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**BREATHE! YOU ARE ALIVE**  
Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing

THICH NHAT HANH



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## **Breathe! You Are Alive**

Breathe and you know that you are alive.  
Breathe and you know that all is helping you.  
Breathe and you know that you are the world.  
Breathe and you know that the flower is breathing too.  
Breathe for yourself and you breathe for the world.  
Breathe in compassion and breathe out joy.

Breathe and be one with the air that you breathe.  
Breathe and be one with the river that flows.  
Breathe and be one with the earth that you tread.  
Breathe and be one with the fire that glows.  
Breathe and you break the thought of birth and death.  
Breathe and you see that impermanence is life.

Breathe for your joy to be steady and calm.  
Breathe for your sorrow to flow away.  
Breathe to renew every cell in your blood.  
Breathe to renew the depths of consciousness.  
Breathe and you dwell in the here and now.  
Breathe and all you touch is new and real.

—Annabel Laity

## A Note on the Translation

There are several conventions employed in this translation about which it would be useful to inform the reader.

The word for a Buddhist scripture, the teachings of the Buddha, is *sutta* in Pali and *sutra* in Sanskrit. This text, the *Anapanasati Sutta*, is of Pali origin, so it would be natural to use the Pali word *sutta* throughout the text. However, due to historical circumstance, Mahayana Sanskrit scriptures have become better known in the West, so we have decided to use the word *sutra* as if it were an English word. We use the word *sutta* only when it is part of the proper name of a Pali *sutta*, such as *Anapanasati Sutta* or *Satipatthana Sutta*. Otherwise, we use the word *sutra* to refer even to Pali texts.

Secondly, there are no diacritical marks in this translation because of the limitations of the publisher's software. We hope to include diacritical marks for Pali and Sanskrit words in future editions.

Finally, we translate the term *sati* differently in the words *Anapanasati* and *Satipatthana*. In the former, we use "full awareness," and in the latter "mindfulness."



**THE SUTRA ON THE  
FULL AWARENESS OF BREATHING**



# **The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing**

## **Section One**

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when he was staying in Savatthi<sup>1</sup> in the Eastern Park, with many well-known and accomplished disciples, including Sariputta, Mahamoggallana, Mahakassapa, Mahakaccayana, Mahakotthita, Mahakappina, Mahacunda, Anuruddha, Rewata, and Ananda. The senior bhikkhus<sup>2</sup> in the community were diligently instructing bhikkhus who were new to the practice—some instructing ten students, some twenty, some thirty, and some forty; and in this way the bhikkhus new to the practice gradually made great progress.

That night the moon was full, and the Pavarana Ceremony<sup>3</sup> was held to mark the end of the rainy-season retreat. Lord Buddha, the Awakened One, was sitting in the open, and his disciples were gathered around him. After looking over the assembly, he began speaking:

“O bhikkhus, I am pleased to observe the fruit you have attained in your practice. And I know you can make even more progress. What you have not yet attained, you can attain. What you have not yet re-

alized, you can realize perfectly. [To encourage your efforts.] I will stay here until the next full moon day.”<sup>4</sup>

When they heard that the Lord Buddha was going to stay at Savatthi for another month, bhikkhus throughout the country began traveling there to study with him. The senior bhikkhus continued teaching the bhikkhus new to the practice even more ardently. Some were instructing ten students, some twenty, some thirty, and some forty. With this help, the newer bhikkhus were able, little by little, to continue their progress in understanding.

When the next full moon day arrived, the Buddha, seated under the open sky, looked over the assembly of bhikkhus and began speaking:

“O bhikkhus, our community is pure and good. At its heart, it is without useless and boastful talk, and therefore it deserves to receive offerings and be considered a field of merit.<sup>5</sup> Such a community is rare, and any pilgrim who seeks it, no matter how far he must travel, will find it worthy.

“O bhikkhus, there are bhikkhus in this assembly who have already realized the fruit of Ara-hathood,<sup>6</sup> destroyed every root of affliction,<sup>7</sup> laid aside every burden, and attained right understanding and emancipation. There are also bhikkhus who have already cut off the first five internal formations<sup>8</sup> and realized the fruit of never return-ing to the cycle of birth and death.<sup>9</sup>

“There are those who have thrown off the first three internal formations and realized the fruit of returning once more.<sup>10</sup> They have cut off the roots of greed, hatred, and ignorance, and only need to return to the cycle of birth and death one more time. There are those who have thrown off the three internal formations and attained the fruit of stream enterer,<sup>11</sup> heading steadily to the Awakened State. There are those who practice the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.<sup>12</sup> There are those who practice the Four Right Efforts<sup>13</sup> and those who practice the Four Bases of Success.<sup>14</sup> There are those who practice the Five Faculties,<sup>15</sup> those who practice the Five Powers,<sup>16</sup> those who practice the Seven Factors of Awakening,<sup>17</sup> and those who practice the Noble Eightfold Path.<sup>18</sup> There are those who practice loving kindness, those who practice compassion, those who practice joy, and those who practice equanimity.<sup>19</sup> There are those who practice the Nine Contemplations,<sup>20</sup> and those who practice the Observation of Impermanence. There are also bhikkhus already practicing full awareness of breathing.

## **Section Two**

“O bhikkhus, the method of being fully aware of breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will have great rewards and bring great advantages. It will lead to success in practicing the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. If the method of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness is developed and practiced continuously, it will lead to success

in the practice of the Seven Factors of Awakening. The Seven Factors of Awakening, if developed and practiced continuously, will give rise to Understanding and Liberation of the Mind.

“What is the way to develop and practice continuously the method of Full Awareness of Breathing so that the practice will be rewarding and offer great benefit?”

“It is like this, bhikkhus: the practitioner goes into the forest or to the foot of a tree, or to any deserted place, and sits stably in the lotus position, holding his body quite straight. Breathing in, he knows that he is breathing in; and breathing out, he knows that he is breathing out.

1. Breathing in a long breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing in a long breath.’ Breathing out a long breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing out a long breath.’

2. Breathing in a short breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing in a short breath.’ Breathing out a short breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing out a short breath.’

3. ‘I am breathing in and am aware of my whole body. I am breathing out and am aware of my whole body.’ This is how he practices.

4. ‘I am breathing in and making my whole body calm and at peace. I am breathing out and making

my whole body calm and at peace.' This is how he practices.

5. 'I am breathing in and feeling joyful. I am breathing out and feeling joyful.'<sup>21</sup> This is how he practices.

6. 'I am breathing in and feeling happy. I am breathing out and feeling happy.' He practices like this.

7. 'I am breathing in and am aware of the activities of the mind in me. I am breathing out and am aware of the activities of the mind in me.' He practices like this.

8. 'I am breathing in and making the activities of the mind in me calm and at peace. I am breathing out and making the activities of the mind in me calm and at peace.' He practices like this.

9. 'I am breathing in and am aware of my mind. I am breathing out and am aware of my mind.' He practices like this.

10. 'I am breathing in and making my mind happy and at peace. I am breathing out and making my mind happy and at peace.' He practices like this.

11. 'I am breathing in and concentrating my mind. I am breathing out and concentrating my mind.' He practices like this.

12. 'I am breathing in and liberating my mind. I am breathing out and liberating my mind.' He practices like this.

13. 'I am breathing in and observing the impermanent nature of all dharmas. I am breathing out and observing the impermanent nature of all dharmas.'<sup>22</sup> He practices like this.

14. 'I am breathing in and observing the fading of all dharmas. I am breathing out and observing the fading of all dharmas.'<sup>23</sup> He practices like this.

15. 'I am breathing in and observing liberation. I am breathing out and observing liberation.'<sup>24</sup> He practices like this.

16. 'I am breathing in and observing letting go. I am breathing out and observing letting go.'<sup>25</sup> He practices like this.

"The Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously according to these instructions will be rewarding and of great benefit.

### **Section Three**

"In what way does one develop and continuously practice the Full Awareness of Breathing, in order to succeed in the practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness?



“When the practitioner breathes in or breathes out a long or a short breath, aware of his breath or his whole body, or aware that he is making his whole body calm and at peace, he abides peacefully in the observation of the body in the body, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. In this case, breathing in and breathing out with Full Awareness belong to the first Establishment of Mindfulness, namely the body.

“When the practitioner breathes in or out with the awareness of joy or happiness, or awareness of the activities of the mind; when the practitioner breathes in or out in order to make the activities of his mind calm and at peace, at that time he abides peacefully in the observation of the feelings in the feelings, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. This exercise of breathing with awareness belongs to the second Establishment of Mindfulness, namely the feelings.

“When the practitioner breathes in or breathes out with the awareness of the mind, or to make the mind calm and at peace, to collect the mind in concentration, or to free and liberate the mind, at that time he abides peacefully in the observation of the mind in the mind, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. Without full awareness of breathing, there can be no development of meditative stability and understanding.

“When the practitioner breathes in or breathes out and contemplates the essential impermanence or the essential fading of all dharmas or liberation or letting go, at that time he abides peacefully in the awareness of the objects of the mind in the objects of the mind, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life.

“The practice of Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will lead to perfect accomplishment of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.

## **Section Four**

“Moreover, if they are developed and continuously practiced, the Four Establishments of Mindfulness will lead to perfect abiding in the Seven Factors of Awakening. How is this so?

“When the practitioner can maintain, without distraction, the practice of observing the body in the body, the feelings in the feelings, the mind in the mind, and the objects of mind in the objects of mind, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life, with unwavering, steadfast, imperturbable meditative stability, he will attain the first Factor of Awakening, namely full attention. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner can abide in meditative stability without being distracted and can investigate every dharma, every object of mind that arises, then the second Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in him, the factor of investigating dharmas. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner can observe and investigate every dharma in a sustained, persevering, and steadfast way, without being distracted, the third Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in him, the factor of energy. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner has reached a stable, imperturbable abiding in the stream of practice, the fourth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in him, the factor of joy.<sup>26</sup> When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner can abide undistractedly in the state of joy, he will feel his body and mind light and at peace. At this point the fifth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed, the factor of ease. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When both body and mind are at ease, the practitioner can easily enter into concentration. At that time the sixth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in him, the factor of concentration. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner is abiding in concentration with deep calmness, he will cease discriminating and comparing.<sup>27</sup> At that time the seventh factor of Awakening is released, born, and developed in him, the factor of letting go.<sup>28</sup> When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“This is how the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, if developed and practiced continuously, will lead to perfect abiding in the Seven Factors of Awakening.

## **Section Five**

“How will the Seven Factors of Awakening, if developed and practiced continuously, lead to the perfect accomplishment of true understanding and complete liberation?

“If the practitioner follows the path of the Seven Factors of Awakening, living in quiet seclusion, observing and contemplating the fading of all dharmas, he will develop the capacity of letting go. This will be a result of following the path of the Seven Factors of Awakening and will lead to the perfect accomplishment of true understanding and complete liberation.”

## **Section Six**

This is what the Lord, the Awakened One, said; and everyone in the assembly felt gratitude and delight at having heard his teachings.



# COMMENTARY ON THE SUTRA





## Chapter One

### A Brief History

*The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing* presented here is a translation of the *Anapanasati Sutta*.<sup>29</sup> In the Chinese *Tripitaka*, there is a *Greater Anapanasati Sutta (Da An Ban Shou Yi Jing)*,<sup>30</sup> but no *Simple Anapanasati Sutta (An Ban Shou Yi Jing)*. Usually in the Canon, any scripture with the word “Greater” in the title was expanded from the original in the process of oral transmission or as it was being copied. Therefore, any scripture which does not have the title *Greater* is probably closer to the original words of the Buddha.

The *Da An Ban Shou Yi Jing*<sup>31</sup> gives the name of An Shi Gao, a Parthian by birth who went to China in the later Han period, as the translator, and has a preface written by Master Tang Hôï. This text seems to be different from the *Anapanasati*, and is probably a commentary on it and not just an expansion or embellishment of it. At the end of the text, the engraver of the wood block says, “Judging from the style of the sutra, it seems the copyist is at fault: the original text and the commentary are so intertwined that it is no longer possible to distinguish them.”

We think that the original translation of the Sanskrit (or Prakrit) text into Chinese has been lost. In the Chinese *Tripitaka* is the commentary which was originally printed below the text of the

sutra. It does not begin with the words which usually begin a sutra, "Thus have I heard." According to Tang Hôi's preface, the person responsible for the annotation and commentary was Chen Hui, and Tang Hôi himself only assisted in the work of correcting, altering, and editing.

Chen Hui was a disciple of Master An Shi Gao, who travelled from Loyang to Giao Chi (present-day Vietnam) with two fellow disciples, Gan Lin and Pi Ye. They may have brought the original translation of the *Anapanasati Sutta* with them. The commentary and preface were written by Tang Hôi in Vietnam before the year 229 CE.

Tang Hôi was born in Vietnam. His mother and father were traders from Sogdia who passed through Vietnam and settled there. Tang Hôi became a monk and studied Sanskrit and Chinese there. Before traveling to the kingdom of Wu in southern China in the year 255 to spread the Dharma, he had already taught the Dharma in Vietnam and had already composed and translated many works into Chinese. He died in the kingdom of Wu in the year 280.

In the Chinese *Tripitaka*, there are a number of other sutras on the full awareness of breathing: *Zeng Yi A Han*, *Ekottara Agama*, the chapter on "Awareness of Breathing," Books Seven and Eight;<sup>32</sup> and the sutra *Xiu Hang Dao Di*, Book Five, chapter twenty-three, on "Breath Counting."<sup>33</sup> In both these writings, we rediscover the simple and original spirit of the *Anapanasati* in the Pali Canon.

The sutra presented here in English has been translated from the original *Anapanasati Sutta* in

the Pali *Tipitaka* (Sanskrit: *Tripitaka*). In many countries of the Mahayana tradition, the *Anapana-sati Sutta* (*Full Awareness of Breathing*) and the *Satipatthana Sutta* (*Four Establishments of Mindfulness*)<sup>34</sup> are not available for study. These two texts, along with the *Bhadekaratta Sutta* (*Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone*),<sup>35</sup> are fundamental to the practice of meditation, and the author of this commentary feels that it is very important to re-establish the importance of these three texts in all places of study and meditation.

The *Full Awareness of Breathing* and the *Four Establishments of Mindfulness* are still regarded as the most important texts for the Southern traditions of Buddhism. Many monks learn these sutras by heart. The author hopes that these texts will again be put into wide circulation in the Northern traditions of Buddhism. Even though the spirit of these sutras is present and observable in the Mahayana meditation sutras, we would do well to become familiar with the sutra literature fundamental to meditation which was studied and practiced at the time of the Buddha. If we understand the essence of these two sutras, we will have a deeper vision and more comprehensive grasp of the scriptures classified as Mahayana, just as after we see the roots and the trunk of a tree, we can appreciate its leaves and branches.

From these sutras, we observe that practitioners of meditation at the time of the Buddha had not yet come into contact with the Four Meditative States<sup>36</sup> and the Four Formless Concentrations.<sup>37</sup> The Four Meditative States are mental states in which the practitioner abandons the desire realm

and enters the realm of form, and although his or her mind remains perfectly awake, the five sense perceptions no longer arise. There are four successive states (also called Four Absorptions), which are followed by the Four Formless Concentrations. These are states of meditation in which the practitioner has already abandoned the form realm and entered the formless realm: (1) The Realm of Limitless Space, (2) The Realm of Limitless Consciousness, (3) The Realm of No Materiality, and (4) The Realm Where the Concepts “Perceiving” and “Not Perceiving” No Longer Apply. There are occasional references in other sutras of the Southern traditions as well as in those of the Northern traditions to the Four Meditative States and the Four Formless Concentrations. It is only in these two basic sutras (*Full Awareness of Breathing* and *Four Establishments of Mindfulness*) that we see no such references. Thus we can infer that the Four Meditative States and the Four Formless Concentrations were instituted after the death of the Buddha, probably due to the influence of the Vedic and other Yogic meditation schools outside of Buddhism.

Therefore we may conclude that according to the *Anapanasati* and *Satipatthana Suttas*, the realization of the Four Meditative States and the Four Formless Concentrations is dispensable. Future generations of scholars should distinguish as much as possible between the essential, fundamental meditation practices of Buddhism (whether Northern or Southern), and elements which were incorporated later from other traditions.

Analyzing their content, we can see that the *Anapanasati* and *Satipatthana Suttas* are perfectly

compatible with one another. Throughout 2,500 years of Buddhist history, all generations of Buddha's disciples have respected these works and have not embellished them (as they did so many other scriptures). Although the *Anapanasati Sutta* was in circulation in Vietnam as early as the end of the second century CE, from the time Vietnamese Buddhism came under the influence of the Northern traditions, this sutra ceased to be regarded as most essential. It is time for us to restore this sutra to its proper place in the tradition of meditation practice.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Summary of the Content**

The sixteen different methods of inhaling and exhaling, in combination with the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, are the essence of the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*. Breathing is a means of awakening and maintaining full attention in order to look carefully, long, and deeply, see the nature of all things, and arrive at liberation.

Everything that exists can be placed into one of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness—namely the body, the feelings, the mind, and the objects of the mind. “All dharmas” is another way of saying “the objects of the mind.” Although all dharmas are divided into four, in reality they are one, because all Four Establishments of Mindfulness are all objects of the mind.

The sixteen methods of breathing in and breathing out can be divided into four groups of four methods each. The first group uses the body as the object of Full Awareness; the second uses the feelings; the third, the mind; and the fourth, the objects of mind.

After explaining the sixteen methods of conscious breathing, the Buddha speaks about the Four Establishments of Mindfulness and the Seven Factors of Awakening. He then reminds us that if the methods of fully aware breathing are practiced continuously, they will lead to the successful ac-

complishment of the Seven Factors of Awakening. The Buddha speaks in greater detail about the Four Establishments of Mindfulness in the *Satipatthana Sutta*. The Seven Factors of Awakening are also discussed again in the *Satipatthana Sutta* and in other sutras. The main point of this sutra is the practice of Full Awareness of Breathing combined with the practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Analysis of the Sutra's Content**

The *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing* can be divided into six sections:

#### **Section One - The Scene**

The first part of the sutra describes the circumstances under which the Buddha delivered this Dharma talk. We are told about the community of his disciples during the time he was staying at the Eastern Park, a very large park with many trees located right in the town of Savatthi. The number of monks staying with the Buddha at that time may have been more than four hundred. The senior monks each taught ten, twenty, thirty or forty newer monks.

Every morning after sitting in meditation, the monks went into the town together, bowls in hand, to beg for food. Before midday, when the sun was directly overhead, they returned to their retreat center to eat. From time to time, they would all be invited to eat at the king's palace or at the home of a wealthy patron, someone whose home was large enough to accommodate so many monks. Poorer households would wait for the bhikkhus to walk by, so they too could make offerings. There were also some people who would bring food to the retreat center to offer to the community.

The Buddha and his disciples ate only one meal a day, before noon. There was no cooking or bak-



ing at the retreat center itself. The monks had no responsibility for performing funerals or praying for sick or deceased laypersons, as is the case today in many countries. Instead they offered a brief lecture to their sponsors either before or after eating the meal offered by them. They spoke clearly and powerfully, because they were living an integrated life, putting their study into practice.

While the sun was still up, the Buddha would teach his disciples under a shady grove of trees. Sometimes, if the moon was bright, he would also give a Dharma talk in the evening, as is the case with this sutra. The Buddha had previously explained aspects of the practice of the Full Awareness of Breathing a number of times (we know that there were many disciples already practicing it), but the evening he delivered this sutra was probably the first time he taught the entire method completely. He probably chose this occasion because there were so many bhikkhus from all around the country present, including a number of new disciples.

That year the retreat of the Buddha and his disciples in the Eastern Park was extended an additional month, to four months, so that there would be a chance for disciples from the entire country to be in one place together. Many were able to be there because they had completed their rainy-season retreats one month earlier than the monks staying at the Eastern Park. There may have been as many as 1,000 bhikkhus present the evening the Lord Buddha delivered the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*.

## **Section Two - The Sixteen Methods**

The second section is the heart of the sutra. This section elaborates the sixteen methods of fully aware breathing in connection with the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.

### *1. The Four Preliminary Methods*

In methods one and two, the object of awareness is the breath itself. The mind of the one who is breathing is the subject, and his or her breathing is the object. These breaths may be short, long, heavy, or light. We see that breathing affects our mind, and our mind affects our breathing. The mind and the breath become one. We also see that breathing is an aspect of the body and that awareness of breathing is also awareness of the body.

In the third method, the breath is connected with the whole body, not just a part of it. Awareness of the breathing is, at the same time, awareness of the entire body. The mind, the breath, and the whole body are one.

In the fourth breathing method, the body's functions begin calming down. The calming of the breath is accompanied by the calming of the body and the mind. The mind, the breathing, and the body are calmed down, each equally.

In just four breathing exercises, we can realize the oneness of body and mind. Breathing is an excellent tool for establishing calmness and evenness.

## 2. The Second Four Methods

The fifth method brings us into contact with our feelings. There are three kinds of feelings: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. As a result of conscious breathing and calming the body (Skt: *Kaya-samskara*), joy arises. This pleasant feeling arises naturally from the fourth method.

In the sixth method, joy is transformed into peace and happiness, and we are fully aware of it. The seventh and eighth methods bring our attention to all feelings which arise, whether produced by the body or the mind (*citta-samskara*). The mind's functions include feelings and perceptions. When we are aware of every bodily and every mental action, we are aware of every feeling.

The eighth method calms the body and mind and renders them peaceful. At this point, we can perfectly and completely unify body, mind, feelings, and breath.

## 3. The Next Four Methods

In the ninth through twelfth methods, the mind is the object. Mind (*citta*) consists of all the functions of the mind, including feelings, perceptions, and all psychological states. Buddhist psychology lists fifty-one mental functions (*citta-samskara*). However, mind is also consciousness, discrimination, and reflection; and awareness during the ninth breathing method includes all of these.

The tenth method makes our mind joyful, because it is easier for the mind to become concen-

trated when it is in a peaceful, happy state than when it is filled with sorrow or anxiety. We are aware that we have the opportunity to practice meditation and that there is no moment as important as the present one. Calmly abiding in the present moment, immense joy arises.

Using the mind to observe the mind, the eleventh method brings us to deep concentration. Mind is the breath. Mind is the oneness of the subject which illumines and the object which is illumined. Mind is peace and happiness. Mind is the field of illumination and the strength of concentration.

The twelfth method can release the mind to freedom, if it is still bound. Mind is bound either because of the past or the future, or because of other latent desires or anger. With clear observation, we can locate the knots which hold us, making it impossible for the mind to be free and at peace. Loosening these knots, we can untie the ropes which bind our mind. Full Awareness of Breathing breathes into the mind the light of the observation which can illumine and set the mind free.

#### *4. The Four Final Methods*

Mind cannot be separated from its object. Mind is consciousness, feeling, attachment, aversion, and so on. Consciousness must always be conscious of something. Feeling is always feeling something. Loving and hating are always loving and hating something. This "something" is the object of the mind. Mind cannot arise if there is no object. Mind

cannot exist if the object of mind does not exist. The mind is, at one and the same time, the subject of consciousness and the object of consciousness. All physiological phenomena, such as the breath, the nervous system, the sense organs; all psychological phenomena, such as feelings, thought, consciousness; and all physical phenomena, such as the earth, water, grass, trees, mountains, and rivers; all are objects of mind and therefore all are mind. All of them can be called "dharma."

The thirteenth breathing method sheds light on the ever-changing, impermanent nature of all that exists—the psychological, the physiological, and the physical. Breathing itself is also impermanent. The fact of impermanence is very important, because it opens the way for us to see the inter-related, inter-conditioned nature as well as the selfless nature (nothing has a separate, independent self) of all that exists.

The fourteenth method allows us to see that every dharma is already in the process of disintegrating, so that we are no longer possessed by the idea of holding onto any dharma as a separate entity, even the physiological and psychological elements in ourselves.

The fifteenth allows us to arrive at the awareness of a great joy, the joy of emancipation, by freeing us from the intention to grasp any dharma.

The sixteenth method illuminates for us what it is to let go of ourselves, to give up all the burdens of our ignorance and our grasping. To be able to let go is to already have arrived at liberation.

These sixteen methods can be studied and practiced intelligently. Although the first four preliminary

methods help our concentration very much, and every time we practice it is helpful to do these, it is not always necessary to practice the sixteen methods in this order. For example, you might like to practice only the fourteenth method for several days or months.

Although these methods are presented very simply, their effectiveness is immeasurable. Depending on our experience, we can enter them deeply or superficially. The Lord Buddha did not intend to generate new theories, to confuse the minds of those new to the practice, so he used simple terms, like impermanence, fading away, emancipation, and letting go. In fact, the term impermanence also includes the concepts of no-self, emptiness, interconnectedness, signlessness (*alaksana*) and aimlessness (*apranihita*). That is why it is so important in progressing to observe that which illumines and leads to emancipation.

### **Section Three - The Four Establishments of Mindfulness**

The third part of the sutra is concerned with the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. These are referred to in the second section, although not by name. In this sutra, the Four Establishments are only briefly referred to and expounded. We must read the *Satipatthana Sutta* to know the subject in more detail.<sup>38</sup> The Four Establishments are the body, the feelings, the mind, and all dharmas (objects of mind). In this sutra, the work of being

fully aware of the Four Establishments is through conscious breathing.

I want to say something about the expressions “observing the body in the body,” “observing the feelings in the feelings,” “observing the mind in the mind,” and “observing the objects of mind in the objects of mind.” The key to “observation meditation” is that the subject of the observation and the object of the observation not be regarded as two separate things. A scientist might try to separate him or herself from the object he or she is observing and measuring, but students of meditation have to remove the boundary between subject and object. When we observe something, we *are* that thing. Non-duality is the key word. “Observing the body in the body” means that in the process of observing, we do not stand outside our own body like an independent observer, but we identify with the object being observed. This is the only path that can lead us to the penetration and direct experience of reality. In “observation meditation,” the body and mind are one entity, and the subject and object of meditation are one entity also. In “observation meditation,” there is no sword of discrimination which slices reality into many parts. The meditator is a fully engaged participant, not a separate observer.

“Observation meditation” is a lucid awareness of what is going on in the Four Establishments: body, feelings, mind, and all dharmas, “persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life.” “Life” means all that exists. Stubbornly clinging to all that exists or resisting and rejecting it all both

lack the lucidity of an awakened mind. In order to succeed in the work of observation, we must go beyond both attachment and aversion.

#### **Section Four - The Seven Factors of Awakening**

In the fourth section of the sutra, the Buddha discusses the arising, growth, and attainment of the Seven Factors of Awakening, through abiding in them in conjunction with conscious breathing.

(1) Full attention is the main Factor of Awakening. Full attention is awareness, being fully awake. If full attention is developed and maintained, the practice of observation to shed light on and see clearly all that exists will meet with success. (2) The work of observation to shed light on and see clearly all that exists is investigation of dharmas. (3) Energy is perseverance and diligence. (4-5) Joy and ease are wonderful feelings nourished by energy. (6) Concentration gives rise to understanding. When we have understanding, we can go beyond all comparing, measuring, discriminating, and reactions of attachment and aversion. (7) Going beyond is letting go. Those who arrive at letting go will have the bud of a half-smile, which proves compassion as well as understanding.

#### **Section Five - Emancipation**

In the fifth section, which is very short, the Buddha reminds us that the Seven Factors of Awaken-



ing, if practiced diligently, lead to true wisdom and emancipation.

### **Section Six- Conclusion**

The sixth section is the concluding sentence of the sutra. This sentence is used at the end of every sutra.

## Chapter Four

### A Point of View on the Practice

Neither the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing* nor the *Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* mentions the method of counting the breath. There is also no mention of the Six Wonderful Dharma Doors: counting, following, stopping, observing, returning, and calming. Nor is there any reference to the *kasina* (sign) meditation, the Four Meditative States, or the Four Formless Concentrations. These teachings were probably developed a little later in order to serve many levels of students. We need not criticize them for being later teachings, certainly not before we have practiced them and seen for ourselves if they work well.<sup>39</sup>

Counting is an excellent method for beginners. Breathing in, count “one.” Breathing out, count “one.” Breathing in, count “two.” Breathing out, count “two.” Continue up to ten and then start counting over again. If at any time you forget where you are, begin again with “one.” The method of counting helps us refrain from dwelling on troublesome thoughts; instead we concentrate on our breathing and the number. When we have developed some control over our thinking, counting may become tedious and we can abandon it and just follow the breath itself. This is called “Following.”

Well-known commentaries, such as the *Patisambhida Magga* (*Path of No Hesitation*) and the *Vi-*

*suddhi Magga (Path of Purity)*, teach that while we breathe, we should be aware of our nostrils, the place where air enters and leaves the body. Just as when we cut a log we keep our eyes on the place where the saw touches the log (rather than looking at the teeth of the saw), we pay attention to the nostrils, and not to the air as it enters the body. Many commentators point out that if you follow the breath entering the body, then the object of your attention is not a single object, and thus concentration will be difficult. For this reason, they say that “the whole body” in the third method means the whole body of breath and not the whole body of the practitioner. If we study the sutra, we can see that their explanation is not correct. In the third breathing method, the object of attention is not just the breath. It is the whole body of the practitioner, in the same way that the object of the seventh method is all feelings and of the ninth method is the whole mind.

In the fourth method (“I am breathing in and making my whole body calm and at peace”), the expression “whole body” cannot mean just the whole body of breath either. All four preliminary methods take the physical body as the object, since the body is the first of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. Even if in the first two methods the object is just the breathing, that includes the body, since the breath is a part of our physical organism. In the third and fourth methods, the entire physical body is the object.

All the commentaries—the *Patisambhida Magga (Path of No Hesitation)* by Mahanama, the *Vimutti Magga (Path of Liberation)* by Upatissa, and the *Vi-*

*suddhi Magga* (*Path of Purity*) by Buddhaghosa—recommend that practitioners focus on the tip of the nose rather than follow the breath as it enters the body. If the “psychological factors” follow the breath into the body, they say, the practitioner will be dispersed and unable to enter into the Four Meditations. The *Vimutti Magga* was written at the end of the fourth century CE, the *Patisambhida Magga* at the beginning of the fifth, and the *Visuddhi Magga* shortly after that. All of these emphasize the necessity of stopping (*samatha*) as the prerequisite for observing (*vipasyana*). Here, stopping means the Four Meditations and the Four Formless Concentrations. Focusing the mind at the tip of the nose and being aware of the first moment of contact of air at its place of entry into the body, just as the carpenter looks only at the place of contact of the saw’s teeth as they enter and leave the wood, gradually the rough, uneven breathing becomes delicate and subtle, and finally all discrimination disappears. At this point, the sign (*kasina*) will appear, like a ball of cotton, giving the practitioner a feeling of freshness, lightness, and ease, like a fresh, cool breeze. If the practitioner follows this sign, he or she enters concentration, the first of the Four Meditations. The First Meditation is the first step, followed by the second, third, and fourth Meditative States. In each state of meditative concentration, the five sense organs are inactive, while the mind of the practitioner is lucid and awake. After the Four Meditations come the Four Formless Concentrations: the realm of limitless space, the realm of limitless consciousness, the realm of no materiality, and the realm where the

concepts “perceiving” and “not perceiving” no longer apply.

We must examine the extent to which Buddhist meditation practice was influenced by the Yoga-Upnishadic systems. Before realizing the Way, Shakyamuni Buddha studied with many Brahman yogis, from whom he learned the Four Meditations and the Four Formless Concentrations. After experiencing these, he said that concentrations like “the realm of no materiality” and “the realm where perceiving and not perceiving do not apply,” taught by the masters Arada Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra, cannot lead to ultimate emancipation. As we have seen, he did not mention the Four Meditations or the Four Formless Concentrations in the *Anapanasati* or the *Satipatthana*, the two fundamental sutras on meditation. Therefore, we must conclude that the practices of the Four Meditations and the Four Formless Concentrations are not a necessity for arriving at the fruit of practice, the awakened mind. The methods of mindfulness taught by the Buddha in the *Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* can be seen as the incomparable path leading to emancipation. There are meditation students who have practiced for many years and who, having failed to attain the Four Meditations, think they do not have the capacity to realize the practice of awakening. There are others who stray into unhealthy meditation practices and lose all peace of mind, just because they want so much to enter the Four Meditations. Only by practicing correctly, according to the teachings of the Buddha in the *Anapanasati* and

*Satipatthana Suttas*, can we be sure we will not stray into practices we may later regret.

In Vietnam, the home country of the author, at the beginning of the third century CE, the meditation master Tang Hôi, when writing the preface to the *Anapanasati* in Chinese, referred to the Four Meditations, but the Four Meditations of Tang Hôi were combined with observation—observing the body, observing sky and earth, observing prosperity and decline, coming and going, and so forth. Tang Hôi also spoke of the Six Wonderful Dharma Doors (counting the breath, following the breath, concentrating the mind, observing to throw light on all that exists, returning to the source of mind, and going beyond the concepts of subject and object). Moreover Tang Hôi referred to the method of concentrating the mind at the tip of the nose. The *Xiu Hang Dao Di Sutra*, in the chapter called “Enumerating,”<sup>40</sup> also refers to the Four Meditations, the method of counting the breath, the Six Wonderful Dharma Doors, and the method of concentrating the mind at the tip of the nose. The *Zeng Yi A Han (Ekottara Agama)*,<sup>41</sup> in the chapter on breathing, also refers to the Four Meditations and the method of concentrating the mind at the tip of the nose, but it does not refer to counting the breath or the Six Wonderful Dharma Doors.

We should remember that the sutras were memorized and transmitted orally for hundreds of years before they were written down. Therefore, many sutras must have been at least somewhat altered according to a variety of influences and circumstances during those centuries. The *Anapanasati*

and *Satipatthana Suttas* can be seen as two precious accounts of early Buddhist meditation practice since they were handed down by the monks in an especially careful way. It seems to be the case that mistakes and outside additions were very few in the case of these two sutras.

In the history of Buddhism, there are some classical sutras which were affected during their transmission by outside influences forever afterwards, in the Southern schools as in the Northern schools, but especially in the Northern schools. Studying Mahayana sutras reminds us to look again and discover the depth of the fundamental “source” sutras. The seeds of all important ideas of the Mahayana are already contained in these “source” sutras. If we go back to the “source,” we develop a more clear and unshakable view of the Mahayana sutras. If we merely sit on the two giant wings of the Mahayana bird, we may fly far away and lose all contact with the source from which the bird arose.

Although the *Anapanasati* and *Satipatthana Suttas* do not refer to the Four Meditations and the Four Formless Concentrations, we should not conclude that they do not stress the necessity and importance of the power and flexibility of concentration. Meditation has two aspects: stopping (*samatha*) in order to look (*vipasyana*). Stopping is concentration, and looking is wisdom. The full awareness of the breath, or of any other object such as the body, the feelings, the consciousness, the objects of consciousness, and so forth, are all aiming at the goal of concentrating the mind on an

object so that it is possible to see the object in all its depth. Concentration of the mind is stopping it from running around from one object to another in order to stay with just one object. We stay with one object in order to observe it and to look deeply into it. In this way, stopping and observing become one.

Thanks to our ability to stop, we are able to observe. The more deeply we observe, the greater our mental concentration becomes. Stopping and collecting our mind, we naturally become able to see. In observing, the mind becomes increasingly still. We do not need to search for anything more. We only need to practice the simple methods proposed by the Buddha in these two sutras.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Methods of Practice**

The practices of stopping and observing are to arrive at liberation, that is, freedom from being bound. To what are we bound? First of all, there is falling into forgetfulness, losing our mindfulness. We live as if we are in a dream. We are dragged back into the past and pulled forward into the future. We are bound by our sorrows, by holding onto anger, by feelings of unease and fear. Here “liberation” means going beyond and leaving behind these conditions in order to live fully awake, joyfully and freshly, at ease and in peace. To live in this way means that life is worth living. Living like this, we are a source of joy to our family and to those who live with us and around us. Buddhism often refers to “emancipation,” i.e. going beyond and leaving birth and death behind. We feel threatened by death. How much unease and fear has been brought about by the fear of death! Meditation allows us to be free from these bonds of unease and fear.

Following are some methods for putting the *Anapanasati Sutta* into practice. They are offered in a simple way, in accord with the spirit of the sutra. Please use whatever methods suit you in your present situation, and practice them first. Although the sixteen methods of practicing full awareness of the breath are intimately connected to one another, the order in which they are given in the su-

tra is not necessarily a progression from easy to difficult. Every method is as wonderful as every other, as easy and as difficult as every other one. We can, however, say that the preliminary instructions place greater importance on “stopping,” and the later ones place more importance on “observing,” although, of course, stopping and observing cannot exist separately from one another. If there is stopping, observing is already present, more or less; and if there is observing, there is a natural stopping. The subjects for full awareness suggested below can be divided into seven categories:

1. *Following the breath in daily life—eliminating forgetfulness and unnecessary thinking (Methods 1-2)*
2. *Awareness of the body (Method 3)*
3. *Realizing the unity of body and mind (Method 4)*
4. *Nourishing ourselves with the joy of meditation (Methods 5-6)*
5. *Observing the feelings (Methods 7-8)*
6. *Controlling and liberating the mind (Methods 9-12)*
7. *Observing in order to shed light on the true nature of all dharmas (Methods 13-16)*

Laypersons as well as monks must know how to practice both the first subject (following the breath in daily life) and the fourth (nourishing ourselves with the joy of meditation). Every time we practice sitting meditation, we should always begin with

these two subjects. Only after that should we go into the other subjects. Every time we notice our state of mind becoming agitated, dispersed, ill-at-ease, we should practice the fifth subject (observing in order to shine light on our feelings). The seventh subject is the door which opens onto liberation from birth and death, and all those of great understanding have to pass through this door. This subject is the greatest gift the Buddha has given us. The first six subjects all involve stopping as well as observing, but the seventh emphasizes observation. Only after we have the capacity to concentrate our mind with great stability, should we embark on this subject.

**The First Subject of Full Awareness: Following the breath in daily life—eliminating forgetfulness and unnecessary thinking (Methods 1-2)**

*Breathing in, he knows that he is breathing in; and breathing out, he knows that he is breathing out. Breathing in a long breath, he knows, 'I am breathing in a long breath.' Breathing out a long breath, he knows, 'I am breathing out a long breath.' Breathing in a short breath, he knows, 'I am breathing in a short breath.' Breathing out a short breath, he knows, 'I am breathing out a short breath.'*

Most of the readers of this book do not live in forests, under trees, or in monasteries. In our daily lives, we drive cars and wait for buses, work in offices and factories, talk on the telephone, clean our houses, cook meals, wash clothes, and so on. Therefore, it is most important that we learn to

practice full awareness of breathing during our daily lives. Usually, when we perform these tasks, our thoughts wander, and our joys, sorrows, anger, and unease follow close behind. Although we are alive, we are not able to bring our minds into the present moment, and we live in forgetfulness.

We can begin by becoming aware of our breath, by following our breathing. Breathing in and breathing out, we know we are breathing in and out, and we can smile to affirm that we are ourselves, that we are in control of ourselves. Through awareness of breathing, we can be awake in (and to) the present moment. By being attentive, we have already established "stopping," i.e. concentration of mind. Breathing with full awareness helps our mind stop wandering in confused, never-ending thoughts.

Most of our daily activities can be accomplished while following our breath according to the instructions in the sutra. When our work demands special attentiveness in order to avoid confusion or an accident, we can unite full awareness of breathing with the task itself. For example, when we are carrying a pot of boiling water or doing electrical repairs, we can be aware of every movement of our hands, and we can nourish this awareness by means of our breath: "I am breathing out, and I am aware my hands are carrying a pot of boiling water," or "I am breathing in, and I am aware that my right hand is holding an electric wire," or even "I am breathing in, and I am aware that I am passing another car. I am breathing out and I know that the situation is under control." We can practice like this.

In fact, it is not enough to combine awareness of breathing only with tasks which require so much attention. We must also combine full awareness of our breathing with all the movements of our body: "I am breathing in, and I am sitting down." "I am breathing in and wiping the table." "I am breathing in and smiling at myself." "I am breathing in and lighting the stove." Stopping both the random progression of thoughts and living in forgetfulness is a giant step forward in meditation practice. We can realize this step by following our breath and combining it with awareness of our daily activities.

There are people who have no peace or joy and even go insane simply because they cannot stop unnecessary thinking. They are forced to take sedatives to lull themselves to sleep, just to give their thoughts a rest. But even in their dreams, they continue to feel fears, anxieties, and unease. Thinking too much can cause headaches, and your spiritual being will be poorer.

By following your breath and combining conscious breathing with your daily activities, you can cut across the stream of disturbing thoughts and light the lamp of awakening. Full awareness of an out-breath and an in-breath is something wonderful that anyone can practice. Even if you live in a monastery or a meditation center, you can practice in this way. Combining full awareness of breathing with full awareness of the movements of the body during daily activities—walking, standing, lying, sitting, working—is a basic practice to cultivate concentration and to live in an awakened state. During the first few minutes of sitting meditation,

you can use this method to harmonize your breathing, and if it seems necessary, you can continue following your breath with full awareness throughout the entire period.

**The Second Subject of Full Awareness:  
Awareness of the body (Method 3)**

*'I am breathing in and am aware of my whole body. I am breathing out and am aware of my whole body.'*

During the practice of meditation, body and mind become a unity. In the sitting, lying, standing, or walking position, we can practice awareness of our body, beginning by taking the different parts of our body one by one, and then taking the organism as a whole. We can start with our hair, and then go down to the tips of our toes. For example, when in the position of sitting meditation, after regulating your breathing, you begin by breathing out and you observe, "I am breathing out and am aware of the hair on my head." "I am breathing in and am aware of the contents of my skull." You can continue like this until you reach the tips of your toes. In the process of the practice, feelings and considerations may arise. For example, I am passing my heart and suddenly I notice anxiety rising up in me with regard to a close friend's heart condition. I do not push this feeling away, I am cognizant of it: "I am breathing in and am aware that I am anxious about my friend's heart condition." Then you continue your journey of observation of your body un-

der the supervision of the full awareness of breathing.

Here is another example: As I become aware of my digestive organs, I see millions of minute living beings which are living along with me in my entrails. I do not push this perception away, I am simple cognizant of it: "I am breathing in and am aware of the minute organisms living along with me and in me." Your awareness of the symbiotic relationship with these organisms may strike you as a rich subject for meditation. Recognize it as such and make an appointment with yourself to return to this subject later, and then continue with your journey of observation through the rest of your body.

Generally, we give very little attention to the organs of our body. We are conscious of them only when they cause us pain and when we are starting to be ill. You can pass half your life seeking riches and fame without ever holding your little toe between your fingers in awakened awareness. Your little toe is very important. It has been very kind to you for many years. If one day in the future there is a sign of cancer in it, what will you do?

Perhaps you think that to be aware of the body is not very important. But that is not true. Any physiological, psychological, or physical phenomenon can be a door which leads you to truth. You can meditate on your toe and reach the goal of realization. The secret of this practice is to concentrate our mind in order to observe each organ of our body in full awareness. If you practice in this way, one day (perhaps tomorrow or even this afternoon) you may see deep and wonderful things

which can change your view and way of life. The hair on your head seems very ordinary, but you should know that your hair is an ambassador of truth. Please receive the credentials of this hair. Observe them well and discover every message that every hair bears in itself. Are your eyes common physiological phenomena? They are the windows which open onto the miracle of reality. Do not neglect anything. Look deeply, and you will see. That is the practice of meditation.

**The Third Subject of Full Awareness: Realizing the unity of body and mind (Method 4)**

*'I am breathing in and making my whole body calm and at peace. I am breathing out and making my whole body calm and at peace.'*

During another period of meditation, observe your whole body without discriminating between different parts: "I am breathing in and am aware of my whole body." (Method 3 in the sutra). At this point, let your breathing, your body, and your observing mind all become one. Breathing and body are one. Breathing and mind are one. Mind and body are one. At the time of observation, mind is not an entity which exists independently, outside of your breathing and your body. The boundary between the subject of observation and the object of observation no longer exists. We observe "the body in the body." The mind does not stand outside of the object in order to observe it. The mind is one with the object it observes. This is the first principle—"subject and object are empty (subject and object



are not two)”—which has been developed extensively in the Mahayana tradition.

Practicing this way for ten or twenty minutes, the flow of your breathing and your body become very calm, and your mind becomes much more at rest. When you first begin these practices, it seems quite rough, like coarsely milled wheat. But the flour becomes finer and finer. The fourth breathing method accompanies you on this path. It is like drinking a cool glass of lemonade on a hot day and feeling your body becoming cool inside. When you breathe in, the air enters your body and calms all the cells of your body. At the same time, each “cell” of your breathing becomes more peaceful and each “cell” of your mind also becomes more peaceful. The three are one and each one is all three. This is the key to meditation. Breathing brings the sweet joy of meditation to you. It is food. If you are nourished by the sweet joy of meditation, you become joyful, fresh, and tolerant, and everyone around you will benefit from your joy.

Although the aim of the fourth method of breathing is to bring calmness to the movements of your body, its effect is to bring calmness to your breathing and to your mind also. The calmness of one brings calmness to all three. In the calmness of meditation, discrimination between body and mind does not exist, and you dwell at rest in the state of “body and mind at one,” no longer feeling that the subject of meditation exists outside of the object of meditation.

**The Fourth Subject of Full Awareness:  
Nourishing ourselves with the joy of meditation  
(Methods 5-6)**

*'I am breathing in and feeling joyful. I am breathing out and feeling joyful.'*

*'I am breathing in and feeling happy. I am breathing out and feeling happy.'*

Those who practice meditation should know how to nourish themselves on the peace and joy of meditative concentration, in order to reach real maturity and help the world. Life in this world is both painful and miraculous. The Buddhist traditions of the Southern schools stress the painful side, while the Buddhist traditions of the Northern schools help us realize and appreciate the marvels of life. The violet bamboo, the yellow flowers, the white clouds, and the full moon are all wondrous expressions of the *Dharmakaya*, the body of the Dharma. The body of a human being, although impermanent, without an independent self, and bound to suffering, is also infinitely wondrous. The initial joy of meditation is like leaving the city, with its hyperactivity and all its disturbing encounters, going off to the countryside to sit beneath a tree, alone. We feel totally at ease, peaceful and joyful. What a joy, what a relief, like when you complete a difficult examination and feel that you have laid aside all anxiety forevermore.

At the end of a busy day, you can turn off the TV, light a stick of incense to make the room fragrant, sit cross-legged, and begin to practice breathing, with a half-smile. You will feel great joy! This is the initial sensation of the peace and joy of medi-

tation. The fifth breathing method helps us become aware of this sensation. If you can set aside the stresses and complications of your day, you will enter a meditation filled with joy. From this state, it is easy to arrive at the state of peace and happiness.

The sixth method establishes awareness of peace and happiness which arises when we become free of incessant worrying and preoccupation, and from the fact that the body and mind are at ease.

When we have a toothache, we know that not having a toothache is a pleasurable feeling. But when we do not have a toothache, most of us are unaware of this pleasant feeling. Only after we become blind will we be aware that having eyes to see the blue sky and the white clouds is miraculous. While we can see, we are rarely aware of this miracle. Practicing meditation is to be aware of both what is painful and what is miraculous. Happiness is the nourishment of the meditator, and it is not necessary to look for it outside of ourselves. We only need to be aware of the existence of happiness in order to have it immediately. Pleasant feelings are like the air around us—we can enjoy them as we need them.

In Buddhist psychology, it is said there are three kinds of feelings: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. But when we practice meditation, we know that we can transform neutral feelings into pleasant ones, and nourish ourselves. Pleasant feelings transformed from neutral ones are more healthy and lasting than other pleasant feelings. When we are constantly nourished by the happiness of meditation, we become at ease with ourselves and oth-

ers. We become tolerant and compassionate, and our happiness is transmitted to all those around us. Only if we have peace ourselves can we share peace with others. Only then do we have enough strength and patience to work helping others, facing many hardships with patience and perseverance.

**The Fifth Subject of Full Awareness:  
Observing feelings (Methods 7-8)**

*'I am breathing in and am aware of the activities of the mind in me. I am breathing out and am aware of the activities of the mind in me.'*

*'I am breathing in and making the activities of the mind in me calm and at peace. I am breathing out and making the activities of the mind in me calm and at peace.'*

The seventh and eighth breathing methods aim at the observation of all feelings, agreeable and disagreeable. Feelings of irritation, anger, anxiety, weariness, and boredom are disagreeable ones. Whatever feeling is present, the meditation student identifies it, recognizes that it is there, and lights up the sun of his or her awareness in order to illumine it. That is the work of observation. For example, if we are irritated, we must know, "This irritation is in me. I am this irritation," and we breathe in and out in this awareness.

In Buddhist practice, observation meditation is based on non-duality. Therefore, we do not view irritation as an external enemy coming to invade us. We see that we are that very irritation in the pre-

me. I am this irritation,” and we breathe in and out in this awareness.

In Buddhist practice, observation meditation is based on non-duality. Therefore, we do not view irritation as an external enemy coming to invade us. We see that we are that very irritation in the present moment. Thanks to this approach, we no longer need to make an effort to oppose, expel, or destroy the irritation. When we practice observation meditation, we do not set up barriers between good and bad in ourselves and transform ourselves into a battlefield. That is the main thing Buddhism seeks to avoid. We must treat irritation with compassion and nonviolence. We can face our irritation with a heart filled with love, as if we were facing our own baby sister. By breathing in and out mindfully, we can light up our awareness based on meditative stability. Every feeling is a field of energy. A pleasant feeling is an energy which can nourish. Irritation is a feeling which can destroy. Under the light of awareness, the energy of irritation can be transformed into an energy which nourishes.

Feelings originate either in the body or in our perceptions. When we suffer from insomnia, we feel fatigue or irritation. This feeling originates in the body. When we misperceive a person or an object, we may feel anger, disappointment, or irritation. This feeling originates in perception. According to Buddhism, our perceptions are often inaccurate and cause us to suffer. The practice of full awareness is to look deeply in order to see the true nature of everything and to go beyond our inaccurate perceptions. Seeing a rope as a snake, we will cry

out in fear. Fear is a feeling, and mistaking the rope for a snake is an inaccurate perception.

If we live our daily life in moderation, keeping our body in good health, we can diminish painful feelings which originate in the body. By observing each thing clearly and opening the boundaries of our understanding, we can diminish painful feelings originating from perception. To observe a feeling in order to illuminate it is to recognize the multitude of causes near and far. To go deeply into what we recognize is to discover the very nature of feeling.

When a feeling of irritation or fear is present, we can be aware of it, nourishing this awareness through breathing. Fully aware of our breathing, with patience, we come to see more deeply into the true nature of this feeling. In seeing, we come to understand. With understanding, there is freedom.

The seventh method refers to the activity of the mind, that is, the arising of a feeling, its duration, and its ceasing in order to become something else. The eighth method aims at the transformation of the energy of feelings. By observing the true nature of any feeling, we can transform its energy into the energy of peace and joy. When we understand someone, we can accept and love him. Once we have accepted him, there is no longer any feeling of reproach or irritation against him. The energy of the feeling of irritation, in this case, can be transformed into the energy of love.

**The Sixth Subject of Full Awareness: Controlling and liberating the mind (Methods 9-12)**

*'I am breathing in and am aware of my mind. I am breathing out and am aware of my mind.'*

*'I am breathing in and making my mind happy and at peace. I am breathing out and making my mind happy and at peace.'*

*'I am breathing in and concentrating my mind. I am breathing out and concentrating my mind.'*

*'I am breathing in and liberating my mind. I am breathing out and liberating my mind.'*

The first four breathing methods help us become one with our breathing and drop all thinking, discriminating ideas, and imaginings. The ninth method helps us identify the functions of the mind (other than the feelings, which were treated in methods seven and eight), such as perception, thinking, reasoning, discriminating, imagining, and all the activities of the subconscious as well. As soon as one of these psychological phenomena arises, we should identify it while breathing with awareness. We continue to observe it to see its connection with the whole of our mind.

Mind is a river of psychological phenomena which is always changing, being born and passing away. In this river, the arising, duration, and cessation of any phenomenon is always linked with the arising, duration, and cessation of all other phenomena. To know how to identify psychological phenomena as they arise and develop is an important part of meditation practice.

The activities of our mind, often unstable and agitated, are like a torrent of water washing over the rocks. In traditional Buddhist literature, mind is often compared to a monkey which is always swinging from branch to branch or a horse galloping. Once our mind is able to identify what is happening, we will be able to see it clearly and make it calm, and we can feel peace and joy in its stillness. The tenth breathing method is intended to calm the mind. Compare this with the fourth and eighth methods. The fourth is intended to calm the body, and the eighth is intended to calm the feelings. These three methods can bring us to the land of great bliss, to a state of joy, peace, and relaxation in meditative concentration. This state brings us ease and can nourish the power of our concentration. But we should not stop at this. We can continue by "observing to shed light on it," in order to arrive at an awakened understanding. Only awakened understanding can lead us to complete freedom.

The eleventh method aims at concentrating our mind on a single object. Only when we can concentrate steadily on an object can we observe it. This object can be a physiological phenomenon, such as the breath; a psychological phenomenon, such as a perception or a feeling; or a physical phenomenon, such as a leaf or a stone. All these phenomena are classified as "objects of mind" and they do not exist independently of mind. The object of the concentrated mind is lit up by the light of the mind's observation, like a singer in a spotlight on a stage. The object can be moving in time and space, since it is as alive as the mind which is observing it. In



the state of concentration, the subject and object have become one. Breathing is also an object of the concentrated mind. When we put all our attention on the breath, our mind follows that alone, and our mind and breath are one. That is concentration. Concentration is the vector of consciousness pointed at a single object. After practicing with the breath, we can practice with other physiological, psychological, and physical phenomena. Only if there is concentration can the work of observation be achieved.

The twelfth method aims at untying all the knots of the mind—the sorrows and memories of the past, the anxieties and predictions concerning the future, feelings of irritation, fear, and doubt in the present, or confusion created by inaccurate perceptions. Only by concentrating the mind do we have the capacity to observe and illumine, and be emancipated from obstacles. It is the same as when we try to take knots out of thread. We have to be calm, and we need to take time. By observing our mind in all its subtlety, in a calm and self-contained way, we can free our mind from all confusion.

**The Seventh Subject of Full Awareness:  
Observing in order to shed light on the true  
nature of all dharmas (Methods 13-16)**

*'I am breathing in and observing the impermanent nature of all dharmas. I am breathing out and observing the impermanent nature of all dharmas.'*

*'I am breathing in and observing the fading of all dharmas. I am breathing out and observing the fading of all dharmas.'*

*'I am breathing in and observing liberation. I am breathing out and observing liberation.'*

*'I am breathing in and observing letting go. I am breathing out and observing letting go.'*

The thirteenth method for breathing proposed by the Buddha aims at observation to shed light on the impermanent nature of all dharmas. All phenomena, whether physiological, psychological, or physical, without exception are impermanent. Impermanent does not only mean "here today, gone tomorrow." The meditation on impermanence is a deep, penetrating, and wonderful path of meditation. There is no phenomenon whatsoever with a separate, lasting individuality. All things are in endless transformation, and all things are without an independent self. To be impermanent is to be without self. This is a fundamental recognition in Buddhism regarding the nature of all that exists.

Impermanence also means interdependence. The components of the universe depend on one another for their existence. In the *Majjhima Nikaya*, it says, "This is, because that is. If this is not, then that is not." Impermanence also means "signlessness." The reality of all that exists is beyond every concept and linguistic expression. We cannot go directly to their essential and true nature, because we are accustomed to grasping phenomena through the intermediaries of perception and thought. The categories of perception and thought are "signs."

The example of wave and water is often given to help us understand the “signless” nature of all that exists. A wave can be high or low, can arise or disappear, but the essence of the wave—water—is neither high nor low, neither arising nor disappearing. All signs—high, low, arising, disappearing—cannot touch the essence of water. We cry and laugh according to the sign because we have not yet seen the essence. The essence (*svabhava*) is the very nature of everything that is and of the reality of ourselves. Impermanence is also emptiness. The reality of everything that exists is its signlessness, since it is a reality that cannot be grasped by concepts and words. Because it cannot be grasped, it is called empty. Emptiness here does not mean nonexistent, as opposed to existent. It means signless, free from all imprisonment by concepts—birth/death, existent/nonexistent, increasing/decreasing, pure/impure.

It says in the *Prajñāparamita Heart Sutra*, “All dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are neither produced nor destroyed, neither defiled nor immaculate, neither increasing nor decreasing.” Impermanence also means aimlessness (*apranihita*). The presence of everything that exists is not to attain a final goal. We cannot add onto the true nature of all that exists, nor can we remove anything from it. It has no origin and no end. We do not need to seek realization outside of all that exists. In the very “stuff” of every dharma, the awakened nature is already fully present.

The fourteenth breathing method aims at observing to shed light on the “fading”<sup>42</sup> nature of dharmas. All things are without permanence and

therefore on the way to dissolution. A rose, a cloud, a human body, an ancient tree, all are on the way to dissolution. Judging from all dharmas right here on the physical plane, all pass through the stages of birth, duration, transformation, and disappearance. The beginning practitioner should observe clearly the impermanent and fading nature of all things, include the Five Aggregates that comprise his or her own self. The Nine Contemplations were the special observation practice with regard to the body used at the time of the Buddha. The Nine Contemplations are the practice of observing to throw light on the decomposition of a corpse from the time when it becomes bloated to the time when it disappears into dust and ashes. The corpse which is the object is any corpse in a cemetery, as well as the corpse of the practitioner. In the *Khoa Hu Luc (Lessons in Emptiness)*, King Trần Thái Tông contemplates as follows:

Formerly glowing cheeks and pink lips,  
 today cold ashes and white bones.  
 Position, renown though unsurpassed,  
 they are but part of a long dream.  
 However rich and noble you are,  
 you are no less impermanent.  
 Jealousy, pride, and self-clinging,  
 but self is always empty.  
 Great strength, ability, and success,  
 but in them is no final truth.  
 Since the four elements come apart,  
 why discriminate old from young?  
 Crevices erode even mountains,  
 more quickly the hero is dead.

Black hair has hardly grown on our head,  
when suddenly it has turned white.  
Our well-wisher has just departed,  
a mourner arrives on our death.  
This six-foot skeleton of dry bones—  
with what effort it seeks riches.  
This wrapping of skin containing blood  
suffers long in its need to love.

This is a way of looking at our body, and it is also a way of seeing how our mind, so subtle and quick today, can become slow and senile tomorrow. Rivers, mountains, houses, riches, health—all should be meditated on like this.

Perhaps you will smile and say that this contemplation is intended principally to bring us to a pessimistic state of mind, frustrating our love of life. This is both true and not true. Medicine may be bitter, but it will possibly heal our sickness. Reality may be cruel, but to see things as they are will heal us. Reality is the ground of effective liberation. Life passes so quickly, and there is no stopping it from being cut off. The sap of joy sings in every living thing, from the mineral world through the vegetable world, to the world of living beings. Only because we imprison ourselves in the idea of a small self do we create a state of darkness, narrowness, anxiety, and sorrow. According to our narrow view of a truly existing self, life is just my body, my house, my spouse, my children, and my riches. But if we can extend beyond every limit we have created for ourselves, we will see that our life exists in everything, and that the deterioration of phenomena cannot touch that life, just as the aris-

ing and disappearing of the waves cannot influence the being of the water. By observing in this way to shed light on the deterioration of everything, we can smile in the face of birth and death and attain a lot of peace and joy in this life.

The fifteenth method helps us free ourselves from individuality, so that we can become part of the whole universe. Here, liberation is freedom from the concepts of life and death, owning and lacking, increasing and decreasing—all concepts which form the basis of desire and attachment, fear and anxiety, hatred and anger. Liberation here means freedom (*nirvana*), the absence of all boundaries.

The sixteenth method, like the fifteenth, aims at helping us observe in order to shed light on giving up all desire and attachment, fear and anxiety, hatred and anger. Seeing that there is a precious jewel in our pocket, we give up every attitude of craving or coveting like one who is deprived. Seeing that we are lions, we do not long to nurse from a mother deer. Seeing that we are the sun, we give up the candle's habit of fearing the wind will blow us out. Seeing that life has no boundaries, we give up all imprisoning divisions. We see ourselves everywhere, and we see our life everywhere. That is why we go to help all living phenomena, all living species, with the vow of a Bodhisattva, one who has attained great awakening.

Giving up, here, does not mean abandoning something in order to seek something else. It means giving up every comparison, seeing that there is nothing to be removed and nothing to be added, and that the boundary between ourselves

and the other is not real. The practitioner does not give up the human condition in order to become a Buddha. He or she seeks the Buddha in his or her very own human condition, giving up nothing, and seeking nothing either. That is the meaning of *apranihita*, “aimlessness,” also translated as wishlessness. It is the same as not-seeking, a concept fully developed in Mahayana Buddhism. Give up in order to be everything, and to be completely free. Many people have already done so, and each one of us can do so also, if we have the intention.

In summary, the order of the Sixteen Breathing Methods is the order of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness: body, feelings, mind, and objects of mind. The intelligent practitioner knows how to regulate and master his or her breath, body, and mind, in order to enhance the power of concentration before proceeding in the work of observation to shed light. Meditation practice is nourishing for body and mind, and can also expand our vision. Expanded vision enables us to go beyond passionate attachment or aversion to life. It makes us joyful, calm, stable, tolerant, and compassionate.

For the practices presented here to have a greater chance of success, the reader is asked to combine the Buddha’s teachings in the *Anapana-sati Sutta* with those in the *Satipatthana Sutra*.<sup>43</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Savatthi*: the capital of the Kosala kingdom, about 75 miles west of Kapilavatthu. (Sanskrit: Sravasti and Kapilavastu)

<sup>2</sup> *Bhikkhu*: monk.

<sup>3</sup> The *Pavarana* Ceremony was held at the end of each rainy-season retreat, the annual three-month retreat for Buddhist monks. During the ceremony each monk present invited the assembly to point out the weaknesses he exhibited during the retreat.

The full-moon marked the end of the lunar month. Normally *Pavarana* was held at the end of the month of Assayuja (around October), but during the year in which this sutra was delivered, the Buddha extended the retreat to four months, and the ceremony was held at the end of the month of Kattika (around November).

<sup>4</sup> The full moon day of the retreat's fourth month (*Kattika*) was called *Komudi*, or White Lotus Day, so-named because komuda is a species of white lotus which flowers in late Autumn.

<sup>5</sup> field of merit: Supporting a good community, like planting seeds in fertile soil, is a good investment.

<sup>6</sup> *Arahat* (Sanskrit: *Arhat*): the highest realization according to the early Buddhist traditions. *Arahat* means worthy of respect, deserving. An *Arahat* is one who has rooted out all the causes of affliction and is no longer subject to the cycle of death and birth.

<sup>7</sup> Root of Affliction (Sanskrit: *klesa*, Pali: *klesa*). The ropes which enslave the mind, like greed, anger, ignorance, scorn, suspicion, and wrong views. It is the equivalent to *Asava* (Pali): suffering, pain, the poisons of the mind, the causes which subject us to birth and death, like craving, wrong views, ignorance.



<sup>8</sup> That is, the first five of the Ten Internal Formations (Skt. *Samyojana*): (1) caught in the wrong view of self, (2) hesitation, (3) caught in superstitious prohibitions and rituals, (4) craving, (5) hatred and anger, (6) desire for the worlds of form, (7) desire for the formless worlds, (8) pride, (9) agitation, and (10) ignorance. These are the knots which tie us and hold us prisoners in our worldly situation.

In the Mahayana, the Ten Internal Formations are listed in the following order: desire, hatred, ignorance, pride, hesitation, belief in a real self, extreme views, wrong views, perverted views, views advocating unnecessary prohibitions. The first five are called “dull,” and the second five are called “sharp.”

<sup>9</sup> Fruit of Never Returning (*Anagami-phala*): The fruit, or attainment, second only to the fruit of Arahathood. Those who realize the Fruit of Never Returning do not return after this life to the cycle of birth and death.

<sup>10</sup> Fruit of Returning Once More (*Sakadagami-phala*): The fruit, or attainment, just below the Fruit of Never Returning. Those who realize the Fruit of Returning Once More will return to the cycle of birth and death just one more time.

<sup>11</sup> Fruit of Stream Enterer (*Sotapatti-phala*): the fourth highest fruit, or attainment. Those who attain the Fruit of Stream Enterer are considered to have entered the Stream of Awakened Mind, which always flows into the Ocean of Emancipation.

<sup>12</sup> Four Establishments of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana*): (1) Awareness of the body in the body, (2) awareness of feelings in feelings, (3) Awareness of the mind in the mind, (4) Awareness of the objects of the mind in the objects of the mind. For further explication, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing: The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Four Right Efforts (Pali: *padhana*): (1) Not to allow any occasion for wrongdoing to arise, (2) Once it has arisen, to find a means to put an end to it, (3) To cause right action to arise when it has not already arisen, (4)

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To find ways to develop right action and make it lasting once it has arisen.

14 Four Bases of Success (*iddhi-pada*): Four roads which lead to realizing a strong mind: diligence, energy, full awareness, and penetration.

15 Five Faculties (*indriyana*): Five capacities, or abilities: (1) confidence, (2) energy, (3) meditative stability, (4) meditative concentration, and (5) true understanding.

16 Five Powers (*bala*): the same as the Five Faculties, but seen as strengths rather than abilities.

17 Seven Factors of Awakening (*bojjhanga*): (1) full attention, (2) investigating dharmas, (3) energy, (4) joy (see note 26), (5) ease, (6) concentration, (7) letting go. These are discussed in Section Four of the sutra.

18 Noble Eightfold Path (*atthangika-magga*): the right way of practicing, containing eight elements: (1) Right View, (2) Right Intention, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort on the path, (7) Right Awareness, (8) Right Meditative Concentration.

The above practices, from the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, through the Noble Eightfold Path, total 37, and are called *bodhipakkhiya dhamma*, the Components of Awakening.

19 Loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity (*brama-vihara*): Four beautiful, precious states of mind, which are not subject to any limitation, often called the Four Limitless Meditations. Loving kindness is to give joy. Compassion is to remove suffering. Joy is happiness and joy in the joy of others. Equanimity is relinquishing, with no calculation of gain or loss, no clinging to beliefs as the truth, and no anger or sorrow.

20 Nine Contemplations: the practice of contemplation on the nine stages of disintegration of a corpse, from the time it swells up to the time it becomes dust.

21 Joy and Happiness: The word *piti* is usually translated "joy," and the word *sukha* is usually translated "happiness." The following example is often used to compare *piti* with *sukha*: Someone travelling in the

desert who sees a stream of cool water experiences *piti* (joy), and on drinking the water experiences *sukha* (happiness).

22 *dharmas*: things, phenomena.

23 Fading (*viraga*): A fading of the color and taste of each dharma, and its gradual dissolution, and at the same time a fading and gradual dissolution of the color and taste of desire. *Raga* means a color, or dye; here it is also used to mean desire. *Viraga* is thus the fading both of color and of craving.

24 Liberation, or emancipation, here means putting an end to the roots of affliction and sorrows by transforming them.

25 Letting go, or relinquishing, here means giving up everything which we see to be illusory and empty of substance.

26 "Joy" is the translation of *niramisa*. This is the great joy which is not to be found in the realm of sensual desire.

27 Discriminating and comparing: That is to say, discriminating subject from object, comparing what is dear to us with what we dislike, what is gained with what is lost.

28 Equanimity, or letting go (Pali: *upekkha*, Skt: *upeksa*): Sometimes translated "indifference." The notion of giving up discriminating and comparing subject/object, like/dislike, gain/loss is fundamental. The Buddhism of the Mahayana school has fully developed this concept.

29 *Sutta* (Sanskrit: *sutra*): a discourse of the Buddha.

30 大安般守意經

31 Sutra 602 in the *Taisho Revised Tripitaka*.

32 Sutra 125 in the *Taisho Revised Tripitaka*.

33 Sutra 606 in the *Taisho Revised Tripitaka*.

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34 See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing*, *Op. Cit.* (note 12, above).

35 *Thich Nhat Hanh, Our Appointment with Life: The Buddha's Teaching on Living in the Present* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990).

36 Four Meditative States (Sanskrit: *Rupa Dhyana*, Pali: *Rupa Jhana*).

37 Four Formless Concentrations (Sanskrit: *Arupa Dhyana*, Pali: *Arupa Jhana*).

38 See Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing*, *Op. Cit.*, note 12 above.

39 The method of counting the breath has been widely accepted and has found its way into the sutras and commentaries. The *Ekottara Agama* (*Zeng Yi A Han*) (Sutra number 125 in the *Taisho Revised Tripitaka*, An Ban chapter, books 7 and 8) does not mention the technique of counting the breath, but it does mention the method of combining the breathing with the Four Meditative States. Chapter 23 of the *Xiu Hang Dao Di* (Sutra number 606 in the *Taisho Revised Tripitaka*, book 5), called "The Breath Counting Chapter," identifies the method of full awareness of breathing with the method of counting the breaths. This sutra also refers to the Four Meditations.

40 Sutra 606 in the *Taisho Revised Tripitaka*, ch. 23.

41 Sutra 125 in the *Taisho Revised Tripitaka*.

42 See note 23.

43 See *Transformation and Healing*, note 12 above. See also *Our Appointment with Life*, note 35 above.

### **About the Author**

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Zen Master in the Vietnamese tradition, which draws on both Northern and Southern Buddhism. He is the founder of Van Hanh Buddhist University, and has taught at Columbia University and the Sorbonne. He is author of 75 books including *The Sun My Heart*, *Being Peace*, and *Old Path, White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha*.

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Annabel Laity is a Buddhist nun from England, presently living in Plum Village in France. She is also the translator of *Transformation and Healing: Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* and *Our Appointment with Life: The Buddha's Teaching on Living in the Present*.

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# **BREATHE! YOU ARE ALIVE**

## **Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing**

In *Breathe! You Are Alive*, Thich Nhat Hanh outlines the methods of conscious breathing taught by the Buddha and offers exercises for practicing them today. Nhat Hanh's commentary gives the reader access to the profound nourishment available when we slow down and get in touch with our breath along with each act of daily life.

*"I am breathing in and making my whole body calm and at peace." It is like drinking a cool glass of lemonade on a hot day and feeling your body become cool inside. When you breathe in, the air enters your body and calms all the cells of your body. At the same time, each "cell" of your mind also becomes more peaceful. The three are one, and each one is all three. This is the key to meditation. Breathing brings the sweet joy of meditation to you. You become joyful, fresh, and tolerant, and everyone around you will benefit."*

Along with the *Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* and the *Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone*, the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing* is one of the three most essential teachings of the Buddha.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, scholar, poet, and peace activist. He is the founder of Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon, and the author of over 75 books, including *Old Path White Clouds*, a biography of the Buddha; *Being Peace*; and *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. At his community, Plum Village in France, he teaches, writes, and gardens; and he leads retreats worldwide on "the art of mindful living."

# DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtue  
accrued from this work  
adorn Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land,  
repay the four great kindnesses above,  
and relieve the suffering of  
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts  
generate Bodhi-mind,  
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,  
and finally be reborn together in  
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.  
Homage to Amita Buddha!

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