



THE LOTUS BUD

Magazine of Mindful Living ~ Issue No 80, May 2016

Dear Sangha,

Human beings live within maps of meaning of their own making. These maps-our language and culture- are useful tools in guiding us around the world and we would be hard pressed to do without them, indeed, they constitute we think we are. However, these maps can also lead us to take wrong turns, especially when we mistake the map for an independent reality. Buddhism teaches us to question our perceptions and to try to approach each new situation with a clean fresh mind uncluttered by our habits and prejudices. 🙏

Chris / True Dwelling of the Mind

Don't always trust your perceptions

Near the mountain, there is a lake with clear, still water reflecting the mountain and the sky with pristine clarity. You can do the same. If you are calm and still enough, you can reflect the mountain, the blue sky, and the moon exactly as they are. You reflect whatever you see exactly as it is, without distorting anything.

Have you ever seen yourself in a mirror that distorts the image? Your face is long, your eyes are huge, and your legs are really short. Don't be like that mirror. It is better to be like the still water on the mountain lake.

We often do not reflect things clearly, and we suffer because of our wrong perceptions. Suppose you are walking in the twilight and see a snake. You scream and run into the house to get your friends, and all of you run outside with a flashlight. But when you shine your light

on the snake, you discover that it isn't a snake at all, just a piece of rope. This is a distorted perception. 🙏

When we see things or listen to other people, we often don't see clearly or really listen. We see and hear our projections and our prejudices. We are not clear enough, and we have a wrong perception. Even if our friend is giving us a compliment, we may argue with him because we distort what he says.

If we are not calm, if we only listen to our hopes or our anger, we will not be able to receive the truth that is trying to reflect itself on our lake. We need to make our water still if we want to receive reality as it is. If you feel agitated, don't do or say anything. Just breathe in and out until you are calm enough. Then ask your friend to repeat what he has said. This will avoid a lot of damage. Stillness is the foundation of understanding and insight. Stillness is strength. 🙏

Thich Nhat Hanh [Online source](#)

The zen of not knowing

Beginner's mind is Zen practice in action. It is the mind that is innocent of preconceptions and expectations, judgments and prejudices. Beginner's mind is just present to explore and observe and see "things as they are." I think of beginner's mind as the mind that faces life like a small child, full of curiosity and wonder and amazement. "I wonder what this is? I wonder what that is? I wonder what this means?" Without approaching things with a fixed point of view or a prior judgment, just asking "What is it?"

I was having lunch with Indigo, a small child, at City Center [a Soto Zen practice center in San Francisco]. He saw an object on the table and got very interested in it. He picked it up and started fooling with it: looking at it, putting it in his mouth, and banging on the table with it—just engaging with it without any previous idea of what it was. For Indigo, it was just an interesting thing, and it was a delight to him to see what he could do with this thing. You and I would see it and say, "It's a spoon. It sits there and you use it for soup." It doesn't have all the possibilities that he finds in it. 🍵

Watching Indigo, you can see the innocence of "What is it?"

Can we look at our lives in such a way? Can we look at all of the aspects of our lives with this mind, just open to seeing what there is to see? I don't know about you, but I have a hard time doing that. I have a lot of habits of mind—I think most of us do. Children begin to lose that innocent quality after a while, and soon they want to be "the one who knows."

We all want to be the one who knows. But if we decide we "know" something, we are not open to other possibilities anymore. And that's a shame. We lose something very vital in our life when it's more important to us to be one who knows than it is to be awake to what's happening. We get disappointed because we expect one thing, and it doesn't happen quite like that. Or we think something ought to be like this, and it turns out different. Instead of saying, "Oh, isn't that interesting," we say, "Yuck, not what I thought it would be." Pity. The very nature of beginner's mind

is not knowing in a certain way, not being an expert. 🍵

As Suzuki Roshi said in the prologue to *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's there are few." As an expert, you've already got it figured out, so you don't need to pay attention to what's happening. Pity. How can we cultivate this mind that is free to just be awake? In zazen, in just sitting, in sitting and noticing the busyness of our mind and all of the fixed views that we carry. Once we notice the fixed views



Image by Jay

that we are carrying around with us, the preconceptions that we are carrying around with us, then it is possible for us to let them go and say, “Well, maybe so, maybe not.” Suzuki Roshi once said, “The essence of Zen is ‘Not always so.’” Not always so. It’s a good little phrase to carry around when you’re sure. It gives you an opportunity to look again more carefully and see what other possibilities there might be in the situation.

I don’t know about you, but when I started to sit, I really began to see how many fixed ideas and fixed views I had. How much judgment was ready right on the tip of my tongue. How much expectation, how much preconception I was carrying around with me all the time, and how much it got in the way of actually noticing what was happening. I don’t want to tell you that after years I’m free of all that, but at least I notice it sooner, and I sometimes don’t get caught in believing it. 🧘

First, before you can let go of preconceptions and expectations and prejudices, you have to notice them; otherwise, they’re just carrying on unconsciously and affecting everything you do. But as you sit, you begin to recognize the really persistent ones: “Oh my gosh . . . you again! Didn’t I just deal with you yesterday?” And again. And again. Pretty soon, you can’t take them seriously. They just keep popping up and popping up and popping up, and after a while you become really familiar with them. And you can’t get so buried under something once you realize that it’s just a habitual state of mind and doesn’t have much to do with

what’s right in front of you. It’s just something that you haul around with you all the time and bring out for every occasion. It hasn’t much to do with the present situation. Sometimes you can actually say, “Oh, I think I’m just hauling that around with me. I don’t think it has anything to do with this.”

In her poem “When Death Comes,” Mary Oliver has a few lines that say, “When it’s over, I want to say: all my life / I was a bride married to amazement. / I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.” 🧘

This is beginner’s mind: “I’ve been a bride married to amazement.” Just how amazing the world is, how amazing our life is. How amazing that the sun comes up in the morning or that the wisteria blooms in the spring. “A bride married to amazement, . . . the bridegroom taking the world into my arms.” Can you live your life with that kind of wholeheartedness, with that kind of thoroughness? This is the beginner’s mind that Suzuki Roshi is pointing to, is encouraging us to cultivate. He is encouraging us to see where we are stuck with fixed views and see if we can, as Kosho Uchiyama Roshi says, “open the



Image by AI_hikesAZ

hand of thought” and let the fixed view go. This is our effort. This is our work. Just to be here, ready to meet whatever is next without expectation or prejudice or preconceptions. Just “What is it? What is this, I wonder?”

So please, cultivate your beginner’s mind. Be willing not to be an expert. Be willing not to know. Not knowing is nearest. Not knowing is most intimate. 🧘

Seeds of a Boundless Life by Zenkei Blanche Hartman, © 2015 by Zenkei Blanche Hartman. Shambhala Publications [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
streammpc@gmail.com
www.plumvillageasia.org
0431 470 172

Online sources for articles in this Issue

<http://www.lionsroar.com/dont-always-trust-your-perceptions/>

<http://www.tricycle.com/blog/zen-not-knowing>