



# THE LOTUS BUD

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## Dear Sangha,

The teachings of the Buddha advise us of the need for right diligence and we often take that to mean that we need to make an effort. But sometimes we can try too hard and right diligence just might mean less effort in our effort – effortless effort – as Thay and others explore in this edition of *The Lotus Bud*. 🙏

Chris / True Dwelling of the Mind



Image by AmberBrooke

## Too much effort

When you feel overwhelmed, you're trying too hard.

That kind of energy does not help the other person and it does not help you. 🙏

You should not be too eager to help right away. There are two things: to be and to do.

Don't think too much about to do—to be is first. To be peace. To be joy. To be happiness. And then to do joy, to do happiness—on the basis of being.

So first you have to focus on the practice of being. Being fresh.

Being peaceful. Being attentive. Being generous. Being compassionate.

This is the basic practice. It's like if the other person is sitting at the foot of a tree. The tree does not do anything, but the tree is fresh and alive.

When you are like that tree, sending out waves of freshness, you help to calm down the suffering in the other person. 🙏

Thich Nhat Hanh

[Online source](#)

## Resting in the river

Resting is a very important practice; we have to learn the art of resting. Resting is the first part of Buddhist meditation. You should allow your body and your mind to rest. Our mind as well as our body needs to rest.

The problem is that not many of us know how to allow our body and mind to rest. We are always struggling; struggling has become a kind of habit. We cannot resist being active, struggling all the time. We struggle even during our sleep. 🧘

It is very important to realize that we have the habit energy of struggling. We have to be able to recognize a habit when it manifests itself because if we know how to recognize our habit, it will lose its energy and will not be able to push us anymore.

Ten years ago I was in India visiting the ex-untouchable community of Buddhists. A friend who belonged to the caste organized the trip for me. I was sitting on the bus, enjoying the landscape outside, contemplating the palm trees and the vegetation. Suddenly I turned and I saw him looking very tense. There was no reason why he had to be tense like that. I thought that he was trying to make my visit pleasant and maybe that was the reason he was so tense. I told him, "Dear friend, I know that you want to make my trip pleasant, but I am already very happy. I've already enjoyed the trip. So why don't you sit back, smile, and relax?" He said, "Okay," and he sat back and he tried to relax.

I was pleased and I turned my face toward the window again and I enjoyed the palm trees and other things. 🧘

But just a few minutes after when I looked back at him he was as tense as before. He was not able to relax, to allow himself to relax. I knew that he belonged to that section of the population that had been struggling for many thousand years. He was discriminated against. He had suffered so much, his ancestors and himself and his children. So the tendency to struggle has been there for many thousand years. That is why it was very difficult for him to allow himself to rest.

We have to practice in order to be able to transform this habit in us. The habit of struggle has become a powerful source of energy that is shaping our behavior, our actions and our reactions. 🧘

[Online source](#)

## Effort in zen meditation

Strictly speaking, any effort we make is not good for our practice because it creates waves in our mind. It is impossible, however, to attain absolute calmness of our mind without any effort. We must make some effort, but we must forget ourselves in the effort we make. In this realm there is no subjectivity or objectivity.

Our mind is just calm, without even any awareness. In this unawareness, every effort and every idea and thought will vanish.

Image by catlovers

So it is necessary for us to encourage ourselves and to make an effort up to the last moment, when all effort disappears. You should keep your mind on your breathing until you are not aware of your breathing. 🧘

We should try to continue our effort forever, but we should not expect to reach some stage when we will forget all about it. We should just try to keep our mind on our breathing. That is our actual practice. That effort will be refined more and more while you are sitting. At first the effort you make is quite rough and impure, but by the power of practice the effort will become purer and

purer. When your effort becomes pure, your body and mind become pure. This is the way we practice Zen.

Once you understand our innate power to purify ourselves and our surroundings, you can act properly, and you will learn from those around you, and you will become friendly with others. This is the merit of Zen practice. But the way of practice is just to be concentrated on your breathing with the right posture and with great, pure effort. This is how we practice Zen. 🧘

*Shunryu Suzuki 'Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind'*

[Online source](#)

## Effortless effort

We read in Zen texts about “effortless effort” or the “goal of goallessness”, and sometimes that sounds like all we need to do is “what comes naturally”. And in a sense that is true, but what is needed is not the “what comes naturally” to our self, for this would simply be to indulge impulsiveness.

Instead, we need to do what comes naturally to our Unborn Buddha Nature. And finding that is what training is all about.

This situation is actually not as much of a paradox as it seems, because there are different sorts of effort. The one which we are used to is one in which “we” are in control: we have a goal or ideal and direct our behavior in ways which we think will achieve it. 🧘

There are difficulties with this in several places. There’s really no “me” in the first place; secondly, goals and ideals may be nice thoughts, but they are lousy descriptions of how the world really works; the same is true for my ideas about what will achieve change; and finally, whatever “we” may be, we don’t seem to be wise enough to direct or control a life. With all of these difficulties, is it any wonder that our attempts to “reform ourselves” generally end up somewhere other than where we hoped they would?

But there is another type of effort entirely. It is more “willingness” than “will”. It is the willingness to let go of things moment-by-moment: ideas, opinions, wants, fears,

ideals, judgments, ... everything. It is the willingness at all times to learn, to be open to seeing new ways, as Dogen Zenji put it “to be disturbed by the Truth”. And it is the willingness to do whatever comes next. 🧘

“Doing what comes next” is more a matter of honesty and courage than of will. The honesty is that of looking straight at what lies before us, at what is shown to us simply and clearly by the Unborn at all times. And this involves trust: trust that a wise and compassionate Buddha Nature really does exist, trust that It can do Its work without us having to control or direct anything, and trust that we can perceive Its teachings directly from the experience of our senses without analyzing, fearing, judging, or worrying about what we perceive. The courage is that of doing what is obviously to be done and of abstaining from what is obviously to be abstained from.

This, then, is the “effortless effort”. No “I” is involved, no ideals, no thinking or planning of how, no control, no direction. The work is that of the Unborn; the direction is that of the Unborn; the trust is placed in the Unborn. And, simply there are things which are to be done, and things which are to be abstained from. 🧘

[Online source](#)



Image by Michelle Bartsch

## 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. 🧘

## Contacts

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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 ?

Email: [cbarker@uow.edu.au](mailto:cbarker@uow.edu.au)

Post: 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 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)  
Meditation Centre  
221 Maria's Lane  
Beaufort VIC 3733  
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0431 470 172

Online sources for articles in this issue:

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1046357-when-you-feel-overwhelmed-you-re-trying-too-hard-th>

<http://www.dharmaweb.org>

<http://anmolmehta.com/blog/2008/12/26/zen-meditation-effortless-effort-zen-teachings-suzuki/>

<http://obcon.org/dharma/buddhism/the-eightfold-path/#effortless>