




THE LOTUS BUD

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Dear Sangha,

In his book "Old Path, White Clouds" Thich Nhat Hanh tells the story of the Buddha in which he says "my teaching is not a dogma or a doctrine, but no doubt some people will take it as such." The Buddha goes on to say "I must state clearly that my teaching is a method to experience reality and not reality itself, just as a finger pointing at the moon is not the moon itself. A thinking person makes use of the finger to see the moon. A person who only looks at the finger and mistakes it for the moon will never see the real moon."

In this edition of *The Lotus Bud* we explore the notion that ideas have their uses but ultimately are to be let go of because 'the raft is not the shore'. 

Burning our notions

When you have a match, you have the condition to make a fire. If the flame you make with the match lasts long enough, it will also burn up the match. The match gives rise to the fire, but the fire itself burns up the match; the teaching of impermanence is the same. It helps us to have the awakened understanding of impermanence, and the insight of impermanence is what will burn up our idea of impermanence.

We have to go beyond the idea of permanence, but we also have to go beyond the idea of impermanence. Then we can be in touch with nirvana. The same is true of no self. No self is the match; it helps to give rise to the fire of the insight of no self. It is the awakened understanding of no self

that will burn up the match of no self.


To practice is not to store up a lot of ideas about no self, impermanence, nirvana or anything else; that is just the work of a cassette recorder. To speak about and distribute ideas is not the study or practice of Buddhism. We can go to a university to study Buddhism, but we will learn only theories and ideas. We want to go beyond ideas to have real insight, which will burn up all our ideas and help us to be free. 



Image by Jason O'Halloran

Where is nirvana?

Look at a quarter. One side of it is called heads, the other side is called tails; they cannot exist without each other. The metal from which they are made contains them both. Without the metal the two sides would not exist. The three elements, heads, tails and metal, inter-are. The metal we could describe as something like nirvana, and the heads and tails as something like the manifestation of impermanence and no self.

Through the appearance of either the tails or the heads, you can touch and recognize the presence of the metal. Similarly by looking deeply into the nature of impermanence and no self, you can also touch the nature of nirvana.

The ultimate dimension of nirvana cannot be separated from the historical dimension. When you touch deeply the historical dimension, you also touch the ultimate dimension. The ultimate dimension is always in you. For a practitioner it's very important to touch his or her own nature of impermanence and non-self. If he is successful he will touch the nature of nirvana and attain non-fear. Now he can ride on the waves of birth and death, smiling serenely.

This is an extract from Thay's book *No Death, No Fear* [Online source](#)

A finger pointing at the moon

Recently, I came across someone who was very angry at religion. I do not know the details or the reason for his anger. But, it was intense and heartfelt. He said he wants nothing more do with religion of any form. Like many folk, this young man was seeking truth and had looked to religion to provide it. Religion had failed him. Religion had promised much, yet failed to deliver. It is not an uncommon experience.

Perhaps we expect too much from religion. After all, religion is merely a sign pointing away from itself toward a greater reality. Our trouble arises when we mistake the sign for the thing signified.

There is a beautiful little Zen story that many find helpful:

The nun Wu Jincang asked the Sixth Patriarch Huineng, "I have studied the Mahaparinirvana sutra for many years, yet there are many areas I do not quite understand. Please enlighten me." 🧘

The patriarch responded, "I am illiterate. Please read out the characters to me and perhaps I will be able to explain the meaning." Said the nun, "You cannot even recognize the characters. How are you able then to understand the meaning?"

"Truth has nothing to do with words. Truth can be likened to the bright moon in the sky. Words, in this case, can be likened to a finger. The finger can point to the moon's location. However, the finger is not the moon. To look at the moon, it is necessary to gaze beyond the finger, right?*"

Religion, like words, is merely a finger. If I could talk to my young friend I would sympathize with him and tell him I have often shared his disappointment with religion. Yet, religion isn't "it." Religion will always disappoint if we mistake it for Reality. It doesn't help that religion often makes a claim to be truth. It is an arrogant claim that has caused a great deal of suffering.

The mystics have told us that once we know Reality we can dispense with the sign. I long for the day. As it is, I suspect most of us still need the sign to point us in the right direction. But, let's keep the sign in its place! 🧘

Andy Fitz-Gibbon, Abbot of the Lindisfarne Community Ithaca, NY

Online source

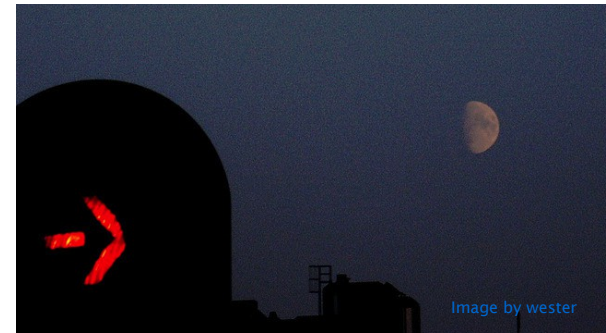


Image by wester

The truth in silence

There are two kinds of truth, conventional truth and absolute truth, but they are not opposites. They are part of a continuum. There is a classic Buddhist gatha:

All formations are impermanent.
They are subject to birth and death.
But remove the notions of birth and death,
and this silence is called great joy.

This beautiful poem has only twenty-six words, but it sums up all of the Buddha's teaching. It is one of greatest poems of humanity. If you are a composer, please put it to music and make it into a song. The last two lines should sound like thundering silence, the silencing of all speculation, of all philosophies, of all notions and ideas. 🧘

The gatha begins in the realm of conventional truth and ends in the realm of absolute truth. The first line describes reality as we usually perceive it. "All formations are impermanent." This is something concrete that we notice as soon as we start paying attention. The five elements that make up our sense of personhood—form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness—all are flowing and changing day and night. We can feel their impermanence and so we are tempted to say that the first two lines of this gatha are true.

But the danger of this statement is that we may believe that formations are real and impermanence is an absolute truth. And we may use that kind of truth as a weapon in order to fight against those who don't agree with our ideas. "Formations" is a notion, an idea. "Impermanence" is another notion. Neither is more true than the other. When you say, "All formations are impermanent," you are indirectly confirming their permanence. When you confirm the existence of something, you are also implying the existence of its opposite.



Image by AI_HikesAZ

When you say the right exists, you have to accept the existence of the left. When you confirm that something is "high," you're saying something else is "low." Impermanence becomes a notion that opposes the notion of permanence. So though perhaps it tried to escape, the first two lines of the gatha are still in the realm of conventional, relative truth. 🧘

To reach the absolute truth, the ultimate truth, you need to release the conventional truth found there. There's a Chinese term that means halfway truths and another that means all-the-way, hitting-the-bottom truths. The first two lines are a halfway truth and the third and fourth lines try to remove what we learned in the first two.

When the notions are removed, then the perfect silence, the extinction of all notions, the destruction of all pairs of opposites, is called great joy. That is the teaching of absolute truth, of nirvana. What does nirvana mean? It is absolute happiness. It's not a place you can go; it's a fruit that you can have wherever you are. It's already inside us. The wave doesn't have to seek out the water. Water is what the wave has to realize as her own foundation of being. 🧘

Thich Nhat Hanh
[Online source](#)

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 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://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/Thich%20Nhat%20Hanh%20-%20No%20Death,%20No%20Fear.pdf>

<http://lindisfarnecommunity.blogspot.com.au/2009/05/finger-pointing-at-moon.html>

<http://www.lionsroar.com/this-silence-is-called-great-joy-a-teaching-by-thich-nhat-hanh/>