat Hanh about compassion as love in action, followed by some reflections on compassion by a leading scientist on the subject. As Thay has demonstrated through his words and actions, Buddhism and science can walk hand in hand. 

Image by paparutzi



Love is compassion in action

Love is a mind that brings peace, joy, and happiness to another person.

Compassion is a mind that removes the suffering that is present in the other.

We all have the seeds of love and compassion in our minds, and we can develop these fine and wonderful sources of energy. We can nurture the unconditional love that does not expect anything in return and therefore does not lead to anxiety and sorrow.

The essence of love and compassion is understanding, the ability to recognise the physical, material, and psychological suffering of others, to put ourselves 'inside the skin' of the other. We go 'inside' their body, feelings, and mental formations, and witness for ourselves their suffering. Shallow observation as an outsider is not enough to see their

suffering. We must become one with the object of our observation. When we are in contact with another's suffering, a feeling of compassion is born in us. Compassion means, literally, 'to suffer with'.

We begin by choosing as the object of our meditation someone who is undergoing physical or material suffering, someone who is weak or easily ill, poor or oppressed, or has no protection. This kind of suffering is easy to see. After that, we can practice being in contact with more subtle forms of suffering. Sometimes the other person does not seem to be suffering at all, but we may notice that he has sorrows which have left their marks in hidden ways. 

People with more than enough material comforts can also suffer. We look deeply at the person who is the object of our meditation on

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compassion, both during sitting meditation and when we are actually in contact with him. We must allow enough time to be in deep contact with his suffering. We continue to observe him until compassion arises and penetrates our being.

When we observe deeply in this way, the fruit of our meditation will naturally transform into some kind of action. We will not just say, 'I love him very much', but instead, 'I will do something so that he will suffer less'. The mind of compassion is truly present when it is effective in removing another person's suffering.

We have to find ways to nourish and express our compassion. When we come into contact with the other person, our thoughts and actions should express our mind of compassion, even if that person says and does things that are not easy to accept. We practice in this way until we see clearly that our love is not contingent upon the other person being lovable. Then we can know that our mind of compassion is firm and authentic. We ourselves will be more at ease, and the person who has been the object of our meditation will also benefit eventually. His suffering will slowly diminish, and his life will gradually be brighter and more joyful as a result of our compassion.

We can also meditate on the suffering of those who cause us to suffer. Anyone who has made us suffer is undoubtedly suffering too.

We only need to follow our breathing and look deeply, and naturally we will see his suffering. A part of his difficulties and sorrows may have been brought about by his parents' lack of skill when he was still young. But his parents themselves have been victims of their parents; the suffering has been transmitted from generation to generation and been reborn in him. If we see that, we will no longer blame him for making us suffer, because we know that is also a victim. To look deeply is to understand. 🙏

Once we understand the reasons he has acted badly, our bitterness toward him will vanish, and we will long for him to suffer less. We will feel cool and light, and we can smile. We do not need the other person to be present in order to bring about reconciliation. When we look deeply, we become reconciled with ourselves, and, for us, the problem no longer exists. Sooner or later, he will see our attitude and will share in the freshness of the stream of love which is flowing naturally from our heart. 🙏

*Excerpt from 'Peace is every step'
by Thich Nhat Hanh*



Image by ronsaunders47

The science of compassion

Why, in a country that consumes 25% of the world's resources (the U.S.), is there an epidemic of loneliness, depression, and anxiety? Why do so many in the West who have all of their basic needs met still feel impoverished? While some politicians might answer, 'It's the economy, stupid'. Based on scientific evidence, a better answer is 'It's the lack of compassion, stupid'. 🧘

What exactly is compassion? Compassion is the recognition of another's suffering and a desire to alleviate that suffering. Often brushed off as a hippy dippy religious term irrelevant in modern society, rigorous empirical data supports the view of all major world religions: compassion is good.

Our poverty in the West is not that of the wallet but rather that of social connectedness. In this modern world where oftentimes both parents work, we are spending less time as a family. People are living further away from extended family and perhaps more disconnected than ever before as suggested by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*. Putnam observes that we thrive under conditions of social connection but that trust and levels of community engagement are on the decline. Loneliness is on the rise and is one of the leading reasons people seek counselling. 🧘

One particularly telling survey showed that 25% of Americans have no one that they feel close enough with to share a problem. That means that one in four people that you meet has no one to talk to and it is affecting their health.

Steve Cole from UCLA, a social neuro-genetics scientist, has shown that loneliness leads to a less healthy immune stress profile at the level of the gene -- their gene expression makes them more vulnerable to inflammatory processes which have been shown to have negative effects on health. Research by expert well-being psychologists Ed Diener and Martin Seligman indicates that social connectedness is a predictor of longer life, faster recovery from disease, higher levels of happiness and well-being, and a greater sense of purpose and meaning. One large-scale study showed that lack of social connectedness predicts vulnerability to disease and death above and beyond traditional risk factors such as smoking, blood pressure, obesity and lack of physical activity. 🧘

While many pay attention to their diet and go to the gym regularly to improve their health, they don't think of social connectedness this way. Just like physical fitness, compassion can be cultivated and maintained. Chuck Raison and colleagues at Emory University have demonstrated that a regular compassion meditation practice reduces negative neuroendocrine, inflammatory and behavioural responses to psychosocial stress. Exercising compassion not only strengthens one's compassion

but brings countless benefits to oneself and others. In fact, Jonathan Haidt at the University of Virginia and others have shown that, not only are we the recipient of compassion's benefits but others are inspired when they see compassionate actions and in turn become more likely to help others in a positive feedback loop. 🧘

As human beings, we will inevitably encounter suffering at some point in our lives. However, we also have evolved very specific social mechanisms to relieve that pain: altruism and compassion. It is not just receiving compassion that relieves our pain. Stephanie Brown, professor at SUNY Stony Brook University and the University of Michigan, has shown that the act of experiencing compassion and helping others actually leads to tremendous mental and physical well-being for us as well. While survival of the fittest may lead to short-term gain, research clearly shows it is survival of the kindest that leads to the long-term survival of a species. It is our ability to stand together as a group, to support each other, to help each other, to communicate for mutual understanding, and to cooperate, that has taken our species this far. 🧘

*James R Doty MD, Professor of Neurosurgery, Stanford University School of Medicine; Director, Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-r-doty-md/science-of-compassion_b_1578284.html*

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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We would love to hear from you. We want the The Lotus Bud to be a place for sharing our experiences and building the Sangha; so why not write a short piece about your experiences with mindfulness ?

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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
Sydney, Inner West

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.

Meditation and monthly Mindfulness Days at Canley Heights

Southwest Sydney - 7.30pm
Friday Night Meditation and Monthly Mindfulness Days.
49 Ferngrove Rd Canley Heights.

Mindfulness Days at Nhap Luu (Entering the Stream)

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