

THICH NHAT HANH

ZEN

AND THE

ART OF

SAVING

THE

PLANET

**'The monk who taught
the world mindfulness'**

TIME

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About the Author

Born in Hue, Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist Zen Master, poet, scholar and human rights activist. In 1967, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Martin Luther King. He founded the Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon, the School of Youth and Social Service and the Plum Village Buddhist community and meditation centre in France, where he lived for many years. He is the author of many acclaimed books including *Peace is Every Step*, *Old Path White Clouds* and *Fear*, which have sold millions of copies around the world. He lives at the Tu Hieu Temple in Vietnam where he was first ordained when he was sixteen years old.

Preface

Sister True Dedication

Thich Nhat Hanh (or “Thay,” as we call him) is a poet, scholar, peace activist, Zen master—and man of action. He embodies an inspiring, decisive, compassionate, and fearless engagement that springs from a place of serenity and insight. Thay teaches that to practice meditation is “to look deeply into the heart of reality, to see things that others can’t see.” And, as he says, “Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what’s the use of seeing?”

A monk for nearly eighty years, Thay has found remarkable ways to combine his practice of meditation and mindfulness with extraordinary actions for peace and social justice, investing his life energy in training the next generation of engaged Buddhists, and building healthy communities of mindful living that can continue to be catalysts for change in the world.

In the 1960s, Thay created a movement of thousands of young social workers in Vietnam before leaving for the West to call for peace. A leading voice for nonviolent social change, he collaborated with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., with whom he shared a vision for building a “beloved community” that could transcend division, discrimination, and hatred—a community in which true reconciliation can be possible, among all people and among all nations. In the 1970s, together with friends and colleagues, Thay rescued boat people from the high seas off Singapore and initiated one of the very first international environmental conferences in Europe. Over the following decades, Thay created a way of teaching and applying mindfulness in everyday life that could be accessible to millions. He has shared his vision for compassionate leadership with politicians, businesspeople, teachers, activists, and more recently, Silicon Valley CEOs. And from his direct—and often painful—personal experience of unstable and polarized times,

he has developed a simple yet powerful code of global ethics that offers a bright compass to guide our way forward.

In this very moment, we face a potent intersection of crises: ecological destruction, climate breakdown, rising inequality, exploitation, racial injustice, and the lasting impacts of a devastating pandemic. The situation is beyond urgent. In order to face these challenges with the best we've got, we need to find ways to strengthen our clarity, compassion, and courage. Cultivating a strong training in meditation and mindfulness is not an opiate to escape what's going on but a way for us to truly still the mind and look deeply, in order to see ourselves and the world clearly. From this foundation of clarity and insight we'll be able to take the most appropriate, effective action to transform the situation and create a regenerative culture in which all life is respected.

Thay tells us that "the world doesn't need another ideology or doctrine, but the kind of awakening that can restore our spiritual strength." This book, edited by his students, offers his most inspirational and timely teachings for the next generation and his guidance on how we can truly sustain our efforts to help our society and planet *without burning out*. Thay first asked us to begin working on this book almost a decade ago, and we are excited to have finally assembled in one volume his powerful Zen teachings on deep ecology, engaged action, community-building, and collective awakening, drawn from his writing, talks, interviews, and question-and-answer sessions. Thay gives voice to a very practical, everyday ethic that can guide our decisions and actions, transform the everyday habits that hold us back, and help us touch joy and meaning right in the heart of each moment. Thay explains that without such an ethic—without a spiritual dimension to guide our daily lives—we will lose everything.

Before Thay suffered a major stroke in 2014, many of us who lived and trained with him had a chance to experience his guidance directly. He nurtured and challenged us, encouraged and sometimes scolded us. He was tender as a grandfather, fierce as a warrior. There were times he mobilized us to be some of his many arms of engaged action in the world. And, whatever the task, it was always to be done with direct immediacy. (I learned that a young student should never ask

her teacher, “Are you sure?”) In true Zen style, there were moments when Thay declared, “Don’t just *do* something, *sit there!*” At other moments, he’d call our names and send us off from our cushions, out of the meditation hall, to work on something urgent we’d not yet finished. There were days when the action was so pressing he’d remind us, with a gentle smile and a glint in his eye, that “there’s no need to eat lunch. The human body can survive several days without food.” And there were yet other days when, seeing us working so hard we’d forgotten to eat, he quietly went into the kitchen himself to prepare us hot soup for dinner.

It is hard to put into words Thay’s compassion and light and his bright, penetrating gaze. It is hard to express his gentleness and warmth. It is hard to explain how much love and trust he offers unconditionally to all those who consider themselves his students. Thay encourages us to boldly reimagine an entirely new way of living and doing things, and to never be afraid to dream. And he reminds us, no matter what, to always work together, never alone. As companions on the path, we invite you to join us on a journey to the heart of his teachings on Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet.

————— *t.d.

*I have been looking for you, my child,
Since the time when rivers and mountains still lay in
obscurity.
I was looking for you when you were still in a deep
sleep,
Although the conch had many times
Echoed in the ten directions.
From our ancient mountain I looked at distant lands
And recognized your steps on so many different paths.
Where are you going?*

*In former lifetimes you have often taken my hand
And we have enjoyed walking together.
We have sat for long hours at the foot of old pine trees.
We have stood side by side in silence
Listening to the sound of the wind softly calling us
And looking up at the white clouds floating by.
You have picked up and given to me the first red
autumn leaf
And I have taken you through forests deep in snow.
But wherever we go, we always return to our
Ancient mountain to be near to the moon and stars,
To invite the great bell every morning to sound,
And help all beings to wake up.*

FROM "AT THE EDGE OF THE FOREST"
by Thich Nhat Hanh

now
is the time
this is
it

Introduction



The beauty of the Earth is a bell of mindfulness. If you can't see it, you must ask yourself why. Maybe something is blocking the way. Or maybe you are so busy looking for something else you can't hear the call of the Earth.

Mother Earth is saying, "My child, I'm here for you; I'm offering all this for you." It's true: the rays of sunshine, the singing birds, clear streams, the cherry blossom in spring, and the beauty of the four seasons—it's all there for you. And, if you can't see or hear it, it's because your mind is too full.

The Earth is telling you that she is there and that she loves you. Every flower is a smile of the Earth. She's smiling to you, and you don't want to smile back. The fruit in your hand—it might be an orange or a kiwi—is a gift from the Earth. But, if you don't feel thankful, it's because you're not there for the Earth, for life.

An essential condition to hear the call of the Earth and respond to her is silence. If you don't have silence in yourself, you cannot hear her call: the call of life. Your heart is calling you, but you don't hear. You don't have time to listen to your heart.

Mindfulness helps us stop the distraction and come back to our breathing. Paying attention only to the in-breath and out-breath, we stop our thinking and, within just a few seconds, we awaken to the fact that we are alive, we are breathing in, we are here. We exist. We are not non-existent. "Ahhh," we realize. "I am here, alive." We stop thinking about the past, we stop worrying about the future, we focus all our attention on the fact that we are breathing. Thanks to our mindful breathing we set ourselves free. We are free to be here: free from thinking, anxiety, fear, and striving.

When we are free, we can answer the call of the Earth. “I’m here. I’m a child of yours.” We recognize that we are part of the wonder. And we can say, “I’m free: free from everything that is preventing me from being fully alive. And you can count on me.”

When you wake up and you see that the Earth is not just the environment, the Earth *is* us, you touch the nature of interbeing. And at that moment you can have *real* communication with the Earth. That is the highest form of prayer. In that kind of relationship, you will have the love, strength, and awakening you need to change your life.

The truth is that many of us have become alienated from the Earth. We forget that we are alive, here, on a beautiful planet and that our body is a wonder given to us by the Earth and the whole cosmos. If the Earth has been able to offer life it is because she, too, has non-Earth elements in her, including the sun and stars. Humankind is made of stars. The Earth is not only the Earth but the whole cosmos.

Only when you have this right view, this insight, will discrimination no longer be there, and there will be deep communion, deep communication between you and the Earth. All kinds of good things will come from it. You transcend the dualistic way of seeing things: the idea that the Earth is only the environment, and that you are in the center; and that you only want to do something for the Earth so you can survive.

When you breathe in and become aware of your body, and look deeply into your body, and realize that you *are* the Earth, that your consciousness is also the consciousness of the Earth that can become a liberated consciousness, free from all discrimination and wrong views, you are doing what Mother Earth is expecting you to do: to get enlightened, to become a buddha, so you can help all living beings, not only on Earth but even, ultimately, on other planets.

My generation has made many mistakes. We borrowed this planet from you, and we’ve done it great harm and destruction. Giving it to you now, we’re ashamed. It’s not as we would wish it to be. You are receiving a beautiful planet that is damaged and wounded. We are sorry. As someone belonging to the older generation, I hope the young generation can step up as soon as possible. This planet belongs to you, to future generations. Your destiny and the destiny of the planet are in your hands.

Our civilization is a civilization of borrowing. Whenever we want something we can't afford, like a house or a car, we count on our body and our labor in the future to pay back the debt. We borrow and borrow without knowing if we can ever pay back. In this way, we have borrowed from ourselves, from our health, and from the planet. But the planet can't take it anymore. And we have borrowed too much from you, our children and grandchildren. The planet and future generations are also us; we are not separate. The planet is us, and you are also us. The truth is there is not much of ourselves left.

It is very important to wake up and see that we don't *need* to borrow anymore. What is available in the here and now is *already* sufficient for us to be nourished, to be happy. And that is the miracle of mindfulness, concentration, and insight: realizing we can be happy with the conditions that are already available, that we don't need to strive to get more, exploiting the planet as we do so. We don't need to "borrow" anything. Only with this kind of awakening can we stop the destruction.

It's not something that can be done individually. We have to wake up together. And, if we wake up together, then we have a chance. Our way of living our life and planning our future has led us into this situation. And now we need to look deeply to find a way out, not only as individuals but as a collective, a species. You can no longer count on the elder generation alone. I have often said that one buddha is not enough; we need a collective awakening. All of us have to become buddhas in order for our planet to have a chance.

Be
Still
and
See



Part 1



RADICAL INSIGHT A NEW WAY OF SEEING

Are You Sitting Comfortably?

Sister True Dedication (—T.D.)

Thay is blazingly clear: there's one thing we have the power to change, which will make all the difference, and that is our mind. Our mind is the instrument with which we engage and interact with the world; it holds our despair and fears, our hopes and dreams. Our mind's way of seeing determines the decisions and actions we take or avoid, how we relate to those we love or oppose, and how we respond in a crisis. In Buddhism we often say that with our mind we create the world. Our perceptions are conditioned by language and culture and by society's tendency to put reality into boxes and categories that simply don't fit. These discriminating labels limit our clarity and our action to protect the planet and prevent us from living in harmony with each other and with the world.

We may want the world to wake up and act. But what kind of awakening would actually be helpful? What do we need to wake up *to*?

Buddhism speaks of two levels of truth: the level of labels and appearances, often called "conventional truth," and the deeper level of reality, known as the "ultimate truth." Thay teaches us that, if we're going to help our society and planet, we need to wake up to what's going on at both levels of truth.

In many talks in Plum Village, the international practice center and monastery that Thay founded in southwest France, Thay taught us one of the most ancient and powerful texts in Zen Buddhism, the Diamond Sutra. It is the world's first treatise on deep ecology and a treasure of humanity's shared wisdom heritage. The sutra originated in the northeast of the Indian subcontinent, sometime between the second and fifth centuries. There's even a ninth-century scroll of the Diamond Sutra, printed on paper from mulberry bark and hemp, found in the remote Dunhuang caves, where the old Silk Road entered western China. It is the world's oldest dated printed book. On a

teaching tour to London a few years ago, Thay took a few dozen of us with him to see the scroll at the British Museum. Our times make it possible for wisdom to transcend geography and generations.

As you'll discover in the following pages, the Diamond Sutra proposes a deep contemplation to give us a breakthrough in our way of seeing the world. It offers a four-part meditation to cut through the stories we tell about what life is and isn't in order to help us get closer to the deeper level of reality as it truly is. It's known as the Vajracchedika Sutra—the “thunderbolt” or “diamond” that “cuts through illusion.” Applying the teachings of the Diamond Sutra can give us a vast source of energy and clarity to take the right kind of action.

It's unbelievably hard to stop and step back. It may even be scary. The fact is, it's rare to get a chance to challenge the deeply held beliefs society imprints on us. For that reason, you may like to read the following pages slowly, taking time to see how these insights may apply directly to your own life. You may like to go for a walk to create space to contemplate these ideas, or to take some notes in a journal as you go along. Thay always says, as the Buddha did, “Whatever you do, don't just take my word for it. Put it into practice and see for yourself.”

Ready for some truth-telling?

*t.d.

Spring Thunder

Many of us are barely awake. We're living in the world, but we can't really see it; it's as though we're sleepwalking. To wake up first of all is to wake up to the beauty of the Earth. You wake up to the fact that you have a body and that your body is made of the Earth and sun and stars. You wake up to the fact that the sky is beautiful and that our planet is a jewel of the cosmos. You have an opportunity to be a child of the Earth and to make steps on this extraordinary planet.

Second, to wake up means to wake up to the suffering in the world. You wake up to the fact that the Earth is in danger and living species are in danger. You want to find ways to bring relief, healing, and transformation. This requires a tremendous source of energy. If you have a strong desire in you, a mind of love, that is the kind of energy that will help you do these two things: wake up to the beauties of the planet to heal yourself and wake up to the suffering of the world and try to help. If you have that source of strength in you, if you have that mind of love, you are what can be called *a buddha in action*.

If you see the suffering in the world but you haven't changed your way of living yet, it means the awakening isn't strong enough. You haven't really woken up. In Zen, sometimes a teacher will shout, or hit you, so you can wake up—they'll do whatever it takes. The Zen master's shout is like a crash of spring thunder. It wakes you up and, with the rains that follow, grasses and flowers will bloom.

We need a *real* awakening, a real enlightenment. New laws and policies are not enough. We need to change our way of thinking and seeing things. This is possible; the truth is that we have not really tried to do it yet. Each one of us has to do it for ourselves. No one else can do it for you. If you are an activist and you're eager to do something, you should begin with yourself and your own mind.

It's my conviction that we cannot change the world if we're not able to change our way of thinking, our consciousness.

breakthrough and begin to see the true nature of what is there. It may be a cloud, a pebble, or another human being, or it may be your anger or even your body. And so, the practice of Zen, dhyāna, meditation, is to be fully present and look deeply.

Buddhism in Vietnam began with the meditation tradition. In the beginning of the third century there was a merchant from Sogdia in central Asia who traveled to what is today northern Vietnam, perhaps along what's called the Maritime Silk Road. He stayed there to do business and waited until the winds were favorable to sail back to India. This young merchant found Vietnam very pleasant, so he settled there and married a Vietnamese young lady. They had a little boy, half Indian and half Vietnamese, who would go on to become the first teacher of Buddhist meditation in Vietnam and China: Master Tang Hoi.

When Tang Hoi was ten years old, his father and mother passed away, and he was taken in by an Indian Buddhist temple, in what is now northern Vietnam, to train to be a monk. The temples had been established by Indian monks in the ports and centers of trade for the Indian merchants staying for extended periods. By the third century, Buddhism was flourishing, and as a young monk Tang Hoi studied both Sanskrit and Chinese. He established a community and taught in Vietnam before heading north across the border into the Wu Kingdom (now China) to share the practice of Buddhist meditation.

It is recorded that, when Tang Hoi came to the Wu Kingdom, there were not yet any Buddhist monks; he was the first. He set up a little hut and practiced walking meditation, and word of his presence began to spread. He was summoned by the king, who was very impressed and, around the middle of the third century, allowed Tang Hoi to build the first Buddhist temple in the Wu Kingdom. It became known as "The First-Built Temple," and, if you go to Nanking today, you can still see its ruins. There, Tang Hoi began to teach meditation and organized ceremonies to ordain the first Buddhist monks in China, about three hundred years before Bodhidharma.

Many people think of Bodhidharma as the first teacher of Zen Buddhism in China, but it's not true. Three centuries earlier, Tang Hoi was already teaching there. He is truly the first Zen master of Vietnam and China. And, while Bodhidharma did not leave behind any writings, Tang Hoi left behind many works that

are still preserved, including precious translations and commentaries. He translated and taught the Diamond Sutra, one of the most beloved scriptures in the Zen tradition and the earliest text to explore deep ecology.

When we hear about the Diamond Sutra, we can imagine a Zen monk like Master Tang Hoi walking with a staff and carrying an old scroll in his bag.

Diamond Breakthrough

In the Diamond Sutra the meditator is urged to *throw away*, to release, four notions in order to understand our own true nature and the true nature of reality: the notion of “self,” the notion of “human being,” the notion of “living beings,” and the notion of “life span.” In the sutra it says that, if you are still caught in these notions, you are not yet free and you cannot be a real bodhisattva, an awakened being helping to relieve suffering in the world. But, if you can break through these ideas, you’ll have the insight, understanding, and freedom you need to help save the planet.

It takes insight and courage to throw away an idea. If we have suffered deeply, it may be because we held on to an idea we weren’t able to release. Throwing away is a very strong term. It’s not just “letting go.” All those centuries ago, it was Master Tang Hoi who used the term “throw away” to translate the Pali term *patinissagga*.

The purpose of looking deeply and meditating is to get insight, and insight is something we have to experience *for ourselves*. So, we shouldn’t waste time accumulating new ideas and knowledge; we have to learn in such a way that helps us overcome our real challenges and obstacles. The aim of a Zen master is to help students to transform; it’s not to transmit knowledge or views. A Zen master is not a professor.

My tradition belongs to the lineage of the ninth-century Zen master Linji. He said, “My aim is not to give you knowledge. My aim is to help you break free from your views.” Understanding should not be only empty knowledge, but deep insight. Insight is not the outcome of thinking. Insight is a kind of direct intuitive vision that you get from strong concentration. It’s not a product

of thinking. It is a deep intuition. And, if it is a real insight, it will have the power to free you from your anger, your fear, your suffering.

Being able to see just once in a lifetime is no small accomplishment. If you've seen once, you can see again. The question is whether you have the determination and diligence.

You Are More than You Think

The first notion you must throw away is the notion of self. This is a very deep-rooted belief in every human being: that there is a self, separated from the rest of the world; that we're ourselves, and everyone and everything else, including the Earth, is not "us." We're born with this strong belief that we're separate: "I am not you. That is your problem; it's not my problem." Intellectually, we may know that nothing can exist by itself alone, but in reality, we still *believe* things can, and still behave as if we're a separate self-entity. This is the base of our thinking and behavior, and it creates a lot of suffering. It takes intensive training to throw this notion away.

In fact, there is no one, no self, there. There is thinking; there is reflection. But there's not a person behind it. When Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am," he was saying that, during the time he's thinking, he is the thinking. The Buddha said that there is thinking going on but that it's not certain there's an "I" behind the thinking. The thinking is going on; that is something we acknowledge. But can we say there's a thinker? If there's a painful feeling, we can say for sure that there is a painful feeling going on. But, as for the person who is the feeler, that's not so sure. It's similar to saying "it's raining." The rain is something certain; it is raining, but there is no rainer. You don't need a rainer for the rain to be possible. And you don't need a thinker for the thinking to be possible. You don't need a feeler for feeling to be possible. That is the teaching of non-self.

In the idea of "self," there is the idea that I am this body, this body is me; or this body is mine, it belongs to me. But this notion does not correspond to reality. When you look deeply into your body, you see that your body is a stream. You can see your parents and ancestors there in that stream. So, the stream is

there, but it's not sure that there is someone called "myself." And, in that stream, you can see ancestors and everything—not only human ancestors, but animal, plant, and mineral ancestors. There's a continuum. Whether there is a person, an actor, behind it is not so sure.

A better statement would be "I *inter-am*." It's closer to the truth in the light of interconnectedness, interbeing. If father and son, mother and daughter, have the insight of no-self, they can look at each other in the light of interbeing and there'd be no more problems. We inter-are. I *am* like this because you *are* like that.

It is very important to throw away the notion "I am" because it does not reflect the true nature of reality.

The notion of a separate self is like a tunnel that you keep going into. When you practice meditation, you can see that there is the breathing but no breather can be found anywhere; there is the sitting but no sitter can be found anywhere. When you see that, the tunnel will vanish, and there will be a lot of space, a lot of freedom.

Who Am I?

I am the continuation of my parents. I am the continuation of my ancestors. This is very clear. I do not have a separate self. Looking into myself, I can see my father, my mother in every cell of my body. I can see my ancestors in every cell of my body. I can see my country, my people, in every cell of my body. I can see that I am made of many elements that can be described as non-me elements. I am made of non-me elements and, when these elements come together, they produce me. So, I am that. I do not have a separate existence. I do not have a separate self.

This is right view. Seeing reality in this way you are no longer lonely because you *are* the cosmos. You have this body, but you also have a cosmic body. The whole cosmos can be found in you. You have a cosmic body right here and right now, and you can talk to the cosmos in you. You can talk to your father in you, your mother in you, your ancestors in you. You are made of non-you elements. You are the continuation of parents, ancestors, stars, moon, sun, rivers, mountains. Everything is in you. So, you

can talk to them and you know that you are the world. You are the cosmos. And this can be seen with meditation. When you are concentrated, you begin to see.

Suppose a wave appearing on the ocean asks herself, “Who am I?” If the wave has some time to get in touch with herself, she will find out that she is the ocean. She is a wave, but at the same time, she is the ocean. And she is not only this wave but she is the other waves also. So, she sees the connectedness, the interbeing nature between her and the other waves, and she no longer discriminates between self and not-self. It’s very important that the wave realizes she has a wave body, but she also has her ocean body. When the wave recognizes her ocean body, she loses all kinds of fear and discrimination.

This is the *goodness* of meditation. It can help you touch your roots and free you from discrimination and fear. If you believe that you have a self—separated from your ancestors and the cosmos—you are wrong. There is a *you*, but you are made of non-you elements.

If you live mindfully and with concentration, you will touch more and more deeply the truth that is in you. And one day you will find that you are resting on the ground of the cosmos. In Christianity they speak of “resting in God.” When the wave is resting in the ocean, she’s at peace. When you are resting in your cosmic body, you’re at peace. And, if you practice walking meditation, every step can help you touch that cosmic body, that ocean body, that makes you immortal. You are no longer afraid of dying. But many of us are too busy, and have no time to breathe and to walk in order to get in touch with our cosmic body, our true nature of no-birth and no-death.

Meditation can be very satisfying. You are searching for yourself. You are searching for meaning. And meditation is to have the time to look deeply, to listen deeply. When you do that, you can get in touch with your true nature, and you release all fear and discrimination.

Deep Ecology

The second notion the Diamond Sutra tells us to throw away is the notion of “human being.” We know that *Homo sapiens* is a very

notion of a “living being” as different from a non-living being, or an enlightened, holy being, because that notion creates so much division, discrimination, and suffering. This is the teaching—the revolution—of the Diamond Sutra.

When we look at the Earth in the light of this insight, we don’t see the planet as inert matter but as a sacred reality that we are also a part of. Seeing in this way, our attitude toward the planet will change. We’ll be able to walk with steps of love and respect on the Earth, and we’ll realize our great capacity to help.

Watch Out! Don’t Get Caught

In Zen, there is a koan, a question for contemplation: “Does the dog have buddha-nature?” Not only does the dog have buddha-nature, so does the stone—and the planet. The Earth manifests insight, awakening, happiness, and many other virtues. The Earth is a female buddha, a mother. “Whose mother?” you may ask. The mother of human-form buddhas and non-human-form buddhas. When we are not caught in signs it is easy to recognize the presence of a buddha.

Whenever we use the word “buddha” it is merely a concept of a buddha. Perhaps you have already heard the Zen story about the word “buddha.” A Zen master, while teaching, used the word “buddha,” and as he did so he used it very carefully because the word “buddha” and the idea of “buddha” are tricky. They can become a prison for those listening. People may think they know who or what the buddha is, and they can get imprisoned in that idea.

Using the term “buddha” is very dangerous, just as using the term “God” is also dangerous. So, in order to help his listeners not get caught, the Zen master said, “My friends, I’m forced to use the word ‘buddha.’ I don’t like the word; I’m allergic to it. And every time I use it, I have to go to the river and rinse out my mouth three times.” A very strong teaching. Very Zen. Every one in the audience was silent. But there was one student sitting at the back, and he stood up and said, “Teacher! Every time I hear you say the word I have to go to the river and wash my ears three times!”

We are lucky that there was such a teacher and such a student to help us not get lost or caught in ideas and words.

Mindfulness, concentration, and insight are in us all as potentialities—seeds—and that is our buddha-nature. Everyone has buddha-nature; that is the good news. It's not hope; it is a reality. The root *budh*-in Sanskrit means “to wake up.” If you wake up to the beauties of the planet, you are already a buddha. And, if you know how to keep that spirit of awakening alive all day, you're a full-time buddha. It's not so difficult to be a buddha.

You Are Non-Local

You may believe that you are only this body. But you are much more than this body. To meditate is to see that you are also over there and there and there—everywhere. Your nature is non-local.

Sometimes Zen masters have to make up new words, especially when old words become sick and lose their meaning. One of the terms coined by the ninth-century Zen master Linji is the phrase “true person” (真人 in Chinese; *chân nhân* in Vietnamese). These two words are very important. He said we need to live and practice mindfulness in such a way that we reveal our true person, which cannot be found in space or time. It has no coordinates. Like an electron in physics, it cannot be grasped. Sitting here in this moment, we realize the planet is there, with her mountains, rivers, and sky, and we inter-are with all these elements. The clouds are there in the sky, but they are also in us. The light of the sun is shining out there, but it is also shining in us. Your true person is a person of wonders.

When catastrophes or natural disasters happen and thousands of people die, we may ask ourselves, “How can such a thing happen? Why do some people have to die, and not others? Why do I get to survive?”

I have practiced sitting and looking deeply, and what I saw is that, when they die, we also die with them. Because we inter-are with them. It is like when someone we love dies, a little part of us also dies; somehow, we die with them. Those who die in natural disasters have died for us, and we are alive for them.

EBURY

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