

"You could spend the rest of your life reading and rereading this deceptively simple book; it is that deep."


—Rick Hanson, PhD, *Buddha's Brain*



Peace of Mind

Becoming Fully Present

Thich Nhat Hanh



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Mind and Body Are One

Why do we care about bringing body and mind together? Can't we just continue as we are? The way we're carrying on is making many of us sick. We're sick in our minds and in our bodies. Our planet is sick as well. Reuniting body and mind, which have become alienated from each other, reunites us with ourselves. Once we have come home to ourselves, we can be fully present for ourselves, fully present for others, and fully present for the planet.

If you are sad, anxious, or lonely, you may think you need to fix or change something in your mind. If your shoulders are tight, if your back aches, you may think you just need a doctor to help fix that area of your body. But the key to happiness is being fully integrated in body and mind. Much of our suffering comes from an unnecessary division of mind versus matter. We think that there's something wrong with our minds or something wrong with our bodies, and that we need to fix or heal that one, separate thing. But it's impossible to remove mind from body or body from mind. They are two manifestations of the same thing.

There are those who say that our mind is made of matter—the brain and the nervous system. That's a materialist view. There is mind, consciousness, intelligence, knowledge in every cell of our bodies. Each cell is a living reality with its own knowledge, its own mind. If you take consciousness out of a cell, the cell will die. If you take consciousness away from our bodies, they will be lifeless.

When we look into the heart of a flower, we can see that the flower isn't only matter; consciousness is present. When you plant a seed, it sprouts and becomes a plant. It's alive. There's a mind inside. We can't even say that a speck of dust is only matter. Scientists have discovered that atoms and electrons are very intelligent; they're both matter and mind.

When we go walking outside in nature, we know that the Earth is not only made of earth. The Earth is also water, air, and fire. If we were to remove the elements of water, air, and fire from our planet, it would no longer be the Earth. In the past we believed that the Earth was the center of the cosmos. Now we know that the Earth isn't the center of the cosmos. In fact, anything and everything can be the center of the cosmos; a pebble, a squirrel, a piece of dust can be the center of the cosmos because the one contains the all. This wisdom of nondiscrimination is the wisdom that doesn't divide things in two. It's sometimes called the wisdom of nonduality, *advaita jñāna*.

There are scientists who are still caught in the idea that the mind is within us and that the world we study and observe is outside us. They believe that the subject of cognition is our mind and that the object is the world. As long as we follow this division between subject and object, mind and matter, we won't be able to touch the true nature of things. We will feel alienated. When we reconnect with our own bodies, and with our relationship to the world around us, happiness becomes possible.

Bringing Body and Mind Together

Breathing in, I'm aware of my whole body.

Breathing out, I'm aware of my whole body.

As you breathe in, you can connect with your body. Bring your mind home to your body and remember that you have a body. Very often we're carried far away by our thinking; we're caught by sorrow and regret concerning the past, by fear and anxiety concerning the future, or by our emotions or projects in the present. Our mind is not with our body. We're in a state of dispersion. Dispersion is the opposite of concentration. When you're truly here and concentrated, you can get in touch deeply with the wonders that are inside you and all around you. The sun, the moon, the stars, the trees, the river, the hills, and your body are all wonders that become available to you when you become fully present.

Practice: Coming Home to Your Body

If we know how to breathe mindfully, every breath will bring us happiness. People with asthma know how to appreciate the happiness of being able to breathe normally, and they can savor each breath. If our lungs are healthy and our noses aren't blocked, we can breathe easily. Not to enjoy that ease is like a wasted opportunity. With the practice of mindfulness, every breath brings happiness. Mindfulness can make every moment of our daily life peaceful, clear, and loving.

When we breathe in, we might breathe in such a way that joy is possible during the time of breathing in. The in-breath may last three or four seconds. If we know how to breathe in properly, we can generate the energy of joy just like that. When we breathe out, we can generate the energy of happiness for ourselves, as well as for others around us who benefit from our energy.

When we first begin to practice cultivating awareness, we give ourselves instructions in how to sit, breathe, and walk so that we can generate the energy of peace, happiness, and joy. Once we've received this teaching, we have to apply it in our daily lives. "Breathing in, I feel joy" is not autosuggestion or wishful thinking; it's a practice.

Coming home to the body is a strong practice. There may be pain, disharmony, suffering, or a lack of peace in the body. That's why we start by practicing mindfulness of the breath, so that we can recover ourselves and come home with strength and energy.

With the energy of mindful breathing, you come home to your body in order to make peace with it. By practicing mindful breathing, you generate harmony and solidity. Then you're in a position to go home to your whole body, in order to help your body. It's possible to continue mindful breathing while you embrace your body.

Breathing in, I'm aware of my whole body.

Breathing out, I recognize and embrace my whole body.

Your entire body becomes the object of your mindfulness. The subject of mindfulness is your mindful breathing. At first your breath is like an empty truck traveling along the highway, not transporting anything. But when you become aware of your breath and your body, your breath is like a truck that is carrying merchandise. That merchandise is insight. Mindful breathing embraces the whole body. It is very important to come home to your body, to recognize it, take care of it, and make peace with it.

The land of the present moment is available only in the here and the now. If you find yourself in the present moment, it means your mind and body are together. When you practice breathing

mindfully, you bring your mind home to your body and you find yourself in the land of the present moment. Mindfulness is the energy that helps the body and the mind come together. When body and mind are together, you are established in the present moment, in the kingdom, in the here and the now.

The opposite of mindfulness is forgetfulness. Our body may be there but our mind is somewhere else. Our mind may be caught in sorrow or regret concerning the past. Our mind may be caught in fear or uncertainty about the future. Or it may be caught in our anger or our projects. When we begin to breathe in mindfully, we can, in two or three seconds, bring our mind home to our body. Breathing in like that, mindfully, we release the past, we release the future, we release our projects, and we become free. That freedom allows us to get in touch with the wonders of life. It doesn't take a long time. A few seconds will do.

We breathe in and bring our attention to our in-breath; we release everything and we get a lot of freedom. With that kind of freedom, we can make better decisions. Our thoughts and our decisions are not skewed by our anger, our fear, our sorrow, or our regret. There will be a variety of options we can choose from. Our perspective will have become broader. When you come home to the here and the now with the practice of mindful breathing or mindful walking, you can recognize the many conditions of happiness that are already available. Mindfulness helps you to recognize that there are more than enough conditions to be happy right here and now. When you are in touch with these conditions, joy and happiness are possible right away.

The Four Qualities of Happiness

The practice of harmonizing body and mind brings more peace, clarity, compassion, and courage into our daily lives. With these four qualities, we can have enough happiness to be able to help others.

People tend to think of happiness in terms of having plenty of fame, power, wealth, and sensual pleasures. But we know that craving these objects can bring a lot of suffering. So we need to have a very different understanding of happiness. If we cultivate peace in ourselves, then clarity, compassion, and courage will come.

If you don't have compassion, you can't be a happy person. A person without compassion is someone who's utterly alone, who can't truly get in touch with another living being. With enough compassion you have the courage to liberate yourself and help liberate other people. That's true happiness, the kind of happiness that every one of us needs.

Peace

The first thing we need to do is to help our breathing become more peaceful and calm. With the intervention of mindfulness, our breath becomes more regular and harmonious. When we follow the course of our breath as we breathe in, our breathing naturally becomes deeper, slower, and more pleasant. We only need half a minute of mindful breathing to notice an improvement in the quality of our breathing. Our breath has become more peaceful and harmonious. This is the basis for bringing peace to our body, our feelings, our mind, and our perceptions.

Clarity

We often feel overwhelmed or confused. We don't think clearly. Our speech and actions in such moments may create suffering for ourselves and for the people around us. When we have more peace in ourselves, we begin to see things more clearly. Without peace, clarity isn't possible. Clarity helps remove wrong perceptions. When you have enough clarity, you see things as they really are, and what you do and say won't create suffering for you or for other people. Seeing things more clearly, you begin to have compassion, and anger and jealousy fade away. You begin to have understanding, and you don't want to blame or punish yourself or the other person anymore. You accept yourself as you are, you accept others as they are, and you look at yourself and others with the eyes of compassion.

Compassion

Compassion is the third quality we can cultivate through the practice. We are made of body and mind. Both body and mind are energy. We know now that matter is energy and energy is matter. Although we don't perform any physical movements while sitting in meditation, our body can actively radiate

the energy of peace and compassion. Our body isn't just matter; it's energy. Our mind is also energy.

~~There are wholesome and unwholesome energies. Mind energy can be powerful. The energy of hate, fear, anger, or despair can be very strong and destructive. While sitting or walking in awareness we don't generate these energies. Instead we generate the energies of mindfulness, peace, and compassion. When we know how to get in touch with the suffering inside us and the suffering in the world, the energy of compassion is born in us. That is the energy that can heal and transform.~~

Courage

With great compassion in you, you have the capacity to act with courage. You have enough courage to cut through habits of craving, anger, and so on. If you don't have enough compassion for yourself and others, you won't have the courage you need to cut off the afflictions that have been making you suffer.

Practice: Four Steps to Ending Alienation

To end the sense of separation and alienation and to revive peace, joy, and well-being in body and mind, return to your breath and get in touch with your body. It's through the door of the breath that you come home to the body. When you're in touch with the body, you're one with the body, and you know how to look after the body. When you're in touch with the body like that, you then have the chance to get in touch with the mind.

Not only are we often out of touch with our unpleasant feelings, we also frequently can't even be in touch with the pleasant feelings that exist within us. There are pleasant feelings, but we're losing ourselves in thinking and despair, and we can't recognize the pleasant feelings. We're also not able to be in touch with neutral feelings. Neutral feelings can become positive feelings once we become aware of them.

The method of the Buddha is very scientific. To help us end our alienation from others and ourselves, we first need to return to our bodies, to be in touch with our bodies, to resolve the things that are out of balance, and to reconcile with our bodies. For a long time we've been oppressing our bodies. We think we love our body, but the truth is we've abandoned our body. Most people breathe and don't know that they're breathing. They need someone to teach them to breathe and to be in touch with their breathing.

Stopping and Calming the Body

One term for our body is "the body formation," *kaya samskara*. *Samskara* means formation, a composite phenomenon. A flower is a formation; it's composed of many different elements such as air, water, clouds, sunshine, and earth. These elements come together and make a formation. Our body is composed of different elements, like mother, father, teachers, earth, water, fire, and air. Our body is a composed thing, a formation.

There are three parts to beginning meditation. The first part is stopping. We stop all the thinking and bring our mind back to our body. The second aspect is calming down, calming our body formation. The third is concentrating and looking deeply.

Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body.

Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.

Breathing in, I calm my body.

Breathing out, I calm my body.

My body is suffering. My body has been abandoned. I've neglected my body and treated it poorly. Now I return to my body and I say, "I'm sorry, my dear body. I will look after you from now on." I look after my body carefully. First of all, I breathe in and out in such a way that when I breathe, my body calms down.

The in-breath and out-breath have the function of helping my body to calm down. We calm the body formation by breathing with awareness. I bring peace back into my body. When my body is abandoned, there's pain, there's tension, and there's no peace. But if I breathe correctly, mindfully, the breath can help to ease the tension and pain. Calming the breath will calm the body and reduce the suffering. That's what is meant by calming the body.

Breathing in, I calm my body.

Breathing out, I bring peace into my body.

Being Aware of the Body

We breathe mindfully to be aware of the body formation.

Breathing in, I'm aware that I have a body.

Breathing out, I know my body is there.

That is already awakening. Don't look for enlightenment somewhere else.

During the many hours we spend at work, we forget that we have a body. Once we've lost ourselves, we've lost everything. In the body there's tension. Now we come back and we breathe in and out in such a way as to remove the tension and bring peace to the body.

Breathing in, I bring peace to my body.

Breathing out, I release the tension.

If we have some feelings that are painful or uncomfortable, then we have to breathe in order to calm the breathing and bring that calming into the feelings. Each breath we take, each step we make can bring peace to our body and to our feelings.

Calming the Mind

The mind is also a formation, a samskara. Perceptions, feelings, emotions—they are all formations. When we breathe, we make these mental formations calm. This is called calming the

mental formation.

Breathing in, I calm my mind.

Breathing out, I calm my feelings, my emotions.

Each of us can learn how to breathe in such a way as to calm the body and our strong mental formations, and bring peace into body and mind. If we know how to breathe, we can ease our inner turmoil.

When our mind and our body have calmed down, we begin to see more clearly. Instead of being lost, ill, alienated, we have clarity, we have vision. We don't make nearly as many mistakes. Peace is followed by tranquility and clarity. When we see our anger and sadness clearly, a kind of miracle can happen and we're no longer angry or sad. We begin to feel compassion. Clarity is brought about by peace of body and mind. That brings happiness and love. Without love, it's not possible to feel truly happy.

Full-Body Meditation

The only way to gain genuine peace, clarity, compassion, and courage is through mindful awareness. Mindful awareness is full attention, with the whole body and mind, to what is happening in the present moment. When body and mind come together in awareness, fully established in the here and the now, we are free and we can live every moment of our daily lives deeply and happily.

There are three elements of awareness we need to bring together to be fully present. The first is the breath, the second is the body, and the third is the mind. Mindful awareness can happen throughout the day, whatever we are doing. One way to practice and gain the skill and habit of being aware is through full-body meditation. Full-body meditation can be done either while sitting or walking. Mind, body, and breath are together. Harmonizing these three elements, we become whole. We show up for ourselves, for our loved ones, for the world, and for life.

The practice of full-body meditation begins with the breath. You can say to yourself silently:

Breathing in, I know I'm breathing in.

Breathing out, I know I'm breathing out.

In just two or three seconds of conscious breathing you can bring your mind home to your body.

In daily life, you may often feel dispersed. Your body is in one place, ignored, your breath is ignored, and your mind is wandering. But as soon as you pay attention to your breath and breathe in, then all three elements come together in just a few seconds. You pull yourself together, and there you are in the here and the now.

A Nonviolent Response

Perhaps anger, fear, or restlessness has taken root in your mind. Don't be too eager to control your breath or your feelings. Allow them to be themselves. This is the most nonviolent way of taking care of our strong emotions. Take time just to sit and breathe, even for just five minutes.

Don't force your breathing. Simply become aware of your in-breath and out-breath. If your in-breath is short, allow it to be short. If your out-breath isn't peaceful, just allow it to be like that. With awareness, your in-breath and out-breath will naturally begin to flow more easily.

When you breathe in, pay attention only to your in-breath. Don't force or fight with your breathing. Allow it to be the way it is. Your breathing will naturally become calmer, deeper, and more harmonious by itself; that's the effect of mindfulness. Just continue to breathe and to smile gently at your breathing. In a few minutes you'll see that the quality of your breathing has increased by itself, and that will have an influence right away on your body and on your mind. Peace and calm are contagious.

When we're upset, perhaps we think, "I should meditate" or "I should practice mindful breathing"

But mindfulness practices are not something we have to do. They are something we get to do. The practices of mindful breathing, mindful sitting, and mindful walking exist only to help us to cultivate more peace in ourselves and become more fully present. Every moment is an opportunity for us to do this.

Mindful Body and Embodied Mind

When you sit and breathe mindfully, body and mind easily and naturally come back together. You don't have to strain. Bringing the body and mind together, you have a mindful body and an embodied mind. A mindful body is a body with awareness. The embodied mind is the mind that is fully present in the body. It's like software and hardware. If your software and hardware aren't communicating with each other, you can't do anything.

Following your breathing and bringing your mind back to your body allows you to be here in the present moment. Let go of everything so you can have freedom, so you can be in touch with the wonders of the universe. We see that all the stars are in us; the galaxy is in us. Sitting like that is a miracle. We embrace limitless space and time. It's possible to sit like that for five, ten, fifteen, or thirty minutes. We enjoy every moment. How many people in the world can sit like that, or have the chance to learn how to sit like that? We have many opportunities to sit mindfully during the day.

Mindful Walking

Walking meditation is always full-body meditation. It can't be done any other way. We combine our breathing with our steps. While we're breathing in, we may take two, three, or four steps. As we breathe out, we may want to take a few more steps. For example, when we're breathing in, if we take two steps, then when breathing out, we may take three steps. If when breathing in we take three steps, then when breathing out we might take four or five steps. If when breathing in we take five steps while breathing out we may take eight steps. Let the rhythm of your breathing and walking be natural, whatever fits your own breath.

We can use words when we do walking meditation. As we breathe in and take two or three steps, we can say, "I have arrived." As we breathe out, we can say, "I am home." With every step, we really arrive; we're really at home. We don't wander around in the past or the future. We feel at ease, peaceful, and secure when we are fully in the present moment. We don't have to run after anything else anymore. Anyone who enjoys walking or sitting can feel satisfied. We have nothing else to look for, nothing more to long for.

If your in-breath is three steps and your out-breath is five steps, you can say, "I have arrived. I have really arrived. With every step, I return to my source." We can use whatever sentences we like. There are many wonderful sentences we can use. When we want to switch, we can find another. Each step is returning to the source.

I have arrived.

I am home.

Walking on the Earth

When we do walking meditation, we don't walk with our body alone, because our body and mind are united. That's why it's best if we don't talk when we walk. Every step is in noble silence. When we step on the Earth, we don't see the Earth as mere matter. To look at the Earth only as matter is incorrect; that's being caught in materialism. But on the other hand to see the Earth as just consciousness, as philosopher George Berkeley did, is too idealistic. Materialism is one extreme and idealism is another extreme. Both are based on the theory that mind and matter are two different things; either there is only mind or only matter.

When we look deeply into the body, we see that the body is not only matter. There is intelligence in it. Every cell in our bodies—and there are trillions of cells—has its intelligence and its very deep understanding. So it's not correct to say our bodies are only matter. Without consciousness there would be no life in the body.

When we look at something in the natural world—at a blade of grass or a tree—we see that it has its knowledge. When we look into a seed of corn, we see that it's more than just matter. When we sow a seed in the Earth, the seed knows how to grow into a plant, produce flowers, and bear fruit. So to say that maize is only matter is wrong. When we look at the Earth, we see that the Earth is a wonderful reality. It has its knowledge, just as each cell has its knowledge. The planet Earth can give birth to life and nourish life. If you say our planet Earth is just a lump of matter, that's incorrect. With advanced jñāna, the wisdom of nonduality, we see our planet is not just an inanimate mass of minerals. It has intelligence and creativity. This planet has produced wonderful things, so many species. The human species is just one of the many species that this planet Earth has produced.

When we do walking meditation, we use our wisdom of nonduality. We see that we're not stepping on mere matter. We see that we're touching our own Mother Earth, a wonderful reality. She doesn't have to be a human being to be a mother. She is the mother of us all, with the capacity to carry, birth, nourish, and heal us.

When we're in ill health, we sometimes lose ourselves. We have to return to our mother, the Earth, to be healed again. Walking meditation is a wonderful practice that can help us to return and find healing from Mother Earth. The Earth is a bodhisattva with great virtues like solidity and patience. In the Kshitigarbha Sutra it says that Earth is "persevering, solid, and stores many things."

Every Step Is for Relaxation

When you walk from one place to another, as you walk be totally in the present moment. When you walk, take steps in a relaxed way, enjoying the beauty around you. Be totally with the present moment with the spring rain, with the autumn leaves. Walk in a free and leisurely manner, and arrive home at every step. Taking steps and breathing in and out, you can say,

I arrive in the present moment.

I am home in the here and now.

When you walk relaxingly, happily, you are already practicing mindful awareness.

When you walk and others see that you radiate peace, happiness, and calm, you're a reminder for all of us. When we see you walking like that, we come back to ourselves and we walk in the same way as you. You contribute to generating the collective energy of mindfulness and peace that will nourish and transform us all. When we practice together, we give and we receive. We offer the energies of

mindfulness, concentration, peace, and happiness and we receive these energies from others. The quality of collective practice is the basis of a practice community.

Your steps must bring you back to the present moment and to what is nourishing. You don't need to rush. There's nothing to rush for. Every step is for relaxing.

You wish to be successful in your practice. When you practice peace of mind, everyone wants you to be successful. You walk not only for yourself, but also for your parents who may never have had a chance to practice, for your ancestors, your teacher, your friends. In fact, you walk so that everyone will be happy. It looks like you're walking alone, but you're not alone. There are many people around who need your practice to be happy and relaxed.

Lying Down or Going to Sleep

As well as when you're sitting or walking, full-body meditation can be practiced when you're about to go to sleep. Lie down on your back. Instead of thinking of this and that, go back to your breathing and practice breathing in and breathing out. You may like to notice and say to yourself as you breathe in and out,

*Joy while breathing;
happiness while resting.*

If you concentrate on your in-breath and out-breath and allow joy and happiness to be generated, you'll likely find you can go to sleep peacefully.

*Joy while breathing;
Joy is the breathing.*

They are the same thing. Joy doesn't exist outside of the breathing. The breathing is joy itself. This is because the quality of breathing is so high; it's mindful breathing, the kind of breathing that brings harmony, calm, and joy. So the joy is the breathing. We're not using the breathing in order to bring joy. Joy becomes the breathing. The breathing becomes joy.

The word *bhavana* means cultivation. This describes how we train ourselves in the practice of meditation. We're able to produce something that wasn't there before. It's like growing flowers, wheat, or corn. Bhavana means we bring something into existence. In English we use the word "practice." If we have a practice that is good, that is solid, we shouldn't be afraid of anything, because the practice helps us generate joy, happiness, peace, harmony, and reconciliation; and it helps us handle pain, suffering, separation, and misunderstanding. With mindful awareness and the practice of full-body meditation, we can begin to know ourselves fully. There's no reason to be afraid.

Practice: Deep Relaxation

Give yourself at least twenty minutes. When you do deep relaxation in a group, one person can guide the exercise using the following cues or some variation of them. For deep relaxation on your own, you may like to record an exercise to follow as you practice. Deep relaxation can be done at home, at the

office or anywhere, at least once a day, wherever you have the space to lie comfortably. If you can lie down, you can sit in a chair.

Lie down on your back with your arms at your sides. Make yourself comfortable. Allow your body to relax. Be aware of the floor beneath you . . . and of the contact of your body with the floor. (Breathe.) Allow your body to sink into the floor. (Breathe.) Become aware of your breathing, in and out. Be aware of your abdomen rising and falling as you breathe in and out. (Breathe.) Rising . . . falling . . . rising . . . falling. (Breathe.)

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your eyes. Breathing out, allow your eyes to relax. Allow your eyes to sink back into your head . . . letting go of the tension in all the tiny muscles around your eyes. Our eyes allow us to see a paradise of shapes and colors. . . . Allow your eyes to rest . . . sending love and gratitude to your eyes. . . . (Breathe.)

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your mouth. Breathing out, allow your mouth to relax. Release the tension around your mouth. . . .Your lips are the petals of a flower. . . . Let a gentle smile bloom on your lips. . . . Smiling releases the tension in the dozens of muscles in your face. . . . Feel the tension release in your cheeks . . . your jaw . . . your throat. . . . (Breathe.)

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your shoulders. Breathing out, allow your shoulders to relax. Let them sink into the floor. . . . Let all the accumulated tension flow into the floor. . . . You carry so much weight with your shoulders . . . now let them relax as you care for your shoulders. (Breathe.)

Breathing in, become aware of your arms. Breathing out, relax your arms. Let your arms sink into the floor . . . your upper arms . . . your elbows . . . your lower arms . . . your wrists . . . hands . . . fingers . . . all the tiny muscles. . . . Move your fingers a little if you need to, to help the muscles relax. (Breathe.)

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your heart. Breathing out, allow your heart to relax. (Breathe.) You have neglected your heart for a long time . . . in the way you work, eat, and manage anxiety and stress. (Breathe.) Your heart beats for you night and day. Embrace your heart with mindfulness and tenderness . . . reconciling and taking care of your heart. (Breathe.)

Breathing in, bring your awareness to your legs. Breathing out, allow your legs to relax. Release all the tension in your legs . . . your thighs . . . your knees . . . your calves . . . your ankles . . . your feet . . . your toes . . . all the tiny muscles in your toes. . . . You may want to move your toes a little to help them relax. . . . Send your love and care to your toes. (Breathe.)

Breathing in, breathing out . . . your whole body feels light . . . like a water lily floating on the water . . . You have nowhere to go . . . nothing to do. . . . You are free as the cloud floating in the sky. (Breathe.)

Now you can listen to singing or music for a few minutes. (Breathe.)

Bring your awareness back to your breathing . . . to your abdomen rising and falling. (Breathe.)

Following your breathing, become aware of your arms and legs. . . . You may want to move them a little and stretch. (Breathe.)

When you feel ready, slowly sit up. (Breathe.)

When you are ready, slowly stand up.

Finding Peace

Whether you're walking or sitting, the first thing to do for full-body meditation is to bring peace to your breath, your body, and your emotions. This may seem like a lot, but if you follow your breath, it can happen quite naturally. As soon as you sit down or begin your walk, bring your attention to your in-breath and out-breath. Your breathing may become peaceful in no time at all. It's important not to force your breathing. When your breath has become more peaceful, harmonious, and pleasant, you begin to enjoy breathing in and breathing out, and to benefit from the harmony and peace brought to you by the practice.

Making Our Bodies Peaceful

The next thing to do is to recognize your body. This is a very important practice, because many of us in our daily lives forget that we have a body. This exercise of going back to our body reminds us that each of us has a body that is our home. If you can get in touch with your body, then you can get in touch with life. "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body. Breathing out, I know my body is there."

When you're lost in your computer, you're not living in a real world. In Plum Village we like to download a bell that sounds every fifteen minutes on the computer. When you're working and you hear the bell, you go back to your in-breath and your out-breath. You breathe in and you recognize that you have a body. When you come back to your body, you touch life; you get in touch with everything inside and around you. Breathing in and out and being aware of your body helps release tension and brings peace into your body, and you feel how pleasant it is to be with the body.

As soon as our in-breath and out-breath have become more peaceful and pleasant, our body begins to benefit. In our body there may not be enough peace. There may be tension, stress, pain in our body whether we're aware of it or not. There's suffering in our body when there's not enough peace. But as soon as our in-breath and out-breath begin to become more peaceful, that peace will be conveyed to our body.

All of us can learn to bring more peace into our bodies. Whether we're sitting, standing, walking, lying down, eating, or working, we can always practice mindful breathing to release the tension in our body and bring in more peace. We can say to ourselves,

Breathing in, I am aware of my body.

Breathing out, I release the tension in my body.

We bring the mind back to the body, we recognize the presence of the body, and we release any tension being held in the body. This brings peace to our body and it can be done in just a few minutes. Peace is something very concrete; there's a harmonious, pleasant feeling born from peace. With the practice of mindful breathing, it's possible to make your breathing and your body peaceful.

The Buddha advises that after becoming aware of the whole body, we can become aware of the

four elements of water, fire, air, and earth within the body. Focus on each element and see if you can sense this element in your body. Up to 60 percent of the human body is water; the brain is composed of 70 percent water; 83 percent of our blood is water, which helps us digest our food. For fire, we can think of the heat and energy we can generate in our bodies to keep us warm and digest our food. Air is our life's breath. Earth is what we eat and digest, and the vitamins and minerals in our blood and bones. If there is balance among the four elements, then there is good health. Much of human illness comes from an imbalance between these four elements. Recognize the four elements within, and recognize the four elements all around you, to see the connection between the body and everything you normally think of as "outside" of the body.

Then we become aware of the positions of the body. While seated, you're aware that you're sitting. While walking, you're aware of the steps you make. Sitting meditation is first of all to be aware that we are in a sitting position. We can sit in a way that brings calmness, solidity, and well-being to our body. When walking, walk in a way that brings solidity, freedom, and pleasure for you while walking. Sitting, walking, standing, and lying down, you are mindful of each of these four basic positions of your body. That is the practice of mindfulness regarding the body. Then we become aware of every action of the body: getting up, bending down, putting on our coat—every gesture of your body should be followed and become the object of your mindfulness.

Peace in the Feelings

The peace we achieve by breathing attentively can benefit not only our body but also our feelings and perceptions. Mindfulness helps us get in touch with what's going on in our body, our feelings, and our perceptions. We make them the objects of our meditation. There are many wonderful things in us and around us. When we make them the objects of our mindfulness they can nourish and heal us. Even in the morning when we wake up, we can breathe in with awareness and get in touch with the wonders of life. Mindfulness allows us to be in touch with those wonderful nourishing things that bring healing, joy, and happiness. The first benefits of mindfulness are joy and happiness.

Calming Painful Feelings

Full-body meditation helps us become aware of each feeling as it arises, whether it's a pleasant feeling, an unpleasant feeling, a neutral feeling, or a mixed feeling. Before attending to painful feelings, we need to learn how to relate skillfully with the feelings that are not painful. We cultivate joy and happiness to nourish ourselves so we have the capacity and energy to take care of the painful feelings. Calming our breathing and our body and releasing tension can already bring a feeling of joy and a feeling of happiness.

Breathing in, I feel joy.

Breathing out, I smile to the joy in myself.

Breathing in, I feel happy.

Breathing out, I smile to the feeling of happiness in myself.

We don't always want to go directly to the painful feeling. It's better to nourish ourselves with

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