

All quotations are outpourings of wisdom from Thich Nhat Hanh.

Our deep appreciation to Aravinda for generously sharing their lovely, peaceful center. May any merit generated by our practice help to nourish and expand the local contemplative community.

Knoxville Mindfulness Meditation

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Music of the Heart Sangha

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Plum Village

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Thich Nhat Hanh - Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/thichnhathanh>

Aravinda Yoga and Healing Arts Center

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Knoxville, TN
November 19, 2011

 **Intentions**

“Because of your smile, you make life more beautiful.”

To grow in mindfulness, appreciation, joy, and understanding.
To deepen connectedness and promote harmony within the sangha.
To heal and transform ourselves and the world.

 **Schedule**

Note: Apart from the group discussion, please try to maintain noble silence as much as possible throughout the retreat.

9:00 am	9:30 am	Orientation / Introductions
9:30 am	10:30 am	Walking meditation
10:30 am	12:00 noon	Dharma talk
12:00 noon	1:00 pm	Potluck / Mindful eating
1:00 pm	2:00 pm	Deep relaxation
2:00 pm	3:00 pm	Sitting meditation
3:00 pm	3:30 pm	Five mindfulness trainings
3:30 pm	4:30 pm	Sharing circle
4:30 pm	5:00 pm	Cleanup / Closing

 **Thich Nhat Hanh**

“The practice of peace and reconciliation is one of the most vital and artistic of human actions.”

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, affectionately called “Thay,” is one of the most well-known and respected Buddhist teachers today. He was exiled from his beloved Vietnam for encouraging peaceful dialogue to end the war. Thay shares the art of mindful living with great energy and skill through his books, retreats, and numerous practice centers.

 **Notes and Reflections**

Happiness

Happiness is here and now
I have dropped my worries
Nowhere to go, nothing to do
No longer in a hurry
Happiness is here and now
I have dropped my worries
Somewhere to go, something to do
But I don't need to hurry

I Am A Cloud

I am a cloud, I am the blue sky
I am a bird spreading out its wings
I am a flower, I am the sunshine
I am the Earth receiving a seed
And I am free when my heart is open
Yes I am free when my mind is clear
Oh dear brother, oh dear sister
Let's walk together mindfully (2x)

The Island Within

Breathing in
I go back to the island within myself
There are beautiful trees within the island
There are clear streams of water
There are birds, sunshine, and fresh air
Breathing out, I feel safe
I enjoy going back to my island

No Coming, No Going

No coming, no going
No after, no before
I hold you close to me
I release you to be free
Because I am in you and you are in me (2x)

Mindfulness

“Life can be found only in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, and if we do not go back to ourselves in the present moment, we cannot be in touch with life.”

Through mindfulness, we experience the present moment with an attentive heart in order to enjoy life's constant unfolding and come home to our true selves. By letting go of judgment, control, negative habit energies, and other distractions, we can repose - fresh, solid, reflecting, free - in the fullness of silence. Our life blossoms in meaning and satisfaction as mindfulness gradually permeates more aspects of it. There is no failure when practicing mindfulness; only a growing awareness of what does and doesn't serve us.

Sitting Meditation

“Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts.”

Sitting is the most common form of meditation in Buddhism and other contemplative traditions. Arrange yourself on a cushion or chair, bringing a relaxed awareness to your posture. Rediscover the full length of your spine, imagining it as a silken cord stretching from earth to sky. Lift the chest and open your heart. A hand mudra, such as joining the thumb and first finger or cradling the hands, may help keep you both centered and receptive. Place your focus on the breath, following every inhalation and exhalation from beginning to end. While staying with the breath, you may choose to momentarily shift your focus to sensations in different parts of your body. You may also extend loving-kindness to others in order to take in and release their suffering. When thoughts and emotions inevitably arise in the mind, take a moment to acknowledge, identify, and embrace them and then gently turn your attention back to the breath.

Walking Meditation

“..I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child – our own two eyes. All is a miracle.”

In walking meditation, the sangha body moves together - silently and mindfully - like a flowing stream. Step in harmony with the rhythms of your natural breath (e.g., taking two steps for the inhale and three steps for the exhale), adjusting your pace as necessary to stay with the group. A short mantra such as “Arrived” or “Home” may help keep you anchored in the present moment. Place awareness in your feet, lighten your body, and feel the earth lift up to caress your soles as they make contact. Keeping the gaze level, trust in your body to find the surest path and protect you. You may want to invite dear ones who cannot join you in physical form to walk with you in spirit.

Compassionate Listening

“When you love someone, the best thing you can offer is your presence. How can you love if you are not there?”

Compassionate listening offers us an ever present opportunity to help alleviate the suffering of a loved one, acquaintance, or even a stranger. Retire to the quietest, most peaceful environment you can, preferably in nature or near flowers. Breathe together, then allow the other to share without interrupting or reacting...as the ocean absorbs tears. [Any wrong perceptions can be discussed later.] Giving someone your full attention and creating a sacred space for them to unburden their heart is a rare gift, which reflects your appreciation of them and the relationship. A related practice - selective watering of one another's positive qualities (e.g., thanking them for acting with wisdom) - allows our innate beauty, understanding, and love to thrive.

Songs of Practice

Dear Friends

Dear friends, dear friends
Let me tell you how I feel
You have given me such treasures
I love you so

I Have Arrived

I have arrived, I am home
In the here and in the now
I am solid, I am free
In the ultimate I dwell (2x)

Breathing In, Breathing Out

Breathing in, breathing out
Breathing in, breathing out
I am blooming as a flower
I am fresh as the dew
I am solid as a mountain
I am free as the Earth
I am free
Breathing in, breathing out
Breathing in, breathing out
I am water reflecting
What is real, what is true
And I feel there is space
Deep inside of me
I am free, I am free, I am free

In Out

In...out, deep...slow
Calm...ease, smile...release
Present moment
Wonderful moment

and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

Nourishment and Healing

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 will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriment, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth.

Mindful Eating

“Keeping your body healthy is an expression of gratitude to the whole cosmos - the trees, the clouds, everything.”

Mindful eating elevates a simple meal into a spiritual experience as you reflect on every element - human, animal, vegetal, mineral - and action necessary to manifest the meal. Savor every bite, chewing thoughtfully and thoroughly. Recognize and honor each morsel as a microcosm of the universe. Especially if you are consuming animal products, vow to use the energy they provide to benefit others.

Five Contemplations

These verses are recited before meals to nurture appreciation and recognition of the interbeing of our food with the universe.

This food is the gift of the whole universe: the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard, loving work.

May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive it.

May we recognize and transform our unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed, and learn to eat with moderation.

May we keep our compassion alive by eating in such a way that we reduce the suffering of living beings, preserve our planet, and reverse the process of global warming.

We accept this food so that we may nurture our sisterhood and brotherhood, strengthen our community, and nourish our ideal of serving all living beings.

Five Mindfulness Trainings

Sisters and brothers in the community, this is the moment when we enjoy reciting the Five Mindfulness Trainings together. The Five Mindfulness Trainings represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love, leading to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world. To practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of interbeing, or Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair. If we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are already on the path of a bodhisattva. Knowing we are on that path, we are not lost in confusion about our life in the present or in fears about the future.

Please strive to recite these with the sangha at least once a month.

Reverence For Life

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and 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 support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.

True Happiness

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share

my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after wealth, fame, power and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming.

True Love

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. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness – which are the four basic elements of true love – for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

Loving Speech and Deep Listening

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic