

*The*  
ART  
*of*  
POWER

Thich Nhat Hanh



HarperOne

*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*




Appendix B published with the permission of Yvon Chouinard.

THE ART OF POWER. Copyright © 2007 by Thich Nhat Hanh. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

HarperCollins books may be purchased for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information please write: Special Markets Department, HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

This book was printed on paper containing 15 percent postconsumer and 5 percent preconsumer recycled fiber.

HarperCollins Web site: <http://www.harpercollins.com>  
HarperCollins®, , and HarperOne™  
are trademarks of HarperCollins Publishers.

FIRST HARPERCOLLINS PAPERBACK EDITION PUBLISHED IN 2008

*Designed by Joseph Rutt*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nhát Hanh, Thích.  
The art of power / Thich Nhat Hanh. — 1st ed.  
p. cm.  
1. Spiritual life—Buddhism. 2. Buddhism—Doctrines. I. Title.  
BQ9800.T5392N45425 2007  
294.3'444—dc22  
2007019425  
ISBN 978-0-06-124236-6

08 09 10 11 12 RRD(H) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
Introduction	1
1 True Power	7
2 Handling Power Skillfully	31
3 The Art of Mindfulness	41
4 Getting What We Really Want	65
5 The Secret of Happiness	79
6 Boundless Love	99
7 Being Present at Home and at Work	115
8 Taking Care of Nonbusiness	137
9 Sparking a Collective Awakening	159
<i>Appendix A: Meditations to Cultivate Power</i>	177
<i>Appendix B: Work and Pleasure: The Example of Patagonia</i>	199

## Foreword

In January 2001, I was privileged to accompany Thich Nhat Hanh and his longtime assistant, Sister Chan Khong, to the World Economic Conference, held each year in Davos, Switzerland. Thich Nhat Hanh had been invited along with other prominent religious leaders from around the planet to meet and discuss how spiritual values could be used to help resolve global issues.

Before an estimated thirty heads of state, two hundred of the world's richest men and women, and a few thousand of the most influential movers and shakers alive, Thich Nhat Hanh spoke with love, compassion, and total fearlessness. He was not there to seek support or approval from the great and famous. He was there hoping to awaken in them their best, to help them change the world by touching their own true selves. In a gathering dedicated to wealth, influence, and power in all its fabulous manifestations, he spoke in a soft and quiet voice.

He asked nothing of them, only reminding them to please always remember their common humanity. On its Web site, the World Economic Forum proudly displays the motto "Committed to Improving the State of the World." That day, in Davos, Switzerland, Thich Nhat Hanh asked everyone to adopt the motto "Committed to Improving the State of Every Heart."

Thich Nhat Hanh has spent his life speaking truth to power and truth to the powerless. He is a determined revolutionary—not one who asks us to mount the ramparts in anger, but rather a revolutionary of the human spirit, a revolutionary of understanding and of love. Born in 1926, he grew up in Vietnam, one of the most war-torn countries of the twentieth century. At age sixteen he was ordained as a Buddhist monk. From the beginning he was that rare person who could undertake multiple vocations and excel at all of them. Simultaneously he was a Buddhist monk, scholar, poet, writer, reformer, and social activist. And he did all of this as a young man in a time and place of immeasurable turmoil and suffering. He lived through the invasion of his homeland by the Japanese in 1941, the return of the French at the end of the Second World War, the guerilla war that followed and became what is known in Vietnam as the American war and in the United States as the Vietnam War. As a reformer and activist, he helped found many groundbreaking institutions, including the An Quang Buddhist Institute, which became one of the foremost centers of Buddhist studies in South Vietnam, and the La Boi Press, which established itself as one of the country's most prestigious pub-

lishing houses. He was also a founder of the School of Youth for Social Service, called "the little Peace Corps" by the American press. During the worst years of the war, he and his assistant, Sister Chan Khong, risked their lives along with thousands of other young people, including many Buddhist monks and nuns, by going into the countryside to establish schools and health clinics and to rebuild villages destroyed by the fighting. During this time he was also editor-in-chief of the official publication of the Unified Buddhist Church and the author of numerous books of poetry, Buddhist psychology, and social commentary. In 1966 he traveled to the United States to call for peace. During this trip he spoke to the American public to "describe the aspirations and the agony of the voiceless masses of the Vietnamese people." He also met with many important figures in America, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who nominated him for the 1967 Nobel Peace Prize. In 1969 he led the Buddhist Peace Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks, organized to negotiate an end to the war in Vietnam. In 1973, because of his peace work, he was denied permission to return home. But being exiled did not deter him. Over the past forty years of living in the West, he has established himself as one of the most influential and respected spiritual leaders in the world. He has continued his social activism through the support of over one hundred schools and programs of village improvement in his homeland. He has also continued to be involved with peace and social justice movements around the world, speaking out on issues from AIDS to the Iraq War. With more than one hundred books in print in over thirty languages



and a year-round teaching schedule, his impact continues to grow worldwide. From his hermitage at Plum Village in southwestern France, he guides numerous communities of monks, nuns, and laypersons on five continents. In 2005 he was able to return to his homeland for the first time in thirty-nine years.

In his new work, *The Art of Power*, Thich Nhat Hanh approaches the subject of power from a radically different direction than most philosophers and thinkers in the Western tradition. Beginning about 2,500 years ago in classical Greece, the topic of power and the appropriate use or abuse of power has been a central subject of debate in Western civilization. For millennia, inquiries into the subject of power have focused primarily on the state's monopoly on violence, its proper legal use, and the legitimacy and behavior of those who control it. Over the centuries, innumerable books have been written on the techniques of power, how to gain power, how to use power, and how to hold on to power.

In these pages, however, Thich Nhat Hanh begins his inquiry into power at its very base, its most organic level. He begins with volition, our deepest intention. He explains to us that the ability to attain any goal is absolutely contingent on the condition and quality of our mind. That a wholesome intention combined with a lucid mind is the prerequisite for genuine power. He reminds us of the obvious fact, so long forgotten, that anyone with a clear and caring mind is inherently powerful, no matter how little power she appears to possess. He makes crystal clear that everyone, without exception, at their core being has the deepest intention of love and good-

ness, and he asks, advises, exhorts, and inspires all of us to return to that primal source.

He knows all too well, having personally witnessed war and its immeasurable suffering, people's awful propensity to be corrupted by power. Like the prophet Levi, who came out of the desert to confront King Solomon, he reminds us that all power, especially great power, has within it the seeds of its own destruction. And that all the power you possess, no matter how great, is useless if it does not bring you joy and does not bring peace and happiness to those you love. He asks us how we can make the claim to be powerful when we are not free from the oppression of our anger or the scourge of our fear. He challenges us to realize that genuine power comes only with a clear mind and a calm heart, and that when we are not in control of our own thoughts we are actually quite powerless, nothing more than slaves to our fears, emotions, and craving. When this happens, it is not we who possess power; it is power that possesses us. He states boldly that every person is born with the capacity to be free of fear, delusion, and tyranny, whether external or, just as important, internal. To him both the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of our own mental anguish and its terrible effects are surmountable. He tells us that the surest way to deal with the age-old problem of the corrosive nature of state power is to create a society of insightful and healthy minds, a citizenry that is strong, happy, and free—especially free from the fear of not having power and the fear of losing power. In this book, Thich Nhat Hanh, as he begins his ninth decade, shows us the way out of the crippling paradox of

corrupt power and powerlessness and points us in the direction of authentic power. He continues to walk his talk and to tell us, "I have done it, you can do it, and my friends, we can all do it." He asks us to have the courage to begin with ourselves as we express our compassion and determination to heal the world.

—Pritam Singh

## THE ART OF POWER

## Introduction

What does power mean to us? Why are most people willing to do almost anything to get it? Even if we are not aware of it, most of us seek to be in positions of power because we believe this will enable us to control our life situations. We believe power will get us what we most want: freedom and happiness.

Our society is founded on a very limited definition of power, namely wealth, professional success, fame, physical strength, military might, and political control. My dear friends, I suggest that there is another kind of power, a greater power: the power to be happy right in the present moment, free from addiction, fear, despair, discrimination, anger, and ignorance. This power is the birthright of every human being, whether celebrated or unknown, rich or poor, strong or weak. Let's explore this extraordinary kind of power.

All of us want to be powerful and successful. But if our drive to get and maintain power drains us and strains our relationships,

we never truly enjoy our professional or material success and it's simply not worth it. Living our life deeply and with happiness, having time to care for our loved ones—this is another kind of success, another kind of power, and it is much more important. There is only one kind of success that really matters: the success of transforming ourselves, transforming our afflictions, fear, and anger. This is the kind of success, the kind of power, that will benefit us and others without causing any damage.

Wanting power, fame, and wealth is not a bad thing, but we should know that we seek these things because we want to be happy. If you are rich and powerful but unhappy, what's the point of being rich and powerful? We can use the simple, concrete, and effective practices offered in this book to cultivate real power—the freedom, security, and happiness we all want right here, right now. This is for us, our families, our communities, our society, and our planet.

The ambition to grow our understanding and compassion and to help the world is a wonderful energy that gives our lives genuine purpose. Many great teachers before us—Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, and Moses—also had this ambition. Today we experience the same profound desire as they did: to embody peace, relieve suffering, and help people. We have seen that one person can bring liberation and healing to thousands, even millions of people. Each one of us, whether a factory worker, a politician, a waitress, a businessperson, an entertainer, or a father coaching a soccer game, shares this deep desire. But it is important to remember that to realize this

wonderful ambition we must first take care of ourselves. To bring happiness to others, we must *be happiness*. And this is why we always train ourselves to first take care of our own bodies and minds. Only when we are solid can we be our best and take good care of our loved ones.

When we live without awareness, without the ability to truly see the world around us, our life is often like a runaway train. This is especially true in our professional life. If we are consumed by our jobs, we can't stop running. When we suffer in our personal lives, our professional lives also suffer. When we suffer in our professional lives, our personal lives also suffer. Heavy workloads, unrealistic deadlines, difficult working conditions, constant stress, the fear of being fired—these all cause suffering at work, which then spills into the rest of our lives. And no one, it seems, can help us. But it doesn't have to be that way. By cultivating our spiritual or true power and bringing mindfulness to our daily interactions, we can completely change the quality of our work as well as our work lives.

Mindfulness is being fully present in the here and now, being in touch with what is going on inside us and around us. Using the simple practices that follow to train our minds and focus our attention, we become not only more efficient and effective but also more relaxed and energized. *We already have enough time* to be attentive to all the people and things that are most important to us, and we can live each moment to the fullest, knowing it is a wonderful moment, the only moment we really have.

By focusing on our spiritual power, we can change our bottom line from pure profit to one that includes compassion. We don't need to get rid of profit. Compassion can bring financial and political success. I believe it is simply good business to include in our definition of the bottom line a consideration of all the effects we have on one another and on the planet. Businesses that intelligently combine profit making with integrity and concern for the world have happier employees and more satisfied customers, while making more money. Every year, *Fortune* magazine lists the one hundred best companies to work for. These companies are successful in every way. And every year, these companies share a commitment to health care, childcare, fair vacation time, respect for the environment, and profit sharing. Those admired companies understand that spending money, time, and energy caring for the physical and mental well-being of their employees and the larger community is vital to the health of their business, and more profitable.

Most politicians, and many businesses, from the pharmaceutical industry to multimedia technology development, started out with some intention of relieving people's suffering. We have to keep that intention, that ambition, alive. When financial profit overrides all other motivation, we self-destruct. The wave of corporate fraud that drowned Enron, Tyco, and WorldCom reminds us of this. That is why it is important that we conduct our professional life with compassion, with kindness. Without compassion, you can't be happy, no matter how rich you are. You become isolated and trapped within your own world, unable to relate to people or understand them.

Running after profit at the expense of compassion hurts you as much as it hurts other people.

When you look deeply, you see the pain and suffering in the world, and recognize your deep desire to relieve it. You also recognize that bringing joy to others is the greatest joy you can have, the greatest achievement. In choosing to cultivate true power, you do not have to give up your desire for the good life. Your life can be more satisfying, and you will be happy and relaxed, relieving suffering and bringing happiness to everyone.

## True Power

Frederick was by conventional standards a powerful man. He was a financially successful executive who prided himself on his high ideals. Yet he was unable to really be there for himself, his wife, Claudia, or their two young sons. He was filled with an energy that always pushed him to do more, be better, and focus on the future. When his youngest son came to him, smiling, to show him a picture he had drawn, Frederick was so absorbed in his thoughts and worries about his work that he didn't really see his son as precious, a miracle of life. When he came home from work and hugged Claudia, he wasn't fully present. He tried, but he wasn't really there. Claudia and the children felt his absence.

At first, Claudia had supported Frederick and his career completely. She was proud to be his wife, and she took a lot of pleasure in organizing receptions and other social events. Like him, she was committed to the idea that getting ahead, having

a bigger salary and a larger home, would increase their happiness. She listened to him to understand his difficulties. Sometimes they would stay up very late at night and talk about his concerns. They were together, but the focus of their attention and concentration wasn't themselves, their lives, their happiness, or the happiness of their children. The focus of their conversations was business, the difficulties and obstacles he encountered at work and his fear and uncertainty.

Claudia did her best to be supportive of her husband, but eventually she became exhausted and overwhelmed by his continuing stress and distraction. He didn't have time for himself, let alone for his wife and two children. He wanted to be with them, but he believed he couldn't afford to take the time. He didn't have time to breathe, to look at the moon, or to enjoy his steps. Although he was supposedly the boss, his craving to get ahead was the real boss, demanding one hundred percent of his time and attention.

Claudia was lonely. She wasn't really seen by her husband. She took care of the family and the house, did charitable work as a volunteer, and spent time with her friends. She went to graduate school and then started working as a psychotherapist. Although she found meaning in these activities, she still felt unsupported in her marriage. His sons wondered why their father was gone so much. They missed him and often asked for him.

When Frederick and Claudia's older son, Philip, had to go to the hospital for open-heart surgery, Claudia spent more than seven hours alone with Philip because Frederick couldn't get

away from his business. Even when Claudia went into the hospital for her own surgery, to remove a benign tumor, Frederick didn't come.

Yet Frederick believed that he was doing the right thing by working so hard, that he was doing it for his family and for the people he worked with, who depended on him. He felt responsible for fulfilling his duties at work, and his work gave him a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. But he was also driven by a strong feeling of pride. He was proud of being successful, of being able to make important decisions, and of having a high income.

Claudia regularly asked Frederick to slow down, to take time off for himself and his family, and to enjoy life. She told him she felt he'd become enslaved by his work. It was true. They had a beautiful home with a lush, green garden in a nice neighborhood. Frederick loved gardening, but he wasn't home enough to spend time in the yard. Frederick always responded to Claudia's requests by saying that he enjoyed his work, and his business couldn't get by without him. He often told her that in a few years, after he retired, he would have plenty of time for himself, her, and their sons.

At fifty-one, Frederick was killed instantly in a car accident. He never had a chance to retire. He thought he was irreplaceable, but it took his company only three days to fill his position.

I met Claudia at a mindfulness retreat, and she told me her husband's story. Although they lacked nothing in terms of fame, success, and wealth, they were not happy. Yet many of us



beginning, Frederick loved his wife, he loved his children, and he started his business with that love. But he betrayed himself by allowing his desire to succeed to take precedence over his need to love. If you look back at yourself and see that your aspiration for success is greater than your wish to love and take care of your loved ones, you know you have begun to follow Frederick.

In Buddhism, we see power differently from the way most of the world views it. Buddhists are as concerned with power as anyone else, but we are interested in the kind of power that brings happiness and not suffering.

Usually people chase financial and political power. Many people believe that if they attain these kinds of power, they can do a lot of things and make themselves happy. But if we look deeply, we see that people who are running after power suffer greatly. We suffer first in the chase, because so many people are struggling for the same thing. We believe that the power we are searching for is scarce and elusive and available only at the expense of someone else. But even if we achieve power, we never feel powerful enough. I have met people who are rich, with lots of power and fame. But they are not always happy, and some even commit suicide. So money, fame, and power can all contribute somewhat to your happiness, but if you lack love, even if you have a lot of money, fame, and power, you can't be entirely happy.

Who has more power than the president of the United States? President George W. Bush is the commander in chief of the most powerful army in the world, the leader of the stron-

gest and richest nation in the world. Not many people have that kind of power. But this does not mean that the president is a happy person. Even with all these so-called powers, I believe he still feels powerless and suffers deeply. He is caught in a dilemma: to continue or not to continue in Iraq? Continuing with the war is difficult, and not continuing is also difficult. It's like when you eat something and it gets stuck in your throat. You cannot spit it out and you cannot swallow it. I don't think President Bush sleeps well. How can you sleep well when your young people are dying every day and every night in Iraq? How can you avoid nightmares when hundreds of thousands of people are dying because of your policy? You are very lucky you are not the president of the United States; if you were, you'd be suffering a lot right now. It is very clear that if political leaders do not have compassion and understanding as their foundation, they will misuse their power and make their own country suffer, and make other countries suffer.

Several years ago, the chief executive of one of the largest corporations in America came to the Green Mountain Dharma Center in Vermont to practice for two days with me and some monks and nuns. I was in the meditation hall leading a guided meditation one morning when I saw him sitting there. Later he talked to us about the life of a billionaire. They have a lot of suffering, worries, and doubt. They think everyone comes to them for money, to take advantage of them, and they have no friends. This man had a lot of political clout and financial resources, but he had come to learn to cultivate spiritual power. I had the opportunity to share with him some teachings on how



to keep calm, breathe, and walk. He participated in sitting meditation, walking meditation, and eating meditation. He washed his own dishes after breakfast. I think he had a bodyguard that he did not allow to accompany him to the monastery. I gave him a small bell so that he could practice listening to the bell, coming back to his breathing, and restoring his calm in difficult moments. I don't know whether he was able to continue his practice because he was utterly alone in the world of business, without a community to support him. The world he lives in is very demanding and busy because it moves so fast.

So we have to recognize the truth that if there's no love or no deep motivation to serve this love, then no matter how rich or powerful you are, you still can't be happy. You are happy when you can relate to other people and other living beings. If not, you feel all alone, in your own world; no one understands you and you understand no one. Love is critical to our happiness.

This is true not only for individuals but also for nations. Many countries want to make progress economically, materially. My definition of progress is to be happy, to be really happy. What is the use of having more money if you suffer more? You become a victim of your own success. We have to measure progress in terms of true happiness. A nation may become very rich, very developed, and be called a superpower, but the people in that country still suffer deeply. The desire for material wealth becomes more important than the health and happiness of the people. They don't have time to take care of themselves and their loved ones, and that is regrettable. To me a civilized society is one where people have the time to live

their daily lives deeply, to love and take care of their family and community.

## THE FIVE SPIRITUAL POWERS

What most people call power Buddhists call cravings. The five cravings are for wealth, fame, sex, fancy food, and lots of sleep. In Buddhism, we speak of the five true powers, five kinds of energy. The five powers are faith, diligence, mindfulness, concentration, and insight. The five powers are the foundation of real happiness; they are based on concrete practices we will learn in this book.

### The Power of Faith

The first source of energy is faith. When you have the energy of faith in you, you are strong. In the Gospel, Jesus said that people with faith could move mountains. But the word *faith* is better translated as "confidence" and "trust," because it is about something inside you and not directed toward something external. The Zen Patriarch Lin Chi used to say to students, "You who don't have enough confidence in yourself, you go around seeking these things outside. You need to have confidence that you have the capacity to become a Buddha, the capacity of transformation and healing."

Faith is having a path that leads you to freedom, liberation, and the transformation of afflictions. If you have seen the path, if you have a path to go on, you have power. Those who have

no path wander around. They suffer. They don't know where to go. You have been searching for a path, and now you have found a path; you have seen the way.

If you have some experience that this path leads in a good direction, you will have faith in your path. You are very happy that you have a path, and thus you begin to have power. This power will not destroy you or the other people around you. In fact, it gives you strength and energy that other people can feel. When you have faith, your eyes are bright and your steps are confident. This is power. You can generate this kind of power every moment of your daily life. It will bring you a lot of happiness.

If you use a method of practice and find it effective, if it brings you mindfulness, concentration, and joy, then faith and confidence are born from this, not from something other people tell you. This is faith and confidence not only in ideas but in the concrete results of your practice. When you successfully practice mindful breathing (explained in chapter 3 and Appendix A), you feel light, solid, free, and confidence is born from this kind of experience. This is not superstition. It is not relying on someone outside yourself. The energy of faith can bring you a lot of happiness. If you don't have faith, if you don't have this energy of confidence, you suffer.

If we look carefully, we can see that the energy of awakening, compassion, and understanding is already there inside us. Recognizing these energies as an inherent part of your very being, you have confidence in these energies. And if you know how to practice, you can generate these energies to protect yourself and to succeed in what you want to do.

### The Power of Diligence

The second kind of power is diligence. You are capable of coming back to your best and highest self, but you must maintain this practice. Don't allow yourself to get distracted and forget to practice. Practice regularly, daily, with the support of your family, friends, and community—this is diligence. If you practice sitting meditation every day, walking meditation every day, mindful breathing every day, mindful eating every day, your practice is nourished, steadily, continuously, and this is the second source of power. You are able to practice mindfulness, but your motivation is not to prove that you are able to do it. The point is not to prove yourself. The point is to practice for your well-being and enjoyment. You simply practice, and you do it every day.

There are four aspects of diligence. The first is that when negative emotions haven't manifested in your mind, you don't give them a chance to manifest. In Buddhist psychology, we describe our consciousness as having two layers, two levels. The lower layer is called store consciousness, and the upper layer is called mind consciousness. Mind consciousness is our normal, waking mind; store consciousness is our unconscious mind.

Store consciousness is like the land, the ground, with many seeds preserved in it. In our store consciousness there are seeds of joy, forgiveness, mindfulness, concentration, insight, and equanimity. But there are also seeds of anger, hate, despair, and so on. All these seeds are kept by our store consciousness. One

of the functions of store consciousness is to maintain these seeds.

When a seed is watered in our store consciousness, it manifests as an energy in our mind consciousness and becomes a mental formation. You have a seed of anger, but when the seed of anger is asleep, dormant in your store consciousness, you don't feel angry. However, when the seed is touched, when it is turned on, it becomes a mental formation called anger, and you feel the energy of anger arise. We can envision mind consciousness as a living room and store consciousness as a basement. If we water a seed of joy, that seed will manifest itself on the upper level of mind consciousness, making the living room beautiful. If we water the seed of anger or hatred, it will make the living room of our mind a hell for us and our loved ones.

We all have a seed of anger, a seed of despair, and a seed of jealousy in us. If you live in a negative environment, the environment can trigger these seeds. If you live in a positive environment, then the seeds of craving, violence, hate, and anger are not touched, not watered easily. So it is wise for you to choose a good environment that will prevent these negative seeds from being touched often. You should not allow other people around you to touch these seeds, and you should not allow yourself to water them.

When you read an article full of violence or watch a violent television program or film, you turn on the seed of violence. The first step of diligence is not to turn on these negative seeds and not to allow the environment to turn them on. Diligence here means the practice of selective watering. So if

negative seeds in store consciousness haven't manifested, keep them down there, don't let them get watered. In your daily life, be careful not to give these seeds a chance to manifest. Don't suppress them; just don't give them a chance. In your community, in your family, expose yourself only to sounds and sights that will help you touch the wholesome elements within you. Try not to expose yourself to sights and sounds that stimulate the seed of craving or the seed of anger in you. You need diligence to practice this, and you may need a community or group of friends with similar values to help you create a good environment. You can encourage your partner, your children, and your friends to help you protect yourself. And you can also protect them by creating an environment where they don't have to be in touch with things that water their negative seeds.

The second aspect of diligence is calming and replacing negative seeds that do manifest in your conscious mind. When a negative seed is triggered—the seed of despair, the seed of anger, or the seed of violence—you need to know how to help it stop manifesting and return to its original form as a seed. Don't let it stay too long on the upper level of mind consciousness, because if it stays a long time, it will grow stronger and cause a lot of destruction. There are many ways to calm a negative energy without suppressing or fighting it. You recognize it, you smile to it, and you invite something nicer to come up and replace it; you read some inspiring words, you listen to a piece of beautiful music, you go somewhere in nature, or you do some walking meditation.

It's like you have put on the wrong CD, and it plays music you don't like, so you replace it with another one. When the new CD begins, it is very pleasant. The Buddha didn't have CDs in his time, so he used the image of changing a peg. A carpenter uses a wooden peg to attach two pieces of wood. When the peg is rotten, it cannot hold the two pieces together, so he removes the old one and replaces it with a new peg. In the same way, you can change your thinking if it is unpleasant. If an idea is negative, full of craving or anger, you can use mindful breathing to touch a seed that is wholesome and invite it to come up. If this wholesome seed is interesting enough, the unpleasant seed will shrivel. But the new seed should be more attractive or the unpleasant seed will not go easily and will fight for your attention. With skillfulness, with diligence, you practice the second step to change the situation, helping the negative mental formation go back to sleep and helping the positive seed manifest. When the positive mental formation arises, the living room is occupied and there is little chance for negative guests to intrude.

The first two aspects of diligence concern taking care of negative seeds, the third and fourth, nourishing positive seeds.

The third aspect of diligence is to always invite good seeds to manifest. You know that you have a seed of love, a seed of forgiveness, a seed of joy, of peace, of happiness. Learn ways to touch them and help them manifest. If you live in a good environment, where you are supported by a loving, healthy community, you have plenty of opportunities to help these positive seeds manifest.

The seeds of awakening, understanding, and compassion are always in us. They are part of our inherent nature. The question is how to help these seeds manifest. If the positive, wholesome seeds in store consciousness haven't manifested, help them manifest. Read something, say something, watch something that will water the seed of compassion, of loving kindness, so it will manifest in your mind. Organize your life in such a way that the good seeds in you can be touched several times a day, so they can manifest on the level of mind consciousness. This can be done quickly. Invite a wonderful guest to be in the living room often, and it will change the whole situation.

The fourth aspect of diligence is trying to keep a good mental formation in the living room as long as possible. We have to nourish it, to keep it in our mind. If a seed of compassion, a seed of joy, or a seed of peace is manifesting as a mental formation, it is good for you, so keep it there, invite it to stay, don't let it go back down to the basement. When you have a lovely friend visiting, you invite him to stay as long as possible, because his presence brings you a lot of joy. It is so pleasant to have a good friend sitting with you in the living room. If there is rain, you might say, "My dear friend, it's raining outside, so stay and have another cup of tea." You try to persuade your good friend to stay as long as possible. The longer the mental formation stays on the level of mind consciousness, the stronger it grows at the base. This applies to the positive as well as the negative. If you entertain craving in your living room for five minutes, the seed of craving has five minutes to grow. Help

the seed of craving go back to the basement as soon as possible, and invite a beneficial seed to come up instead.

When you use your skillfulness and these practices to create mindfulness, this is called true diligence. True diligence can bring a lot of joy, a lot of happiness to you and your loved ones. People with the energy of diligence are extraordinarily powerful. They can transform themselves; they can help transform the community, the environment, and the world.

### The Power of Mindfulness

The third power is the power of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the energy of being aware of what is happening in the present moment. When we have the energy of mindfulness in us, we are fully present, we are fully alive, and we live deeply every moment of our daily life. Whether you are cooking, or washing, or cleaning, or sitting, or eating, it is a time for you to generate the energy of mindfulness. And the energy of mindfulness helps you know what you should do and what you should not do. It helps you avoid difficulties and mistakes; it protects you and shines light on all your daily activities.

Mindfulness is the capacity to recognize things as they are. When you are mindful, you recognize what is going on, what is happening in the here and now. When you recognize something positive, you can enjoy it, you can nourish and heal yourself just by recognizing these positive elements. And when something is negative, mindfulness helps you embrace it, soothe it, and get some relief. Mindfulness is an energy that

can hold the suffering, the anger, the despair; if you know how to hold your suffering long enough, you get relief.

If we lose this power of mindfulness, we lose everything. Without mindfulness, we make and spend our money in ways that destroy us and other people. We use our fame in such a way that we destroy ourselves and others. We use our military strength to destroy ourselves and other people.

Walking and eating are actions we perform every day. But usually when we walk we are not really walking. We are being carried away by our projects and worries. We are not free. When we walk with mindfulness, dwelling in the present moment, no longer pulled by our regrets about the past or our worries concerning the future, we touch the wonders of life and each step nourishes our happiness. With mindfulness we do not have to regret the way we have lived. Mindfulness helps us see and be in touch with our loved ones. It is the energy that allows us to come back to ourselves, to be alive and truly happy.

### The Power of Concentration

Mindfulness brings about the fourth power; the power of concentration. When you drink your tea, just drink your tea. Enjoy drinking your tea. Please don't drink your suffering, your despair, your projects. This is very important. Otherwise you can't nourish yourself.

There are things that you have seen but not very clearly. You can use the power of concentration to experience a breakthrough and see deeply the nature of what is there. Perhaps

you have some difficulty, depression, fear, or despair, and you want to look deeply into the nature of your affliction to be able to transform it. To do this you need a lot of concentration.

Concentration can help us look deeply into the nature of reality and bring about the kind of insight that can liberate us from suffering. There are many kinds of concentration we can cultivate. Through concentration on impermanence, we become aware that everything is constantly changing. We may die tomorrow or anytime because of an accident. We should do everything we can to make our loved ones happy today. Tomorrow may be too late. With concentration on nonself—the reality that we do not have a separate self—we become aware that suffering is there not only in us but also in the other person. Not only do we suffer, but so do our children, our partners, our friends, and our colleagues. When we develop concentration on interbeing, on the interconnectedness of all things, we see that if we make them suffer they will make us suffer in return. Concentration on the nature of impermanence, nonself, and interbeing can help us realize great breakthroughs that will bring us the fifth kind of power, insight.

### The Power of Insight

Insight, the fifth power, is a sword that painlessly cuts through all kinds of suffering, including fear, despair, anger, and discrimination. If you are using your powers of concentration, insight allows you to fully see what you are concentrating on.

Concentration on impermanence and nonself leads to the insight of impermanence and nonself.

Impermanence is not an idea, not a notion, but an insight. Many of us try desperately to hold on to some notion of stability or permanence. We become anxious when we hear the teaching of impermanence. But impermanence is not just negative; impermanence can be very positive. Everything is impermanent, including injustice, poverty, pollution, and global warming. In our lives, there is misunderstanding, there is violence, there is conflict, there is despair, but these things are also impermanent, and because they are impermanent they can be transformed if we have insight into how to live in the present moment.

However, sometimes we forget about impermanence. Although intellectually we realize that everything is impermanent, we forget that one day our loved ones will get sick and die. We don't remember that we ourselves have to die some day. We have a tendency to think that we will live forever. And therefore we do not have the insight we need to live beautifully and really cherish our loved ones. For many of us, the excruciating pain we feel at the death of a beloved one is not entirely because we miss him, but more because we regret that while our beloved was alive, we didn't have time for him, we didn't care wholeheartedly for him. We may have treated him unkindly. And now that our beloved is gone, we feel guilty. If we have the insight of impermanence, we know that our beloved will die one day and that we must do everything we can to



make her happy today. Don't wait for tomorrow. Tomorrow may be too late. If we know how to live according to the insight of impermanence, we will not make many mistakes. We can be happy right now. We can love our beloved, care for her, and make her happy today. And we won't run toward the future, losing our life, which is available only in the present moment.

When the Buddha spoke about impermanence, he was speaking of insight. He was not being pessimistic but only reminding us that life is precious, that we have to treasure every moment of life. Concentrating on impermanence in this way will bring us the insight of impermanence. With this kind of insight, we don't allow ourselves to be carried away by despair, anger, or negativity, because our insight tells us exactly what to do and what not to do to change the situation. With impermanence, everything is possible.

Without insight, we think of power as something we gain for ourselves and ourselves alone. But another insight we can cultivate is the insight of nonself. Nonself doesn't mean that you don't exist; it means you are not a completely separate entity. A lot of our suffering is born from the discrimination between self and others and our notion of a separate self. Suppose you are a parent. Looking into your child, you will see that your son, your daughter is your continuation. Just as a corn plant is the continuation of a kernel of corn, the child is a continuation of the parent. The father is there in every cell of the son. The father and son are not exactly one person, but they are not exactly two different people either. If the father can see this, he touches his nature of nonself. If the son suffers, the father suffers, and vice versa. So getting angry at your son

is getting angry at yourself. Getting angry at your father is getting angry at yourself. This is very clear. When you are able to touch your nature of no-self, when you no longer see a distinction between you and your daughter or son, your anger will vanish. When you are in a power struggle, if you know how to meditate on nonself, you will know what to do. You can stop your own suffering and the suffering of the other people in the struggle. You know that his anger is your anger, his suffering is your suffering, and his happiness is your happiness.

When my left arm hurts because of rheumatism, I try to take care of it: I massage it and do everything to bring relief to my left arm. I do not get angry at my left arm. When I have a student who suffers, who is difficult, I try to practice like this. I do not get angry at her. I try to take care of her like I take care of my own arm, because getting angry at my student is getting angry at myself and will not help the situation. But we can act with this kind of wisdom only after we achieve the insight of nonself.

In Buddhism there is a kind of wisdom called the wisdom of nondiscrimination. Nondiscrimination is one element of true love. I am right-handed, so I do most things with my right hand: brushing my teeth, inviting the bell to sound, writing calligraphy. I have written all my poems with my right hand. But my right hand is never proud of itself. It never says, "Left hand, you are good for nothing! I have to do everything by myself." And my left hand does not have an inferiority complex. It never suffers, it's wonderful. My right and left hands are always at peace with each other. They collaborate in a perfect way. This is the wisdom of no-self that is alive in us.

One day I was hammering a nail in the wall to hang a picture. I was not very skillful, and instead of hitting the nail, I hit my finger. Immediately, my right hand put down the hammer and took care of my left hand. My right hand never said, "Left hand, you know, I'm taking good care of you. You should remember that." And my left hand did not say, "Right hand, you have made me suffer. I want justice, give me that hammer!" My left hand never thinks like that. So the wisdom of nondiscrimination is there in us. And if we make use of it, there will be peace in our family, in our community.

If Hindus and Muslims in India use their wisdom of nondiscrimination, there will be peace. If Israelis and Palestinians realize their wisdom of nondiscrimination, there will be no war. If Americans and Iraqis see that they are brothers and sisters, two hands of the same body, they will not continue to kill each other. We all need to cultivate this kind of wisdom. With this insight, we can undo our own fear, suffering, separation, and loneliness, and we can help others do the same.

Insight comes from understanding. There may be elements of understanding in us already, but if we don't have time to be mindful and concentrate, insight won't manifest in us. We need to create the kind of environment where mindfulness and concentration become easy. It's like preparing the soil so that the flower we plant can sprout. Insight is the kind of understanding you obtain after you've been mindful. If you allow yourself to get lost in regrets about the past and worries about the future, it is difficult for insight to grow, and it will be more difficult to know what right action to take in the present.

It is because of ignorance that we suffer. When we begin to touch insight, we are deeply in touch with reality and there is no longer any fear. There is compassion. There is acceptance. There is tolerance. This is why we talk about insight as a kind of superpower. If you take the time to look at reality using the insights of impermanence and nonself, you will have a breakthrough that will liberate you from your suffering and your difficulties. All of the first four powers lead to this fifth superpower. And with insight comes a tremendous source of happiness.



## Handling Power Skillfully

When something upsets you, when something happens that is not to your liking in your family or your community, you want to change it right away. You are tempted to use the little power that is available to you, as a father, a mother, a teacher, *somebody*, to change the situation. This is exactly the moment to stop and contemplate. Practice looking deeply into the nature of what upsets you to see what the most mindful and compassionate response may be.

When I see one of my students not practicing mindfully, I am not happy, because I always want my students to practice well. But if this student doesn't practice well, what should I do in terms of power? I might be tempted to shout at him, to punish—to use my power and authority as a teacher aggressively. And of course a teacher always makes mistakes, especially in the first part of his

career as a teacher. But to help my student, I must learn to be patient. I first need to offer him my love and insight. Using this kind of power, you are safe from misusing or overstepping your authority. You can help your student, you can help your son, your daughter, your employees without creating suffering for yourself or others.

There are many ways to share our guidance, our advice. If we share out of compassion, we will be effective and helpful. We may be unskillful in our guidance, but in the process we will learn how to share in a way that doesn't create suffering, that doesn't turn others away from us. We need to constantly check if we are guiding or teaching for the sake of fame, wealth, or a superficial kind of power.

If you cultivate the five powers mentioned in the previous chapter, you naturally begin to acquire another source of power, the power of leadership, as people turn to you for advice and influence. Three virtues are required if we are to be true leaders: the virtue of cutting off, the virtue of loving, and the virtue of insight.

The first virtue you need to use your power skillfully is *the virtue of cutting off*. Cutting off what? You cut off your anger, your craving, and your ignorance. Another way of saying this is "letting go." You gradually transform your craving, anger, fear, and delusion. If you don't have this kind of self-mastery, you can cause yourself and others great suffering, and people will not respect you. We only need to remember the many politicians and leaders whose careers were ruined by sex scandals to see the importance of cutting off the craving for meaningless sex.

This is why cutting off brings power. When you encounter someone who has the virtue of cutting off, who is free from her afflictions, you have respect for her and you listen to her. The virtue of cutting off brings liberation and lightness to body and mind. We can't buy it in the supermarket. We must attain it through our own practice.

A good leader also has *the virtue of loving*. You have the capacity to be affectionate, to accept, forgive, and embrace the other person with loving kindness and compassion. When you have this power, you are happy and people respect you—not because you shout at them or scold them, but because you offer care and compassion. People who lack compassion, love, and forgiveness suffer a lot. When you can forgive, when you can accept, you feel light, you can relate to other living beings. Without compassion, you are utterly alone. That is why compassion is the ground of happiness. If our political and business leaders can cultivate this virtue, this power of loving, they will not misuse other kinds of power: money, fame, and position in society. They will not make themselves and others unhappy.

A good leader also has to have *the virtue of insight*. Knowledge is not the same as insight. There are people with numerous PhDs, who know a vast array of scientific, philosophical, and literary discourses by heart, who can give eloquent commentaries on the Buddhist Canon, but they don't have insight, they don't have wisdom. Wisdom or insight is born from looking deeply. A genuine leader has the wisdom to show us the path out of suffering. You may be in a difficult situation, caught in confusion, and without direction. When you come to a true

leader, he can show you the way. Very quickly you see a way out, because he has wisdom.

When we have insight, we can easily take care of difficulties, tension, and contradictions. If we don't have it, we just go around in circles, haunted and controlled by our suffering, fear, and worries. So the third virtue is to be able to look deeply to gain insight, so we can resolve our difficulties and help other people.

If you lead with the three virtues of cutting off, offering love, and cultivating insight, you have real authority. Simply having the title of leader is not enough. Titles do not give true power. When you practice mindfulness well and you radiate joy, stability, and peace, you acquire a much deeper authority. When you speak, people listen to you, not because they have to but because you are fresh, serene, and wise. A good leader is one who exercises only this kind of authority. She doesn't strive for it or want to use it, but it comes naturally. She inspires people by her way of living, and people listen to her because of her authenticity.

You can evaluate the quality of your authority by looking deeply to see if compassion is the foundation of your leadership. See if your authority comes to you because of your spiritual insight rather than your wealth or your position in the community. Even if you are the pope, if you don't have that spiritual life, that loving kindness and compassion, you don't have real authority. You might give orders that people follow because they are afraid of you, but this is not true authority.

If you don't practice the five powers and the three virtues of a true leader, the power you hold in your hands can turn

against you, because without spiritual authority, we are always at risk of being seduced by the power we possess and abusing our power. Suppose you are an employer or a teacher. Because you are in a position of authority, you may be tempted to impose your will on your employees, your students. As a parent, you know that it can be hard not to use your power as a parent to control your children. But if you do that, you create a lot of suffering for your children and for yourself. Many people resent their parents because their parents misused their power and authority. If there is a fight between a parent and a young child, it cannot be a fair fight because the parent always has more power. Even if we have only a little bit of power, without spiritual authority, there is always a temptation to misuse it. But if we cultivate the five kinds of spiritual power, they will grow in us and we will have the capacity to transform and protect ourselves and those we love from suffering and despair.

When you have a strong desire to cultivate this power, you do everything you can to find an environment where you can be doing that all the time. I became a monk not because I wanted to be different from others or to cut myself off and live in a hermitage, but because I wanted to devote all my time to helping other people.

Imagine a president who relied on the five spiritual powers instead of political force. He would then be able to use the means available to him to bring reconciliation, peace, and happiness to people in his country as well as in other countries.

Before he left his family to become a monk, Siddhartha, the man who became the Buddha, saw that his father the king, who was politically very powerful, still felt helpless much of the

time. His father saw corruption around him but wasn't able to stop it. He was still caught in fear and craving. With fear, anger, and confusion controlling us, the exercise of political power can bring only suffering to us and the people around us. One of the main reasons Siddhartha left his family and renounced the throne was his understanding that political power by itself couldn't help him or his country to be happy. Siddhartha was determined to discover another kind of power, a spiritual one.

If we look below the surface, we see that the rich and powerful still suffer a lot and create a lot of suffering around them, in spite of all their privilege. Although they have a lot of power, they often fall into the abyss of despair and suffering. Our political and economic leaders relish their power, but they also suffer because of it. It is time for us to reconsider the meaning of power and change our direction in life. The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote, "The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right, and obedience into duty." Power will be challenged by those with less power if it is seen as illegitimate. But when power is seen as legitimate and comes with spiritual authority, it is appreciated and even revered.

When there are some who are too powerful and others who don't have any power at all, there is always a tendency to revolt. Vast inequality between people and groups makes power unstable. Even if people appear to accept those in authority, their power will always be insecure. But when power is based on spiritual authority and is a manifestation of love, wisdom, and

freedom from afflictions, it can establish justice, maintain order, and withstand challenges peacefully, without resorting to violence or oppression.

Business leaders, stockbrokers, and politicians seek financial and political power. And it seems like there is never enough. Buddhists and many other spiritual seekers also want power, but they seek the powers of faith, diligence, mindfulness, concentration, and insight. These powers are unlimited, and they never do any harm to anyone, including oneself.

Many people think of money as a source of happiness. They work in part to make money. It's true that money is a kind of power. With money you can buy anything you want. Politicians promise to help you get more power and more money. People believe that a good politician can give people more buying power. Being able to buy things and choose what to buy makes people feel powerful. After all, with money you can buy not only material things but people to clean your house, care for your children, and cook your meals. You ease people's financial difficulties and then they are indebted to you; they are caught and you have more power. With your power, you can manipulate them and force them to do what you want.

With enough money, you can also buy whole nations by offering trade and special treatment. You may promise that if they take your side in a war, they will get your support in developing their economy and so on. When you have money, you have this kind of power to buy others. You have the power, but if you misuse your power you will make yourself suffer and you will make others suffer.

Money can create fame, it can buy a name, it can buy prestige. You can write a book and become well known even if you don't have much talent. Or you can pay someone else to write a book but take credit as the author. There are things like this going on in the world; that's how money can buy fame. When you are famous, you can make even more money. If you are a television personality, your image becomes familiar and others want you to do advertisements for their companies. You get a lot of money for just a one- or two-minute commercial. You say something good about a product, and people listen to you and buy it. Money brings fame, fame brings money, and both of them can bring other things, like sex. Because it easily corrupts us, having power can be very dangerous.

Money and fame are not evil in and of themselves. But if you don't know how to handle them, they become evil. The way you use money, the way you use your fame can lead you and many other people to suffering. If we are wise and have spiritual power, then money and fame will do no harm. In fact, they may be helpful. It is possible to use money and fame with wisdom to relieve suffering and create happiness. Whether money and fame are helpful or destructive depends on how we handle them.

Spiritual and political power are not mutually exclusive. Emperor Ashoka, who reunified India in the third century B.C., adopted the teachings of the Buddha and became a wonderful king for all of India. He recognized in the teaching and practice of the Buddha the possibility of creating a new kind of society. He limited the number of animals killed to what was

necessary for all to eat. He urged people to practice compassion and understanding, refraining from killing and stealing. Emperor Ashoka had the power of a maharaja, a great king, and he used that power to help people.

In the Middle East, Israel is a superpower. Israel has sophisticated nuclear technology and a large army. Everyone knows that it has the power of striking and punishing and that it is supported by the United States. But this power is not enough to keep Israel happy and safe. That is why Israel must cultivate other kinds of power. Political leaders need to be aware of the power to be calm, the power to use loving speech, the power to understand the suffering and difficulties of other nations, the power of talking to them with love and compassion. If Israeli leaders learn how to cultivate the five spiritual powers, they will not misuse their political and military power and create more suffering within and outside the country.

If you strike out at others, they suffer, and they will strike back at you one way or another. If they cannot do it officially, they will do it unofficially. If they can't bring a bomb on an airplane, they will use bombs in other ways. Misuse of power is the primary cause of suffering for many of us. The way power is used is not just a matter of spirituality; it is a matter of life and death for a whole nation.

Business and political leaders are powerful in our society. In many ways they decide our fate. We must find ways to help them learn to use their power with wisdom. They are caught in suffering, fear, and anger, and without enough understanding and compassion, they can misuse their power. They proceed

with decisions that the majority of people in their own country and around the world don't support. We shouldn't let them misuse for purposes of destruction the power we have entrusted to them. We can channel our wisdom and compassion to these political and business leaders, so a balance can be restored in them. Their spiritual power can act as a check on their political and economic power.

During the Buddha's time, there was a monk, Bhaddiya, a former governor of the Sakya kingdom. When he became a monk, he gave up everything. One day, while sitting in meditation at the foot of a tree, he said three times, "O my happiness!" Another monk overheard it and thought Bhaddiya regretted losing his power as a governor, and he reported this incident to the Buddha. The Buddha summoned Bhaddiya and asked why during the night he had pronounced "O my happiness" three times. Bhaddiya replied, "Noble teacher, when I was governor I had a lot of power, a lot of money. I had many units of soldiers guarding me. I could buy anything I wanted. But I wasn't happy because I was always fearful. I was a victim of fear, jealousy, hatred, and greed. Now I no longer have any fear or any afflictions. I don't have anything to lose. I am not afraid of being assassinated anymore. I don't need a bodyguard. I have a lot of freedom and peace. That is why I said 'O my happiness' three times. If I have disturbed the sangha, I beg for pardon."

This is a beautiful story. It shows us clearly the limitations of financial and political power, and the true power of liberating ourselves and helping others do the same.

## T H R E E

## The Art of Mindfulness

Imagine the power of our actions if each one contained one hundred percent of our attention.

Many large companies spend significant resources on research and development departments because they know that for their business to thrive, they must constantly improve and stay on top of the latest information. The same is true of figuring out how to create a mindful business: it takes an investment in developing insight that will guide you, protect you, and put you and your business on the right path.

Everything is related to everything else. Your well-being and the well-being of your family are essential elements in bringing about the well-being of your business or of any organization where you work. Finding ways to protect yourself and promote your own well-being is the most basic investment you can make. This will have an impact on your family and work environment,



but first of all it will result in an improvement in the quality of your own life.

The foundation of your investment, the key to transforming your professional life, is mindfulness. Mindfulness is the energy of attention. It is the capacity in each of us to be present one hundred percent to what is happening within and around us. It is the miracle that allows us to become fully alive in each moment. It is the essential basis for healing and transforming ourselves and creating more harmony in our family, our work life, and our society. The fruit of mindfulness practice is the realization that peace and joy are available within us and around us, right here and right now. Mindfulness is one of the five spiritual powers, but it is also the foundation for acting in the world in a way that reflects our true power. Our family and professional lives will be poisoned if we don't know how to create and maintain a mindful home and a mindful workplace. Many businesses intuitively understand this truth.

Political and financial power can't fully satisfy us when we don't have mindfulness. We need the energy of mindfulness to help us come back to ourselves and look deeply into our situation. We work in a profession, but we bring to the work our own individual difficulties, pain, and suffering. Mindfulness practice allows us to embrace and understand our suffering. This is the basis for personal transformation and healing.

So how do you *do* mindfulness? It is very simple and also very challenging. The practice of mindfulness requires only that whatever you do, you do with your whole being. You have to invest one hundred percent of yourself in doing even very

simple things, like picking up a pen, opening a book, or lighting a stick of incense. As a novice monk, several times a day I had to light incense to offer on the altar of the meditation hall. I was taught to pick up the stick of incense with both hands, the left hand on top of the right hand, which picks up the stick of incense. A stick of incense is very light. Why do you have to use both hands? The idea is that you have to invest one hundred percent of yourself into this simple act of picking up an incense stick. When you strike the match and light the incense, or put the tip of the incense stick into the flame of a candle, you have to be with the act of lighting one hundred percent. This is the practice of mindfulness.

When you pour tea, the act of pouring the tea into the cup can become an act of meditation if you pour with mindfulness. Don't think about the past. Don't think about the future. Don't think about what you're going to do the next day. Focus entirely on the act of pouring the tea. Invest yourself entirely in the here and now.

Everyone knows how to pour tea, everyone knows how to drink tea, but not everyone pours tea mindfully and drinks tea mindfully. This is because we have a tendency to run away from the here and now—we are driven by our habit energy. Our habit energy is strong, so we need to practice to transform it. The more we free ourselves of our habit energy, the more we will be capable of living fully every moment of our daily life.

In our work, we may be responsible for many people, a few people, or just ourselves. It's good to be responsible. We may

also have the desire to be successful. But because we lack mindfulness, we allow ourselves to be carried away by our desire for success. It becomes a habit. It pushes us all the time. We're no longer capable of drinking our tea in the here and now. Even when the tea is in our mouth, we aren't conscious of it. We're drinking our projects, we're drinking our problems.

According to the Buddha, life is available only in the here and now, the present moment. He said, "The past is already gone, the future is not yet here. There's only one moment for you to live, and that is the present moment." If you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. It's so clear. Mindfulness is the energy and practice that helps you go back to the here and now so that you encounter life. It is a practice that requires time and support. Without training and without the support of a community of fellow practitioners, you won't be able to do it. There may be people you work with who are willing to become your copractitioners.

You may have a beautiful house and yard that are perfectly taken care of. There are many flowers in your yard. You know these beautiful flowers are there, but you are never able to enjoy them. When people look at your yard, they may envy you very much. They would like to have a yard like yours where they could walk and enjoy the grass, the flowers, and the trees. But you don't have time to enjoy it because you are obsessed with finding answers to questions, solving problems, overcoming difficulties, and being number one at work.

From time to time, you have a flash of insight: "I have a beautiful yard and I must make time to enjoy it." So you decide

to go into the yard. You take a few steps and look at the flowers, the trees, and the grass. You have good intentions. But after four or five steps, you give up, because your preoccupation with your work is too strong. It's like a dictator. It prevents you from being present to enjoy the wonders of life that are available in the here and now.

When I was a sixteen-year-old novice monk, my teacher taught me to open the door and close the door with one hundred percent of myself. One day, my teacher asked me to get something for him. Because I loved him very much, I was eager to do it, so I rushed to do this task and closed the door quickly.

My teacher called me back: "Novice, come back here." I went back to him. I joined my palms and looked at him. He said, "Novice, this time go out mindfully and close the door behind you mindfully." That was the first lesson he gave me on the practice of mindfulness. At that moment, I began to walk mindfully and became aware of every step I took. I touched the doorknob mindfully. I opened the door mindfully. I went out and closed the door behind me mindfully. My teacher didn't have to teach me a second time how to close the door.

When you hold the hand of a child, invest one hundred percent of yourself in the act of holding her hand. When you hug your partner, do the same. Forget everything else. Be totally present, totally alive in the act of hugging. This is the opposite of the way we've been trained to lead our lives and run our businesses. We've been taught to do many things at once. We answer an e-mail while we talk on the phone; while in a meeting for one



project, we work on our notes for another project. Every new technology promises to help us do more things at once. Now we can send e-mail while listening to music, talking on the phone, and taking a picture, all with the same device. With your energy that dispersed, where is your power?

Instead of always multitasking, we must teach ourselves to unitask. Mindfulness needs some training. We may be very intelligent. We may understand this right away. But that doesn't mean we can do it. To do it, we have to practice and train ourselves.

First, we use our practice of mindfulness to focus on ourselves. Once we have done this, then, with mindfulness, we look at our family. Our family, however we may identify it, is our home. We can't go straight to looking at our work life without first looking at our home base. There may be suffering, fear, or anxiety in our family. Mindfulness helps us recognize this suffering, and embrace and transform it. You can say to your loved ones, "I'm here for you. Let's embrace the pain together and transform it." Mindfulness is the capacity of being there, fully present. When you love someone, the most precious gift you can give your loved one is your true presence. You can't buy the ability to bring joy and transform suffering.

Then mindfulness will help us understand the situation at our workplace. We may be entrepreneurs—executives responsible for hundreds of people—or we may be employees, working alone or in a team. With mindfulness, we can look deeply and recognize the strengths as well as the difficulties and suffering in our organizations. When we look at our workplaces,

we recognize the fears, the pain of our co-workers or employees, and we say, "I am here for you, I know you are suffering. Together we can embrace this suffering and transform it. We will do whatever we can to remove this suffering." It's the same practice we have done with ourselves and our family. With the energy of mindfulness and the capacity of looking deeply, we will find the insights to transform and heal the situation.

Mindfulness is the capacity to be present with one hundred percent of ourselves. The energy of mindfulness enables us to recognize the presence of what is. What is there is yourself, what is there is your loved ones. If you aren't capable of being in the here and now, you won't be able to recognize yourself, your happiness, or your suffering. Without your full presence, you won't be able to recognize others, and they will feel unseen, misunderstood, and unloved. They will begin to suffer, and that suffering in turn will make you suffer more. Without mindfulness, we can't help ourselves or our loved ones or succeed in our workplace. Without mindfulness, any power we have will be fleeting and ultimately unsatisfying.

Mindfulness is concrete. It can happen in a single breath. As you breathe in, keep your awareness with your breath. It may help to silently say "in" as you breathe in. And when you breathe out, silently say "out." With this simple act, your mind comes back to your body and you are truly present. It can happen in a footstep. You invest one hundred percent of your attention into taking a step. Allow your breathing to be natural, don't force it or try to change it. Be aware of how many steps you take with your in-breath, and how many you take with

your out-breath. If you're practicing inside at home, you can walk very slowly, taking one step for each in-breath and one for each out-breath. If you're at work or outside, you may want to take two, three, or four steps for each in-breath and each out-breath. It may help to say "in, out" silently as you walk. For example, if you take three steps when you breathe in and four steps when you breathe out, you can say, "In, in, in. Out, out, out, out." Keep your mind completely with your steps and your breath. This practice is very easy and profoundly effective. With mindful breathing and mindful walking, you can go back to yourself and be really present and alive.

To understand mindfulness, we need to understand it on a physical level. We can learn how to go home to our bodies. We can start simply by recognizing that our bodies are there and embracing them tenderly with the energy of mindfulness. You generate mindfulness through the practice of mindful breathing and mindful walking. "My dear body, I know you are there, and I will take good care of you." Your body becomes the object of your love.

If you don't know how to take care of your body, how to release the tension in your body and give it permission to rest, you don't love your body. We all know that our bodies have the capacity of self-healing. When we cut our finger, we know that we don't have to do anything besides clean it; our body will take care of the rest. We panic when we forget that our bodies have the power of self-healing. If we simply allow our bodies to rest, our bodies can heal themselves without a lot of medicine.

When an animal in the forest gets seriously wounded, it knows exactly what to do. It looks for a secluded spot and just lies down for several days, not concerned with eating. It has wisdom. Only when the wound has healed does the animal return to foraging or hunting for food. We once had this kind of wisdom, but now we have lost our capacity to rest. We panic every time we experience something uncomfortable in our body. We rush to the doctor to get a prescription for all kinds of medicine because we don't realize that just allowing our body to rest is often the best method of healing.

There are people who complain they don't have time for a vacation. The purpose of a vacation is to have the time to rest, but even when people go on vacation they don't know how to rest. They may do lots of things and come back even more tired than before. We have to learn the art of deep relaxation. You lie down and pay attention to and relax the different parts of your body, beginning with your head and going all the way down to the soles of your feet. "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body. Breathing out, I release tensions in my body." "Breathing in, I'm aware of my eyes. Breathing out, I smile to my eyes." You continue like this with each part of your body. You scan your body, not with an X ray but with the ray of mindfulness. When you come to an organ or a part of your body that is ailing, you can stay with it longer, using the energy of mindfulness to embrace it and smile to it. This will speed the healing. You can practice this every day, alone or with your family. When you are used to it, you can lead a total relaxation session for yourself, your partner, your family. You can also encourage

others in your family to lead total relaxation for the whole family. Children are very capable of guiding others in this practice. When you are able to embrace your body, release accumulated tension, and help your body heal, you will be able to go home to your feelings and emotions (this practice is explained in detail in Appendix A).

Each of us experiences pleasant feelings and painful feelings. One of the core practices of mindfulness is to take care of our painful emotions. Many of us run away from ourselves, from our pain. Usually when we have pain, we don't want to face it because we don't know how to take care of it. We also think that if we are powerful, we shouldn't feel pain. So we try to cover it up with other things. Rather than changing the peg and helping positive seeds arise from our store consciousness, we try to escape our feelings through unmindful consumption. We turn on the television, pick up a book, or talk on the phone. We try to do something to ignore the pain, fear, sorrow, or despair we feel. But while consuming things that help us temporarily forget our pain, we bring more elements of distress into our bodies and minds. We bring in the elements of craving, fear, and worries. This makes the situation worse every day.

Instead, we can go home to ourselves. We can use the energy of mindfulness to recognize the pain inside and hold it tenderly, like a mother holding her baby. Mindfulness is the mother. Your pain, your sorrow, your despair, is your baby. There is no fighting. The energy of mindfulness does the work of recognizing, embracing, and bringing relief. When a mother hears her baby crying, she puts aside what she's doing, goes

immediately to pick up her baby, and holds the baby tenderly. She may not know what is wrong with the baby at first, but the fact that she's holding him tenderly like this already brings relief to the baby. You may not know what is causing your pain, your despair, your depression, your fear, but if you know how to hold that pain with the energy of mindfulness, you immediately get relief, because the energy of mindfulness begins to penetrate the energy of pain, of sorrow.

Imagine a flower in the morning. The flower is not yet open. The sunshine embraces the flower, and the energy of the sunshine begins to penetrate the flower. The sun doesn't just go around the flower. The light naturally penetrates the flower, and an hour later the flower has to open itself to the sun. The sun is our mindfulness, embracing the flower of our feelings.

If we allow our anger, fear, and despair to be alone and unsupervised in us, they will be destructive. If we generate mindfulness, it will recognize and embrace these painful feelings. The practices of mindful breathing and mindful walking not only nourish and refresh us, but they also help us recognize and embrace the pain in us. Instead of using our energy, our power, to suppress our pain, we help our body become more integrated. By embracing our suffering, we are much stronger.

If our loved ones sit or walk with us, we become even stronger because the other person lends us their energy of mindfulness. We can say, "Darling, please come and do mindful walking with me. I need your presence." Then she will come and walk with you. Together, we combine our mindful energies, and there is plenty to embrace our suffering.

If we have several friends sitting with us, the positive, collective energy of mindfulness will be even stronger. It will be much easier for us to allow our pain, sorrow, and despair to be embraced by the collective energy. That is why it is so pleasant and helpful to practice in a community where everyone knows how to do the same thing. The energy is powerful. If you allow yourself to be embraced by that collective energy, you feel much better and healing happens quickly.

The energy of mindfulness helps us be aware of what is going on. When you breathe in and you know that you are breathing in, this is mindfulness of breathing. When you drink your coffee or tea and you know that you are drinking coffee or tea, this is mindfulness of drinking. When you walk and you know you are walking, and you enjoy every step you take, this is mindfulness of walking. So these kinds of practices generate the energy of mindfulness, helping you be fully alive, fully present to touch the wonders of life for your nourishment and healing.

### THE FIVE MINDFULNESS TRAININGS

One time Anathapindika brought five hundred businesspeople to listen to the Buddha. The Buddha offered them a teaching that came to be known as the Sutra on the White-Clad Disciple.\* It focused on how to live happily in the here and now as a

---

\*During the Buddha's time, monastics wore yellow robes and laypersons wore white robes when practicing with the monastics.

businessperson and householder. In the Sutra on the White-Clad Disciple, the expression "living happily in the present moment" is repeated at least five times. Knowing that you are on the right path is the greatest happiness. The greatest happiness is having a job that you like and that expresses your understanding and compassion. Happiness, responsibility, and mindfulness are interconnected. A businessperson begins the path to happiness by taking care of himself first. With practice in generating the energy of mindfulness, he'll be able to receive the joy and happiness he deserves and he'll have the capacity to care about the well-being of others. So many elements of happiness are available right in the here and now.

This sutra taught that the foundation of mindfulness and happiness is the Five Mindfulness Trainings. These trainings are essential for learning to handle our power skillfully, for cultivating true power, spiritual power. They are the heart of mindfulness practice.



## THE FIVE MINDFULNESS TRAININGS

### The First Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

### The Second Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am committed to practicing generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I shall respect the property of others, but I shall prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on earth.

### The Third Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in

sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I shall do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

### The Fourth Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to learning to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I shall refrain from uttering words that cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I shall make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

### The Fifth Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society, by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I am committed to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being,

and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I shall work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings are a concrete expression of the practice of mindfulness and can be applied to your daily life, both professionally and in your family.\* The same spirit of mindfulness exists in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and all spiritual faiths. If you are from a different spiritual tradition, when you read your scriptures, when you come back to your own roots, you can identify the elements of the Five Mindfulness Trainings in your own tradition. They can help you better understand your tradition. You can't be happy if you've lost your roots.

The trainings are not imposed on us by another person; they are the direct fruit of our practice. We want to observe the mindfulness trainings because when we practice mindfulness,

---

\*For a more extensive commentary on the Five Mindfulness Trainings, see *For a Future to Be Possible*, by Thich Nhat Hanh.

we see all the suffering that is born when we don't observe them. So we have decided to practice the five trainings to be able to uproot ill-being and suffering. They're not commandments; they're commitments made by individuals after having meditated on suffering and its causes. This is a practice. It is a determination born from our own insight. For a vivid illustration of how a highly successful company practices mindfulness and compassion based on its deep insight, see the story of Patagonia CEO Yvon Chouinard in Appendix B.

For me, the Five Mindfulness Trainings are the real practice of love, of compassion. The first training concerns the protection of life. Because I love life, because I love living beings, I'm determined to train myself in mindfulness. I am determined not to condone any act of killing in the world. Life is precious, so I am determined to protect life—not only the lives of human beings but the lives of other species, because humans are made of nonhuman elements. That means animal, plant, and mineral elements. To protect humans, we have to protect nonhuman elements. This is the teaching of the Diamond Sutra, the oldest text on deep ecology. We have to protect animals, plants, and even minerals to protect humanity. This is the essence of the first mindfulness training. If you want to protect the environment, you are invited to read the Diamond Sutra, and you will see that by protecting animals, plants, and minerals we protect men, women, and children. It is the practice of love.

The Second Mindfulness Training concerns the practice of generosity. Everywhere there is poverty. Inequality causes a lot of suffering. For this reason, we try to live in such a way as to alleviate suffering. We are determined to offer our time, energy,

and material resources to those who are in need. This is real generosity. We can live more simply so that we can have more time to help others. We are determined not to steal, not to possess anything that does not belong to us. This is also the practice of true love.

The Third Mindfulness Training protects individuals and families. We make an effort to abstain from sexual misconduct and sexual abuse, because it has produced a lot of suffering. This mindfulness training is also the practice of true love. We make the commitment not to have sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. If we look deeply, we see that the body and the mind are not two separate things. Respect for the body is at the same time respect for the mind. If there is no respect for the body, there is no respect for the mind. We cannot separate the two. Respect has to be there for love to be possible. There is no true love without respect.

In our society, we engage in a lot of empty sex, just for physical pleasure. We have confused sex with love, but this isn't love at all. When we love, we have something precious to offer: our heart, our mind. We already know that the heart and the mind are very close to our body. We have secret zones in our soul. There is pain, or there is a deep and tender aspiration that we want to keep a secret. And we share it only with the one we really love. There is a forbidden city in our soul. In the capitals of Asian countries, the king always had a forbidden city. No one outside the royal family could enter. You risked getting decapitated if you went into the forbidden city. There

is a forbidden city in us that we open only to the one we love the most. It is sacred.

The same is true of our body. There is a forbidden city, areas of the body that people don't have the right to touch without our explicit permission. This wisdom is already in our culture, but to some degree we have lost our respect for the sacred zones in our body and our mind. The Third Mindfulness Training protects ourselves and others from suffering.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training is about the way we communicate. Our speech can be powerful, or we can be shouting in the wind. Never in the history of humankind have we had so many means of communication—e-mail, cell phones, faxes, television, radio, newspapers—but we still remain distant islands. There is so little real communication between the members of one family, between the individuals in society, and between nations. This is because we don't know how to listen to each other. We have little ability to hold meaningful conversation. The door of true communication has to be opened again. When we can't communicate, there's no circulation; we get sick, and as our sickness increases, we suffer and we spill our suffering on other people.

Speech can be constructive or destructive. Mindful speaking can bring real happiness; unmindful speech can destroy life. When someone tells us something that makes us healthy and happy, that is the greatest gift she can give. The Fourth Mindfulness Training also shows us that mindful speech goes together with listening deeply to others. We listen with all our attention and compassion; we are really there to receive what



the other person needs to say. Our only intention is to help the other person feel safe enough to open her heart and find relief from her suffering.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training is linked to the fifth, because the Fifth Mindfulness Training is about mindful consumption—what we eat but also what we watch, read, and listen to. We are what we consume. If we look deeply into the items we consume every day, we come to know our own nature well. We have to eat, drink, and consume, but if we do it unmindfully, we may destroy our body and our consciousness, showing lack of gratitude toward our ancestors, our parents, and future generations.

We can be mindful of what we are putting into our body and consciousness. Ask yourself, "What kind of toxins am I putting into my body today? What films am I watching today? What book am I reading? What magazine am I looking at? What kind of conversations am I having?" Mindfulness is recognizing these toxins and then putting yourself on a toxin diet. You can say to yourself, "Aware of the fact that I am bringing this and that toxin into my body and consciousness every day, making myself sick and causing suffering to my beloved ones, I am determined to prescribe for myself a proper diet. I vow to ingest only items that preserve well-being, peace, and joy in my body and my consciousness."

The Five Mindfulness Trainings may seem like a big commitment that is difficult to follow. They may not fit with your image of yourself. But if you take them on, your life will be easier and your days filled with more joy. So act right away. Enter the right path and do everything you can for the protec-

tion and well-being of living beings. Then you will no longer be afraid. Even when you have to go through difficult moments, like illness, danger, or death, you'll be at peace with yourself. This has been my experience.

I know an American who enlisted in the army during the Vietnam War. He was full of goodwill and wanted to serve his country and the anticommunist cause, so he went to Vietnam, and there his duty was to murder people in the night. There were villages where the guerrillas came at night and talked to the villagers to get their support. The anticommunist government couldn't find proof that any of the villagers had collaborated with the guerrillas. But the Central Intelligence Agency said there were collaborators and they should be eliminated so the guerrillas couldn't influence the village.

The task of this American soldier was to go to the home of a suspected person at night, and with only a knife—no gun, so he wouldn't make any noise—kill this person. In the morning, the other villagers would find the person dead and say that the communists had come and killed him. In peacetime, if someone commits a crime, you bring him to court and have a trial. But in Vietnam during the war, that wasn't done. Once they believed someone was an enemy, they would just come at night and assassinate him, leaving no trace. You just eliminate the person you think belongs to the other camp. No trial, no tribunal, nothing.

Many years after the Vietnam War, the American soldier who told me this story got sick and was dying. I witnessed his suffering during that time. It was a suffering you cannot describe. It was not only suffering of the body but the utmost



suffering—suffering of the spirit, of his conscience. What he had done came back to him every moment of the day and every moment of the night. It was only by fully telling his story that he was able to lay his suffering to rest.

Every act comes back to you. Your knife goes in, the person dies. Any harm you do to other people will come back and punish you. You alone will understand your suffering. No one else will understand your suffering, and the process of dying will be very difficult. This is why the greatest happiness is knowing you are on the right path. You don't do anything that destroys people, animals, plants, or minerals. With that peace of mind, you can go through difficulties and dangers without fear, and you will die in peace. This is important. There is no time to wait.

No one can practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings perfectly, not even the Buddha. The goal is not to be perfect but simply to be mindful of ourselves, even when we make mistakes. If you are lost in a forest at night, you can follow the North Star to find your way out. You follow the North Star, but your goal is to get back home; it's not to arrive at the North Star. The mindfulness trainings are like the North Star; we don't have to be perfect in practicing them. They are our guide, and we know we're on a good path. If you have a spiritual path, the path of love, compassion, and understanding, you feel happy because you know where you're going. You are on the path of compassion, of protecting life so that happiness becomes possible. That is very important. You are protected by the practice of the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings have a universal nature. Practicing them, you become a better friend of the Buddha, a better disciple of Jesus. The Buddha, Jesus, Abraham, and Mohammed are our companions on the way. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are a practice that protects and supports us.

# Getting What We Really Want

With the practice of mindfulness and the mindfulness trainings, the motivation behind our desire for power becomes clear. When we are clear about our motivations, our actions are much more powerful because we can do them with one hundred percent of our intention.

Volition is the driving motivation behind our thinking, speech, and actions. It determines everything. Every one of us has a strong goal for our life. We want to achieve something. We feel a ball of energy in us, a tremendous, powerful source of energy. We want to feel truly alive.

We search for this feeling in different ways. There are people who are ready to die for a cause. They want national independence, they want social justice, they want to overthrow a dictatorial regime, and they're ready to sacrifice their lives for

it. Their desire gives them the energy and strength needed for their activities. There are people motivated by the desire to protect the environment. They're willing to undergo any kind of hardship to protect the earth. There are those who want to get off the spiral of escalating consumption. They want to live a simple life to have more time and energy to serve living beings.

There are also people whose motivating desire is not so wholesome. They live only to accumulate wealth, influence, and recognition. They want to be admired and envied by others, drive fancy cars, have famous and attractive lovers, and live in luxurious houses. Then there are people whose strongest desire is to punish those they believe have caused them a lot of suffering. They live only for revenge. They focus their whole lives around the desire to attack, destroy, punish, and cause suffering to the people they think made them suffer. They're ready to blow up an airplane or force their way into an embassy carrying a bomb, losing their own lives in the explosion, just because they want revenge. They consider themselves victims of injustice, and they want to inflict sorrow and pain on other groups or other nations. This kind of motivation is the foundation of their lives and the basis of their actions. These people have given up on happiness, because if your motivation is to punish someone else or to run after fame, glory, and power, you are going to suffer a lot.

To illustrate the tragic power of our volition, the Buddha used the example of a young man who's being dragged toward a pit of fire by two strong men. The man wants to live; he's

being dragged against his will. But the two men are stronger than he is, and they intend to throw him into the pit of fire. He doesn't want to die, but he can't resist. The Buddha asked, "Who are these two strong men who try to bring you to the realm of hell? They are your volition, your desire to run after what you believe to be happiness, namely the objects of your craving: craving for fame, craving for power, craving for sex, craving for wealth."

Before Siddhartha became the historical Buddha, he undertook six years of practice to become a free person, enlightened and emancipated. He had witnessed much suffering in his family, his society, and his country. He left his family and his position as a prince in his father's kingdom, but he was motivated by love, not by a desire to run away from his responsibilities. Siddhartha wanted to uproot the suffering in himself in order to offer others a way out. This was his deepest desire, and it brought him tremendous happiness. It gave him the courage and strength to go through many hardships.

We call this desire, this volition, *bodhicitta*. Bodhicitta is the mind of love, the mind of enlightenment. It can also be translated as the "mind of understanding," because understanding is the foundation of love. If you don't understand, it is not possible for you to accept and to love. If you don't understand your father, you cannot really love him. If you don't understand your daughter, you cannot love her. Understanding is love and love is understanding. And if you have the desire to attain this understanding, you have the beginner's mind, the most powerful kind of energy there is. With this energy you will never

give up, because you are seeking happiness, for yourself and for others.

So all of us must look deeply into our desire. What's our true motivation? We know that business is for making money, but we have to understand what goes along with the profit we're making. Are we causing suffering, despair, or injustice in the process of making a profit? Earning money is just one part of the picture. The way we use money is also important. Money can be used to promote well-being. With money we can buy medicine and save someone's life. With money we can provide food for people who are hungry. But with money we can also destroy our own lives and the lives of others. We have to look deeply to see whether money is the only element that can bring happiness.

What's the motivating desire of people working in business, politics, the entertainment industry, sports, or science? Is it more power, more fame, more wealth? We may think that these things are only means for us to be more effective. But they will not, by themselves, help us be happy or help others. We may be misguided by our sense of pride and responsibility. We may be fooling ourselves. It's important to look deeply into our deepest desire to see its true nature. If you suffer and make your loved ones suffer, there is nothing that can justify your desire.

You may never have had a chance to practice looking into your intentions, but if you do, you will discover your deepest motivations. We have to identify the source that motivates our actions every day. A wholesome motivation will bring us well-

being; it can bring happiness to us and many other people. An unwholesome motivation will bring suffering to us, our family, and many people in society.

We can distinguish our compassionate ideals from our unwholesome desires and cravings. These two things are very different, but sometimes we mistake our craving and desire for noble ideals. We often try to fool ourselves to feel more peaceful. Greed is based on ignorance. We have misperceptions. We think that if we can obtain certain things, we'll be happy. But when we get them, we continue to crave and suffer.

The Buddha used the image of the bait and hook to illustrate this. You see the bait and you think it will give you a lot of pleasure, a lot of happiness. But when you bite it, the hook gets you. These days people use lures, artificial bait, when they go fishing. The bait is not a real insect anymore but is made of plastic. It's very appealing. When the fish sees the bait, he bites the lure, because he doesn't know there's a hook inside. When the fish bites, he gets hooked and is pulled out of the water.

We're just like the fish that gets hooked. What's appealing to you? You're tempted, you want it, so you bite it, even though you know that *it* will get *you*. Fame, sex, power, and wealth are the four kinds of bait that have a hook. If you're motivated by any of these desires, your destiny is suffering. When you're wealthy, you feel powerful and important. There are so many favorable conditions encouraging you to indulge in this kind of consumption. But you can destroy yourself, your family, and even your company, and this destruction often contributes to damaging the environment and society in general.

Is our strong desire to serve our loved ones, to serve ourselves, other living beings, and our planet, or is it to strive after lures that are empty of real nourishment? We may deceive ourselves into thinking that our concern with wealth, power, and fame is really only a means for us to be more effective in bringing happiness to others, providing jobs, or helping the environment. But we may be misguided by our pride and sense of responsibility. We shouldn't fool ourselves. We have to be really honest and practice deeply to discover the true nature of our desire and motivation. It's important to distinguish between the indulgence of craving and true happiness. Happiness exists in many forms, but true happiness doesn't come from the four objects of craving: sex, power, fame, and wealth.

The Buddha described a dog who, when thrown a bare bone, runs after it and chews on it even though there's no meat on the bone. He doesn't get any nutrition from the bone, yet he hangs on to it and won't let go. Our attitude is just like that. Cravings can never bring satisfaction, yet we keep on running after them.

The Buddha also cited the example of holding a torch against the wind: the torch will burn your fingers. Sensual desire is like that—it burns you. It doesn't give you true happiness; it burns you and in fact can destroy you.

The Buddha gave another example. You're thirsty and you go into an apparently empty house. You see a bottle of water. You're very thirsty and you want a drink. But just as you bring the bottle to your lips, someone appears and says, "Don't drink this water, it has poison in it." But since you're so thirsty, you

drink it anyway. Our desire for the four cravings can be like that.

Sometimes your intellect tells you that it's dangerous to embrace this or that object of desire. You know that you'll suffer, but you can't resist and you do it anyway. Without a wise friend, without a spiritual community that can protect and help you, you often do such things in spite of your better judgment.

We crave something because we don't see the true nature of the object of our craving. Don't despise money, sex, power, and fame: just look deeply to see how running after things like these has brought you a lot of suffering and little satisfaction. These cravings are like saltwater: the more you drink, the thirstier you become. We keep running after money, believing that when (and only when) we have a certain amount of money, we will be happy. Then that day comes and we have that amount of money, but it's not enough because we always want to have more.

Indulging our cravings can kill us. The Buddha used a final example of a small bird that has stolen a piece of meat from a butcher. The bird flies up in the sky, and suddenly a bigger bird comes along and tries to take the piece of meat. The little bird doesn't let go. If the little bird doesn't release the piece of meat, the big bird will kill her to get the piece of meat. The little bird knows this on some level, but she still cannot bring herself to let it go.

In fact the thing we are running after is just a delusion; and with mindfulness, we can see that it is not worth it. We can

explore deeply the nature of that object of craving—let's say it's money—and then we will see that money is not something we need to crave. We need some for basic use, but not much. When you see deeply the true nature of the object of your craving, you will be healed from your running and able to finally feel free.

Deep in every one of us there is a desire to be continued, a desire for procreation. Monks and nuns also have this desire to procreate, to be continued. But it is possible for them to fulfill this desire spiritually. They can have spiritual children and grandchildren. They can completely satisfy their desires without suppressing themselves. Fulfillment through sublimation is possible with practice.

Love in a couple relationship has to do with this desire to be continued. This doesn't mean that procreation is the only valid reason for a sexual relationship. When you love, you need to express yourself. Sexual expression is one way you demonstrate your love. But I would like to tell you that it is not the only way. If you think it is the only way, you are wrong. There are many ways of expressing our love other than sexually. We can still be happy together. If you don't see things clearly and you think sex is the only way to express your love, you can become obsessed with sex. When a mother holds her child, there's a lot of love in her. When a father speaks to his son on the telephone, he can express his love deeply.

The question is how to express your love and preserve happiness. If you don't respect the other person's body, this is not love. If the sexual act does not include respect, gentleness,

compassion, and loving kindness, I wouldn't say it is a true expression of love. It is an expression of craving, violence, and disrespect. So it should be made clear that in sexual expression, true love should exist; otherwise you are creating suffering for yourself and the other person. A genuine expression of love should include the desire to offer happiness, remove suffering, and remove separation. This is why sex can be deeply spiritual. It can be a very beautiful act.

When the element of disrespect is there, love is destroyed. You have to ask yourself whether the sexual act is creating suffering or not. Sometimes your partner is not in the mood to make love. If you force him, there is no respect, no love. It's like inviting someone for tea. If the person is so busy, doesn't have the time, or doesn't like tea, and you force her to sit down and have tea with you, you are not a true friend; you are not being truly loving. Respect is the first ingredient of true love. Not only for mind and spirit, but for the body. You treat her body gently and with a lot of respect, because we are made of body and mind together. In Plum Village, every time we offer massage to a person, we join our palms and breathe first. We should have complete respect before we touch the other person's body. If you are motivated by craving, sex can be destructive. If you create jealousy, anger, or frustration, you know it is not true love. So it is possible for us to express our love through sexual intimacy, but we should remember that it must be a real expression of true love, not craving. And second, we should remember that sexual expression is not the only way to express our love.



We know it's dangerous to run after objects of craving. Happiness is possible, but not through indulging desire and sensual pleasure. Real happiness is found in the knowledge that ignorance is the ground of all desire. If you know exactly what the danger is and what suffering it will bring, then that desire will die down. You know that if you get AIDS, you will suffer and you may well die. If you understand that clearly, you'll be very careful to protect yourself from contracting AIDS. Thus understanding is the foundation of correct behavior, and ignorance is its opposite.

Right or wrong action can be determined by using the single criterion of suffering or nonsuffering. Whatever causes suffering in the present or the future, for ourselves and people around us, is the wrong thing to do. What brings well-being in the present and the future is the right thing. The criterion is clear.

To put it another way, what comes from mindfulness, concentration, and insight is right, and what goes against mindfulness, concentration, and insight is wrong. Suffering and happiness are a complementary pair we can use to see our situation more clearly. If you use these two yardsticks, you'll know what's wrong and what's right, what is to be done and what shouldn't be done.

This is why, to be happy, to be a real bodhisattva, we need to take some time each day to sit down, look into ourselves, and identify the kind of energy that's motivating us and where it is pushing us. Are we being pushed in the direction of suffering and despair? If so, we must release this intention and find a

more wholesome source of energy. Our volition should be bodhicitta, the mind of love, the intention to love and serve.

There are seeds of awakening and compassion in each of us. In Buddhism, a bodhisattva is someone who is awake, mindful, and motivated by a desire to help others wake up, be mindful, and be happy. Your purpose is to wake up to the reality of suffering and its causes, to wake up to the possibility of happiness. The path of understanding and compassion is the path to happiness.

If you don't have this strong desire to help people, to liberate, to bring awakening and joy, you can't be called a bodhisattva and you don't have a path to follow. But with mindfulness and awareness of our intention, we can all quickly and easily become bodhisattvas, awakened beings committed to the protection of all beings. If you have in you a lot of compassion and a lot of insight and awakening, you can act as a bodhisattva in the form of a businessperson, an athlete, a scientist, a politician, an entertainer, or a parent. The bodhisattva practices the art of living happily in the here and now and shows up in many guises. You don't have to wear a monk's robe. You don't have to have achieved enlightenment or have a certain income. You don't have to have achieved anything. You can wear a suit and tie or a pair of jeans and still carry a bodhisattva's joy, happiness, and freedom. And when you have a lot of joy, happiness, and freedom, you can share it with other living beings.

A bodhisattva may have blocks of fear, suffering, and pain within her, so she returns to herself to recognize the blocks of suffering and fear, embrace them, and transform them into

compassion, love, understanding, and solidity. The bodhisattva has the ability to go back to himself to take care of his body and consciousness. Pain is an inevitable part of life, but happiness is possible. This is the summation of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. These truths are equally applicable to businesspeople, monastics, and everyone in between. The First Noble Truth is that suffering exists. The Second Noble Truth is that suffering has causes. The Third Noble Truth is that happiness is possible. The Fourth Noble Truth is that there is a path that leads to happiness. We have to distinguish between the first truth and the third one. The first is called *dukkha* in Sanskrit, suffering. The third is called *sukha*, happiness. They are quite different. Very often, we mistake our desire or craving for happiness.

We don't need to be afraid of suffering; we can confront it. If you try to run away from it, you will never have a chance to transform it. The Buddha taught that we should look at suffering in terms of nutriment. You have consumed in a way that has brought about suffering. He said, "What has come to be—namely ill-being—if you can look deeply into its nature and identify its source of nutriment, you are already on the path of emancipation."

All of us who want to be bodhisattvas will have to do the same. We have to go back to ourselves, take good care of ourselves, and recognize the suffering in ourselves in order to embrace and transform it. You have to make time for yourself and be there for yourself. Then you will be able to be there for your family and your company, your constituents, your school, and your community.

If you are an artist or a teacher, a parent or a politician, you have the ability to be a bodhisattva and awaken many people at once. When you are motivated by this big desire, you have so much joy and energy that fame and power no longer attract you. You become active, day and night, helping people touch their seeds of joy, peace, and happiness, helping them understand and transform their seeds of discrimination, fear, and craving. Fame, political power, and financial success can't be compared with the joy of knowing that your life on earth is beautiful and helpful. You are a bodhisattva manifesting in the here and now.

Whatever your business, if your true intention is to be a bodhisattva at your work, then you are being a buddha, even if you do not call yourself one. This is what Anathapindika did as a bodhisattva businessman.\* This is something anyone in any profession can do: be truly present, fully alive with a compassionate heart. With the support of a community, this practice can bring transformation, healing, joy, and happiness. You and your family become one entity. You are participating in the work of promoting awakening and transformation. It's a wonderful path.

Power is good for one thing only: to increase our happiness and the happiness of others. Being peaceful and happy is the most important thing in our lives and yet most of the time we suffer, we run after our cravings, and we look to the past or the future for our happiness.

---

\*Anathapindika was a good friend of the Buddha first mentioned in chapter 1.

We know that the bottom line of business is profit. But to *profit* means "to benefit from." There are many ways one can benefit from being a bodhisattva. If our work brings about well-being, there's nothing wrong with making money. It's possible to make money in a way that is not destructive, that promotes more social justice and more understanding and lessens the suffering that exists all around us. To do this, we need to be free from the pursuit of power, wealth, fame, and sex. These four go together. If you don't practice mindfulness, you'll be the victim of these four lures. Looking deeply, we see that it's possible to work in the corporate world in a way that brings a lot of happiness, both to other people and to us. When we're doing something for the benefit of all humankind and the environment, our work has meaning. Even if it's also making money, it has meaning, because it can bring well-being to the world.

## FIVE

## The Secret of Happiness

If we are able to quiet the cravings within us, we see that our true desire is not wealth or fame but happiness. Because we want happiness, we search for power outside of ourselves. But as long as we seek power and happiness in fame, money, and sex, we will not find it. Only by coming back to ourselves and purifying our minds can we experience true, lasting happiness and the kind of power that can't be corrupted.

Is it possible for those of us who are poor, who are unknown, to have happiness? Many of us think that if we have no money and no fame, we have no power and therefore cannot be truly happy. Of course, our basic material needs for food, water, shelter, clothing, physical safety, and livelihood must be met for us to be happy. Abject poverty leads to suffering, disease, and violence. So I am speaking here of the desire to have money above and beyond our material needs.

When the Buddha attained enlightenment, he wasn't famous. On that remarkable day he was unknown to most of the world. Even his family did not know that he had become enlightened. When he went to Deer Park to see the five friends with whom he had previously practiced, they did not know he had attained buddhahood. He wasn't famous yet. After he attained enlightenment, he sat down at the foot of the bodhi tree and played with children and was very happy. His happiness was not based on fame or money. His happiness was based on his liberation, his peace, and his wisdom. We should train ourselves to see happiness in terms of peace, freedom, and compassion, not the size of our bank accounts. These are tremendous sources of power that we can cultivate in our daily lives. Later in his life the Buddha did become famous. But this fame couldn't consume and destroy him; this fame only helped his teaching and practice to spread farther. This kind of fame was not evil; in fact, it was of great benefit to many living beings.

Even if you have no money or fame, the practice of the five powers can make you happier than a lot of people with great wealth and celebrity. Surprisingly, when you are happy, it is not difficult to earn enough money to live comfortably and simply. It is much easier to make the money you need when you are solid and free. If you are happy, you are more likely to be comfortable in any situation. You are not afraid of anything. If you have the five spiritual powers and you lose your job, you don't suffer much. You know how to live simply, and you can continue to be happy. You know that sooner or later you will get another job, and you are open to all possibilities.

We must distinguish happiness from excitement, or even joy. Many people think of excitement as happiness. They are thinking of something, or expecting something that they consider to be happiness, and for them, that is already happiness. But when you are excited you are not peaceful. True happiness is based on peace.

Suppose you are walking in a desert and you are dying of thirst. Suddenly you see an oasis and you know that once you get there, there will be a stream of water you can drink from so you will survive. Although you haven't actually seen or drunk the water, you feel something—excitement, hope, joy, but not happiness yet. Happiness comes only once you actually drink the water and your thirst is quenched. If you don't have peace in yourself, you haven't experienced true happiness.

Some people find it easy to be happy and others don't, even though they have plenty of conditions for happiness. You can buy conditions for happiness, but you can't buy happiness. It's like playing tennis. You can't buy the joy of playing tennis at a store. You can buy the ball and the racket, but you can't buy the joy of playing. To experience the joy of tennis, you have to learn, to train yourself to play. It's the same with writing calligraphy. You can buy the ink, the rice paper, the brush, but if you don't cultivate the art of calligraphy, you can't do calligraphy. So calligraphy requires practice, and you have to train yourself. You are happy as a calligrapher only when you have the capacity to do calligraphy. Happiness is also like that. You have to cultivate happiness; you cannot buy it at the store.

Walking meditation is a wonderful way to train yourself to be happy. While standing in one spot, look off a little ways and choose something—say, a pine tree. Make up your mind that while walking to the pine tree you will enjoy every step, that every step will provide you with the kind of peace and happiness that nourishes, heals, and satisfies.

There are those of us who are capable of walking from one point to another in that way, enjoying every step we take. We are not disturbed by anything—not by the past, not by the future, not by projects, not by excitement. Not even by joy, because in joy there is still more excitement than peace. If you are trained in walking meditation, with each step you can experience peace, happiness, and fulfillment. You are capable of truly touching the earth with each step. You see that being alive, being established fully in the present moment and taking one step, can be a wonder, and you live that wonder in every moment of walking.

Whether we are walking alone or together as a community, every step releases tension so we can touch the wonders of life right here and now. When you are free from tension, free from regrets about the past and worries about the future, you can touch the Kingdom of God or the Pure Land of the Buddha with every step you take, all day long. In the Gospel, there's a story of a farmer who discovered a treasure in a field. He went home and sold everything to buy that field. Like that farmer, if we know how to touch the Kingdom of God or the Pure Land of the Buddha in the here and now, we have the most precious treasure already and we don't need to run after money, fame,

and power anymore. I have been urging church leaders and spiritual leaders to provide us with the kind of teaching and practice that will help us touch the Kingdom of God right here, right now, so we won't run after fame, sex, money, and power anymore. The Kingdom of God is always available. The question is whether we are available to the kingdom. In Buddhist teachings, it is said that the Pure Land of the Buddha is in your heart. If you are free, you can touch the wonders of life here and now. The French writer André Gide said that God is happiness. I like that. He also said that God is available twenty-four hours a day. If God is there, his kingdom is there. But are you there to enjoy the kingdom? The same thing is true in Buddhism. If you do walking meditation properly, every step helps you touch the Pure Land of the Buddha. So you can challenge yourself: "I will do walking meditation from here to that pine tree. I vow that I will succeed." Only if you are free can your steps bring you happiness and peace.

One nun shared with me a story about her friend who visited Plum Village. Her friend is married and has a family, a job, a house, a car, and everything she needs. She thinks of her relationship as a good one, although it wasn't what she'd expected. Her job is enjoyable, with a salary above average. Her house is beautiful.

And yet she doesn't feel happy. Intellectually, she knows that in terms of comfort she has everything, but it does not keep her from being depressed. Not many people are as successful as she is, and she knows that she is fortunate. And yet she isn't happy.



We have a tendency to think of happiness as something we will obtain in the future. Like the oasis visible from miles away in the desert, we expect happiness down the road. We don't have certain conditions we think we need to be happy, but we believe that once we have them happiness will be there.

Suppose you think a degree will make you happy. You think about the diploma day and night, and you do everything to get it because you believe that happiness will be there tomorrow, when you earn your diploma. There may be joy and satisfaction in the days and weeks after you receive your diploma, but you will quickly adapt to that new condition, and in just a few weeks you won't feel happy anymore. You will get used to having a diploma. We become immune to our happiness, and after a while we don't feel happy any longer.

Even people who win the lottery and become millionaires don't often get lasting happiness from their good fortune. Studies have found that after two or three months winners return to the emotional state they were in before winning the lottery. During those three months, what they experience is not exactly happiness; there is a lot of thinking, a lot of excitement, a lot of planning. But three months later, they fall back to exactly the same emotional level they were in before winning the lottery.

Perhaps you want to marry someone, thinking that if you can't marry her, then you cannot be happy. You believe that your happiness will be great after you marry that person. After you marry, you may have a period of happiness, but eventually happiness vanishes. There is no longer any excitement, any

joy, and of course no happiness. What you get is not what you expected and dreamed of. Perhaps you know that what you have attained will not last. The person you are living with may betray you one day. You can't be sure that person will be faithful to you, so there is also fear and uncertainty. Even if you have a good job, you are not sure you can keep it: you may be laid off at any time. This type of happiness without peace has an element of fear and cannot be true happiness. To hold on to these conditions of so-called happiness, you have to be busy all day long. And with these worries, uncertainties, and busyness, you don't feel happy and you become depressed.

Even after we obtain all the conditions we believe are necessary for our happiness, we remain unsatisfied. So the question for those of us who want true happiness is, what can we rely on? The answer is simple and profound. Those of us who want to experience great happiness, to awaken the mind of great understanding and love, should not base our mind on any external thing, including form, sound, touch, and ideas. We should not rely on any object to give rise to the mind of enlightenment, the mind of love.

Suppose you wonder what path to choose for your life. You may think that being a police officer will make you very happy. Some people may be attracted to this path because they want the uniform, they want power. Others feel they can find happiness as medical doctors. And there are those who feel they can be happy only if they become politicians.

You must choose one of these paths, but you are not sure it will bring you happiness. You hesitate, wondering, "If I am not



happy in this career, what will I do?" We have this doubt because we are basing our decision on form, on appearance. The path of a monastic is a form. The path of a politician is a form, just like the path of a businessperson and the path of an artist. There are artists who are happy and artists who aren't. There are monastics who are happy and monastics who aren't. There are laypersons who are happy and laypersons who aren't. There are police officers who are happy and police officers who aren't. So you cannot say that the position or occupation you long for will make you happy. If you think you can base your decision and your happiness on this kind of outer form, you are wrong. You will be deceived.

You may want to marry a man who is attractive, who has a prestigious degree, or who has a high position in society, because you think that marrying such a person will guarantee your happiness. If you want to marry someone just because he is beautiful or rich, you are relying on only the external form, and this changes constantly. What if your spouse loses his job, his fame, his power? What if he gets into an accident and is no longer attractive?

Whatever form you take, whatever path you take, if you are attached to the form, you cannot get the happiness you want, even if you become a monk or a nun. If you are attached to the form of a monastic and you think that wearing the robe and living in the monastery will make you happy, you are wrong. There are monks and nuns who are not happy because they are not capable of being understanding and loving. But when you know how to cultivate understanding and compassion in every

moment of your life, the outer form of your life doesn't matter anymore. So the key to success is not the form of a monastic or layperson, of a police officer, a farmer, or a doctor, but your capacity to cultivate happiness, understanding, and compassion.

Wherever there is form, wherever there is perception, there is delusion. We have to be very careful about basing our decisions on the appearance of things, on the outer form. To find happiness, enlightenment, and compassion, you have to be free, not fooled by your perceptions. When you look at something deeply, you discover its nature and you are no longer fooled by it. Since you are not fooled by the appearance, you no longer suffer, and you have the capacity to be happy.

We tend to think, "I'll be so happy if I can get this and this and this. But if I'm not able to get these things, my life will be ruined, and I'll never be happy." Our ideas about what power is and what will bring us happiness can be quite dangerous for us. It's dangerous to be committed to an idea of happiness, because then you're caught in that idea. Happiness can come to you in a thousand ways if you only allow it to. But if you're committed to only one idea of happiness, you're stuck. Happiness can no longer come to you because you've decided that you'll refuse everything except this one path of happiness. Of course you're motivated by the desire to be happy and to make the people you love happy. But the idea of happiness that you have may actually be an obstacle preventing you and your beloved ones from being happy.

The Buddha told the story of a merchant, a widower, who went away on a business trip and left his little boy at home.

While he was away, bandits came and burned down the whole village. When the merchant returned, he didn't find his house; it was just a heap of ash. There was the charred body of a child close by. He threw himself on the ground and cried and cried. He beat his chest and pulled his hair.

The next day, he had the little body cremated. Because his beloved son was his only reason for existence, he sewed a beautiful little velvet bag and put the ashes inside. Wherever he went, he took that bag of ashes with him. Eating, sleeping, working, he always carried it with him. In fact, his son had been kidnapped by the bandits; three months later, the boy escaped and returned home. When he arrived, it was two o'clock in the morning. He knocked on the door of the new house his father had built. The poor father was lying on his bed crying, holding the bag of ashes, and he asked, "Who is there?" "It's me, Daddy, your son." The father answered, "That's not possible. My son is dead. I've cremated his body and I carry his ashes with me. You must be some naughty boy who's trying to fool me. Go away, don't disturb me!" He refused to open the door, and there was no way for the little boy to come in. The boy had to go away, and the father lost his son forever.

After telling this story, the Buddha said, "If at some point in your life you adopt an idea or a perception as the absolute truth, you close the door of your mind. This is the end of seeking the truth. And not only do you no longer seek the truth, but even if the truth comes in person and knocks on your door, you refuse to open it. Attachment to views, attachment to ideas, attachment to perceptions are the biggest obstacle to the truth."

It's like when you climb a ladder. When you get to the fourth rung, you may think you are on the highest step and cannot go higher, so you hold on to the fourth rung. But in fact there is a fifth rung; if you want to get to it, you have to be willing to abandon the fourth rung. Ideas and perceptions should be abandoned all the time, to make room for better ideas and truer perceptions. This is why we must always ask ourselves, "Am I sure?"

I have a friend who became a stockbroker. At first, he was quite eloquent and used that talent to persuade his clients to buy stock. But after encountering the Buddhist teaching and learning the mantra "Are you sure?" he changed his views and his method. When people asked him whether he was sure, he said, "I can't say that I'm sure. This is my opinion, based on my best understanding at this time." He was honest. The result was that even more people sought his advice.

We may find that ambition—the desire to become someone special—is very strong in us. Achieving and "becoming someone" is seen as significant, yet it can lead us to suffer a lot in spite of our many achievements. How can we deal with the desire to become someone?

Your action, what you do, depends on who you are. The quality of your action depends on the quality of your being. Suppose you want to offer happiness to someone. You are eager to make a person happy. This is a good idea, but if you yourself are not happy, you can't do it. To make another person happy you have to be happy yourself. So there is a link between doing and being. If you don't succeed in being, you can't succeed in doing.

Happiness becomes possible when we realize we have a path, when we know where we are going. If you don't have the impression that you are on the right path, if you don't know where you are going, you suffer, you feel lost and confused. Happiness is feeling that you are on the right path every moment. You don't need to arrive at the end of the path to be happy. You are happy right here and right now.

Being on the "right path" has to do with the very concrete ways in which you live your life in every moment. It is possible to live mindfully every moment of your daily life. This makes you happy, and it also makes the people around you happy. Even if you haven't "done" anything yet to make them happy, once you are walking that path and you are happy doing so, you become pleasant to be with, fresh, and compassionate, and people benefit from being around you. Look at the tree in the front yard: the tree doesn't seem to do anything. It just stands there, vigorous, fresh, and beautiful, and everyone benefits from it. That is the miracle of being. If a tree is less than a tree, all of us will be in trouble. If a tree can be a real tree, there is hope, there's joy.

So if you can be yourself, this is already love, this is already action. Action is based on nonaction, and nonaction is the practice of *being*. There are people who "do" a lot, who cause a lot of trouble. Even if they have the best of intentions, the more they try to help, the more trouble they create. There are a lot of activists around us who are not peaceful, not happy, and so what they do causes more trouble. This is why what we want to do is to *be* in such a way that peace and compassion are possible in

every moment. Words and actions coming from that foundation can be only helpful. If you can make a person suffer less, make her smile, you will feel very happy, very rewarded.

If a nun is happy, it is not because she has power or fame but because she knows her presence is helping a lot of people. To feel that you are helpful, you are useful to society—this is happiness. When you have a path and you enjoy every step on your path, you are already someone. You don't need to become someone else. You already are what you want to become, practicing nonaction, the art of being.

When I was a young monk, I learned that the teachings of the Buddha could be summarized in four short sentences. People asked the Buddha how to be happy, and he said that all buddhas teach the same thing:

The bad things, don't do them.

The good things, try to do them.

Try to purify, subdue your own mind.

That is the teaching of all buddhas.\*

I wasn't impressed. I thought to myself, "This is too simple. Everyone agrees that you have to do good things and refrain from doing bad things. To subdue and purify your mind is too vague." But after sixty-five years of practice I have a different perspective on this teaching. Looking carefully, I have seen that these four sentences are very meaningful.

---

\*This translation is from the Chinese version of the Dhammapada.

Now I understand that the bad things you should avoid are those that create suffering for you and other people, including other living beings and the environment. Mindfulness helps you know whether something is a good thing or a bad thing, whether doing it will bring happiness or suffering to yourself and the people around you. When you refrain from doing bad things, you are practicing compassion, because you refrain from bringing suffering to yourself and other people. Practicing compassion is practicing happiness, because happiness is the absence of suffering. Then, try to do good things. Try to do whatever brings peace, stability, and joy to you and other people.

You practice love, you practice compassion, and you know that practicing love brings happiness. Happiness cannot exist without love. All the great spiritual teachers have told us to love, and the concrete means is to refrain from causing suffering and to offer happiness.

It is easy to say, easy to understand, but it is not always easy to do or to refrain from doing. Thus these first two things depend entirely on the third thing: to purify and subdue your mind. The mind is the ground of everything.

The Buddha said that all suffering comes from the mind but all happiness also comes from the mind. To purify your mind is to transform your way of perceiving things, to remove wrong perceptions. When you remove your wrong perceptions, you also remove your anger, your hate, your discrimination, and your craving.

Our minds can be intoxicated by three kinds of poison: the first is craving, the second is hate or violence, and the third is

delusion. To purify your mind is to neutralize and transform these poisons in you. You neutralize these poisons with the three wisdoms, the energies of mindfulness, concentration, and insight.

If your mind is full of confusion, anger, and craving, then your mind is not pure, so even if you want to do good things you can't do them, and even if you want to refrain from doing bad things you cannot. You can offer happiness and refrain from causing suffering easily and beautifully only when you know how to subdue and purify your mind. This is the most special thing in Buddhism, the art of subduing and purifying your mind. Once our mind is subdued and transformed, happiness becomes possible.

When you walk from here to the pine tree, you begin with one step, and you can train yourself so that this step has within it the energy of mindfulness, concentration, and insight. If you really practice walking meditation, you will discover that every step you take generates the energies of mindfulness, concentration, and insight, bringing you a lot of happiness. When you walk like this, you are first aware that you are taking a step: that is the energy of mindfulness. I am here. I am alive. I am taking a step. You step and you know you are taking a step. That is mindfulness of walking. The mindfulness helps you be in the here and now, fully present, fully alive so that you can take the step. Zen Master Lin Chi said, "The miracle is not to walk on air, or on water, or on fire. The real miracle is to walk on earth." Walking with mindfulness, concentration, and insight is performing a miracle. You

are truly alive. You are truly present, touching the wonders of life within you and around you.

We have invented many types of machines that save a lot of time. We can do wonders with a computer. A computer can work a hundred or a thousand times faster than a typewriter. In farming, it used to take several weeks to plough the fields, now you can do it in a few days. You don't have to wash your clothes by hand anymore—there's a washing machine. You don't have to go fetch the water, because the water comes to your kitchen. We have found many ways to save labor, and yet we are much busier than our ancestors were. That is a contradiction. Why is that? Because we have acquired so much and we are afraid of losing these things, so we have to work hard to keep them. That is why even if you have a lot, you still suffer and become depressed.

Manufacturers of medicine will tell you that the kinds of medicine we consume the most in our society—in tremendous quantities—are sedatives and antidepressants. When the Buddha talked about subduing and purifying our minds, he wasn't talking about sedation.

We have taken into ourselves so many toxins, poisons. The world we have created has overpowered us. We cannot escape anymore, even in our sleep. But peace and happiness are still available, once we see that the conditions we think are essential to our happiness may in fact bring us the opposite of happiness—depression, despair, and forgetfulness.

We have to begin with our breath. We have to breathe in mindfully to know that we are alive, that there are still wonders

of life around us and in us that we can touch every minute for our transformation and healing. We have to use our feet to learn how to walk in the present, because each step will be transforming, healing, and nourishing.

Most of us walk like sleepwalkers. We walk, but we aren't there. We don't experience life or the wonders of life. There is little joy. We are sleepwalking through our own life, and our life is as unreal as a dream. Cultivating true power is about waking up from your dream. One mindful step can be a factor of awakening that brings you to life—that brings you the miracle of being alive. And when mindfulness is there, concentration is there, because mindfulness contains concentration. You can be less or more focused. You may be fifty, sixty, or ninety percent focused on your step, but the more focused you are, the better your chance of breaking through into insight. Mindfulness leads to concentration, which leads to insight. Insight is a fruit of our practice. Like an orange tree offers oranges, insight offers us the truths of impermanence, no-self, and interbeing.

Impermanence means that everything is changing, including the happiness you experience when you are doing walking meditation. Happiness, like all phenomena, is impermanent. It lasts for only one step; if the next step doesn't have mindfulness, concentration, and insight, then happiness will die. However, you know that you are capable of taking a second step that also generates the three energies of mindfulness, concentration, and insight, so you have the power to make happiness last longer. It's like when we ride a bicycle: we continue to pedal so that we can continue to move forward.



Happiness is impermanent, but it can be renewed. You are also impermanent and also renewable, like your breath, like your steps. You are not something permanent experiencing something impermanent. You are something impermanent experiencing something impermanent. If happiness can be renewed, so can you, because you in the next moment is a renewal of you in this moment. It's wonderful to know that happiness lasts only as long as one in-breath or one step, because we know we can renew our happiness in another breath or another step, provided we know the art of generating mindfulness, concentration, and insight.

The insight of impermanence leads to the insight of no-self. When we pursue individual happiness, our satisfaction is always ultimately fleeting, because individual happiness is not possible. Our happiness, our existence, is dependent on the existence and happiness of everyone and everything else. This is the insight of interbeing, the interconnectedness of all things. The father knows that if the son is not happy he himself cannot be truly happy, so when the father seeks his own happiness, he also seeks happiness for his son. Your mindful steps are not for you alone; they are for your partner and friends too, because the moment you stop suffering, others benefit.

When you take one mindful step, it might seem that you are taking a step for yourself alone. You are trying to find some peace, some stability, some happiness. But with insight, you see that everything good that you do for yourself, you are doing for all of us. If just one person in a family or a com-

pany practices, that practice will benefit everyone, not only the practitioner. When that person practices correctly, she gets the insight of no-self and she knows that she's doing it for everyone.

Perhaps you feel you are doing most of the work in your home or office. You get angry at others and feel they should be punished. When a feeling of anger or discrimination manifests, the practitioner recognizes that to allow such an energy to continue is not healthy for himself or for others. All these thoughts can be easily transformed once you have touched the nature of no-self. Practice mindfulness of breathing and walking in order to recognize the feeling of anger, to embrace the anger and transform it. When the element of ignorance is no longer there, the element of anger will be transformed. You don't transform it just for the benefit of others; you do it for yourself as well, because you see that there is no distinction between the two. With the insight of no-self, you no longer seek the kind of happiness that will make other people suffer. This kind of insight can liberate you and liberate the world.

So from here to the pine tree, I wish you good luck. Take a step in such a way that mindfulness, concentration, and insight can be generated, so that you get in touch with the here and now, you touch the wonders of life. Forget about the conditions of happiness that you have been running after for such a long time—money, power, wealth, sex—because you know that once you get them, you will still be unhappy. You want true life, true happiness, true power.



## Boundless Love

When we are running around after our cravings and false power, we are missing out on something that is crucial to our happiness: the experience of love. With the insight of impermanence, no-self, and interbeing, we have the opportunity to experience true love. The French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said that to love another doesn't mean we sit and look at each other; it means we both look in the same direction. We all should look deeply at our own lives to see whether in our experience this is true or not, and if it's true, to what degree. Each of us has needs and desires, so when we love someone, we have a natural tendency to look at him. We hope to see in him the goodness, truth, and beauty we are looking for. We are thirsting for sincerity. We are looking for something sacred, something beautiful, something good, and something wholesome. Many of us

believe that once we find these qualities in another person, we will feel we don't lack anything, and we will be less alone.

We all start looking for the beautiful, the true, and the good in other people. Many of us believe there are only a few people who have these qualities. When we find these qualities in another person, we may fall in love with him because we believe we have discovered the essence of the true, beautiful, and good. We must be careful in this search, because we may have wrong perceptions. Sometimes the beauty we think is real is not true beauty. The truth we think is real is not real truth. And the wholesomeness we perceive is not real goodness. So we can love another based on a wrong perception. When we have gotten to know that person for a period of time, we discover that we have failed, because that person is not able to symbolize for us the beautiful, good, and true that we were looking for. We say that the person has deceived us, and we suffer. And then we go and look for someone else, another person to love. We may fail many times, falling into the same situation, growing tired of or disappointed with the other person. If we continue like this, we can spend our lives constantly looking for someone.

In the beginning, each of us feels that we lack something, that we are only half a person. And we wander around looking for our other half. We're like a saucepan without a lid, and we're always looking for our lid. We have an inferiority complex and believe that the true, the good, and the beautiful don't exist in us. This is a deep complex in every one of us. We have a perception that we are not worthy. We don't say these

things—we may not even be consciously aware of them—but deep down we feel that we have no beauty, goodness, or truth.

Because we wish we had these things, we try to seem like we do, even if only on the outside. We want to show other people that we are good, that we are beautiful, even if only in appearance. In ourselves, we believe we are not really beautiful, not really good. And so we try to improve our appearance with cosmetics, clothes, diets, or plastic surgery. We want to appear more truthful and knowledgeable, so we look for things to study or unusual experiences that will bring us prestige. We adorn ourselves with titles and awards.

We are all deceiving each other. Deep down we feel there is nothing good, beautiful, and true in us, and at the same time we are desperate to show other people how good, beautiful, and truthful we are. And so we deceive ourselves from generation to generation. And while we are deceiving others, we are also being deceived by them. We are each other's victims. We are trying to make ourselves up so we will look less ugly, and others are doing the same.

Sitting at the foot of the bodhi tree on the night when he realized the truth, the Buddha discovered something that was very surprising to him and also to us. He saw that the good, the beautiful, and the true are to be found in everyone, but very few people know that. People think that the true, the beautiful, and the good exist somewhere else, in someone else. They don't know that they are true, beautiful, and good at their core. Our whole life, we are looking for someone else to replace what we feel is missing.

This is what the Buddha said at the moment of enlightenment: "How strange—all living beings have the fully awakened nature, but none of them knows it. And because of that they drift and sink from lifetime to lifetime in the great ocean of *samsara*, in suffering."

When we recognize that in us there is the essence of goodness, beauty, and truth, we will stop going in search of something. We will stop wandering around feeling that we lack something. And we are able to stop deceiving others. We don't have to adorn ourselves because we have discovered the true, the beautiful, and the good here within us.

We are like an ocean wave that believes it is fragile and ugly and that the other waves are more beautiful, more powerful. The wave has an inferiority complex. But when this wave gets in touch with its true nature, water, it sees that water goes beyond all concepts of beautiful, ugly, high, low, here, and there. Whether it's a large wave or a small wave, half a wave or a third of a wave, it is still made out of water. Water is beyond all these qualifications—it is without birth and without death. A wave is really only water, and as far as water is concerned, all waves are equal because all waves are water.

Everyone who lives in this world—women, men, rich, poor, educated, uneducated, sick, healthy—they all have this basis of goodness, beauty, and truth. Don't go looking outside yourself anymore, because the thing you are looking for is already there within you. All living beings have the pure, clear, complete nature within themselves. And everyone has to return to herself to be in touch properly with that beautiful, good, and true that

is within her. When you have been in touch with this inner nature, you will put an end to the many lifetimes of searching and have a steadfast faith in yourself. Then you will have happiness; you will have peace.

The Buddha said we each have beauty within us, but this may be hard to accept if in our home, our community, and our workplace we're getting a different message. Many of us believe our workplace is not a safe place. Often at work, we are afraid of disapproval. We are afraid to be ourselves, and we change who we are to be accepted. If your happiness depends entirely on the views of other people, you have no confidence in yourself. Then, when you are not recognized by others as beautiful and worthy, you suffer. This is what makes you want to be someone else, something else, which is the foundation of suffering.

A flower doesn't have this kind of fear. It stands in a garden with many other kinds of flowers, some pink or yellow, some with many petals, others with just a few. But a flower never tries to imitate another flower. Don't try to be someone else. You don't need plastic surgery. The cosmos has come together and helped you manifest in this way, and you are beautiful just as you are. To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don't need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself. When you are born a lotus flower, be beautiful as a lotus flower; don't try to be a magnolia flower. If you crave acceptance and recognition and try to change yourself to fit what other people want you to be, you will suffer all your life. True happiness and true power lie in understanding yourself, accepting yourself, having confidence in yourself.



