

INTRODUCTION

Peace is every step.

The shining red sun is my heart.

Each flower smiles with me.

How green, how fresh all that grows.

How cool the wind blows.

Peace is every step.

It turns the endless path to joy.

—*Tinh Thuy, senior student of Thich Nhat Hanh*

In the midst of our chaotic world, we tend to lose touch with the peace and joy that are available in each moment: the sunshine, the birds' singing, the autumn leaves, a baby's smile. The practice of walking meditation brings us back to being fully present and alive with every step, filling each moment with peace and joy.

Over the past four decades, my teacher, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, has offered walking meditation practice to hundreds of thousands of people around the world. It has transformed many people's lives, including my own. I was introduced to the practice in 1980, and it has stayed with me and become my life. I have shared it with many people at mindfulness workshops and retreats at the Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax in Oakton, Virginia, and elsewhere.

This book, CD, and DVD set includes a complete program of meditation instruction that you can use to create your own walking meditation practice. Be sure to read the instructions for each practice before listening to the guided session that is included on the CD. You will also be instructed when to watch the *Walking Meditation* DVD, which features archival footage of the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh instructing students in the basic practice of slow walking meditation.

It is with great happiness that I share the art of mindful walking with you. If you follow this training program wholeheartedly, the value of your practice will be beyond measure. The boundary between practice and non-practice will eventually disappear, and every time you take a step, it will be a peaceful one. Every time you walk, it will be a walking meditation.



CONSCIOUS BREATHING MEDITATION

The Welcoming Path

The empty path welcomes you,
fragrant with grass and little flowers,
the path paved with paddy fields
still bearing the marks of your childhood
and the fragrance of mother's hand.
Walk leisurely, peacefully.
Your feet touch the Earth deeply.
Don't let your thoughts carry you away,
come back to the path every moment.
The path is your dear friend.
She will transmit to you
her solidity,
and her peace.

—*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Meditation is not meant to help us avoid problems or run away from difficulties. It is meant to allow positive healing to take place. To meditate is to learn how to stop—to stop being carried away by our regrets about the past, our anger or despair in the present, or our worries about the future. By practicing the art of stopping, we can enter the present moment and be

nourished by the beauty and wonder of life in and around us: the smell of flowers, the warmth of sunshine, the color of the sky. To practice mindfulness is to begin to realize that we have a choice—to stop and rest or run, to be angry or happy. Once we choose to stop, everything will be okay.

Before learning walking meditation, we begin by learning how to breathe mindfully. This is the best way to help us learn to rest and stop. When we breathe and know that we are breathing, our wandering mind begins to rest on the pillow of our breath. A feeling of calm and ease then naturally arises.

The fundamental practice of conscious breathing meditation is to nourish your mindfulness and learn how to keep it present, alive, and strong. When you learn how to generate the energy of mindfulness and allow it to penetrate everything you do, understanding, compassion, and loving kindness will naturally flower in you. At the beginning you may think that you are practicing mindfulness only while walking, but then one morning you might make some tea; you pick up the mug and suddenly you can smell the tea more keenly than ever before. And as you take a sip, the tea becomes more delicious because the energy of mindfulness that you have developed allows you to taste it more directly and deeply.

Your breath is part of your body, so when your mind is in touch with your breath through mindful breathing, it is also in touch with your body. True rest and peace are the natural result of conscious breathing in which body, breath, and mind come into unity.

To practice basic conscious breathing meditation, sit comfortably and let your weight sink into the ground. You can also practice conscious breathing while standing, walking, or in any other position, or even while jogging. If you have physical limitations and cannot sit or stand comfortably, you can lie

on your back. Whether you walk or jog, sit or stand, as long as you remain mindful of your breathing, peace and serenity are always with you.

Sit in such a way that you can enjoy each moment of your sitting. You can sit on a chair if sitting on a cushion is difficult for you. If you experience a lot of restlessness or resistance in your sitting, lie down instead.

Whether you are sitting or standing, keep your head and neck aligned with your spinal column by dropping your shoulders completely. If you are lying down, let your arms rest alongside your body at an angle that enables your shoulders to fully relax. Your hands can rest on your belly or on the floor. If you need to use a pillow, choose one that is thin enough to support your head without tensing your neck. To loosen your jaw, open your mouth as wide as you can three times, followed each time by a deep breath. Now, close your eyes and allow your facial muscles to relax completely by keeping a half-smile on your lips. A half-smile helps bring you back to the source of love, joy, and compassion within you. Let your breath flow naturally and allow the river of your breath to carry your gentle smile to every part of your body.

Your elbows and wrists should be loose. Relax each of your fingers. If you are sitting, you can place one hand on top of the other, interlock your fingers, or let your hands rest naturally on your lap.

When you feel settled in this sitting or lying position, put your hands on your belly and continue to breathe naturally. With your in-breath, allow all of your thoughts to move down to the level of your abdomen and settle there. As you breathe out, allow your whole body to feel softened and cleansed as tensions and stresses in your body are released. As you breathe in, quietly say “Resting” while allowing all of your mental activities to rest in your abdomen. Then, during the whole length of your out-breath, quietly say “Softening”

as your body relaxes and becomes as soft as a baby's. Practice this exercise—breathing in, “Resting”; breathing out, “Softening”—for a few minutes or as long as you wish until you experience a sense of deep ease and calm.

Your mind has been resting on the soft pillow of your breath and because of that your breath has become deeper, quieter, and slower. Now, give your gentle and complete attention to your breathing and nothing else. Place your hands on your abdomen so you can feel it rise and fall with your in-breath and out-breath. Have you noticed that it rises as you breathe in and falls as you breathe out? This is healthy breathing. When we are tense or taken over by a strong emotion, our breathing becomes short and shallow, and our belly does not move at all.

Now, as you breathe in, follow the air that enters your body through your nose, feel the rise of your abdomen, and quietly say, “In, one.” With your out-breath, feel the fall of your abdomen and quietly say, “Out, one.” Say “In, two” on the second in-breath, and “Out, two” on the second out-breath. Continue for ten full breaths. Counting your breath in this way helps you to cultivate mindfulness and concentration, which are crucial for nourishing peace and happiness.

At first you may find it difficult to remain mindful for as many as ten breaths, but once you are able to take ten conscious breaths in a row, you can continue until you reach fifteen. And if you want to do more, you can continue until you reach twenty breaths. I will guide you through a basic conscious breathing meditation practice on Track One of the CD.



CD LISTEN TO TRACK ONE:
CONSCIOUS BREATHING MEDITATION

IF YOU EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTIES PRACTICING CONSCIOUS BREATHING MEDITATION

Although conscious breathing will eventually become very natural and enjoyable for you, it takes some effort at the beginning. But if you practice a short period of mindful breathing for ten breaths twice a day—after you wake up in the morning and before you go to bed at night—the practice will grow stronger in you over time. One day you will wake up and remember to breathe naturally, because you will have sown the seed of mindful breathing and watered it daily.

In meditation, the practice of calming, resting, and dwelling happily in the present moment can be difficult at first because our minds are always racing. The more you try to stop your racing mind, the more it resists. Mindfulness is not meant to suppress or get rid of the racing mind, but simply recognize its presence. First you need to acknowledge that thinking nonstop has become a strong habit for you. The easiest way to keep that habit from taking you over is to learn how to breathe in a sitting position for a short time, for just five or ten breaths. If you think you have to practice meditation for too long a period of time, there is no way you will maintain a daily practice. Instead, throughout the day you can use the ringing of the telephone or the sound of your watch or any other cue to stop all doing and thinking for a moment. Just enjoy your breathing. Our son started sitting when he was three or four years old. Before he went to kindergarten, he sat for ten breaths every morning. And if a little child can do that, I am sure we grown ups can do that as well.

If anxiety, sorrow, confusion, or fear happen to arise while you sit, greet them with a gentle smile; and if you are a visual person, invite them to rest in your lap or next to you as you sit. Return to the practice of conscious

breathing: “Breathing in, I feel (or rest on, or smile to) my in-breath”; “Breathing out, I feel (or rest on, or smile to) my out-breath.” Practicing in this way will help calm both your body and your emotions, and as a result you will begin to experience the peace and joy of sitting.

There is a wisdom inside of us that tells us what to do at certain moments. We can wake up that wisdom through meditation practice until, eventually, the process becomes quite natural for us and takes place on a subconscious level.

If you think that peace and happiness are somewhere else and you run after them, you will never arrive. It is only when you realize that peace and happiness are available here in the present moment that you will be able to relax. In daily life, there is so much to do and so little time. You may feel pressured to run all the time. Just stop! Touch the ground of the present moment deeply, and you will touch real peace and joy.

—*Thich Nhat Hanh*

