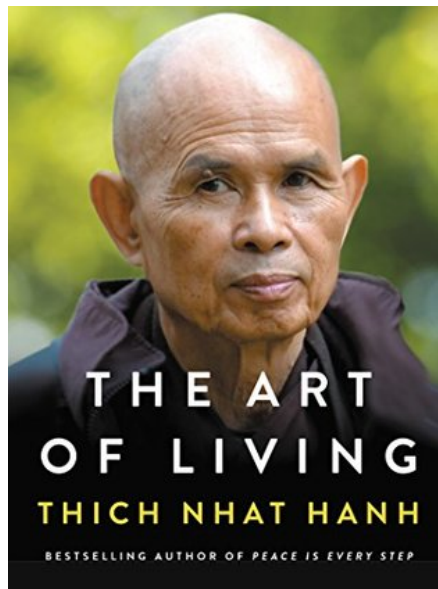




The Art of Living: Peace and Freedom in the Here and Now

Thich Nhat Hanh

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In troubled times, there is an urgency to understand ourselves and our world. We have so many questions, and they tug at us night and day, consciously and unconsciously. In this important volume Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh—one of the most revered spiritual leaders in the world today—reveals an art of living in mindfulness that helps us answer life's deepest questions and experience the happiness and freedom we desire.

Thich Nhat Hanh presents, for the first time, seven transformative meditations that open up new perspectives on our lives, our relationships and our interconnectedness with the world around us. Based on the last full talks before his sudden hospitalization, and drawing on intimate examples from his own life, Thich Nhat Hanh shows us how these seven meditations can free us to live a happy, peaceful and active life, and face ageing and dying with curiosity and joy and without fear.

Containing the essence of the Buddha's teachings and Thich Nhat Hanh's poignant, timeless, and clarifying prose, **The Art of Living** provides a spiritual dimension to our lives. This is not an effort to escape life or to dwell in a place of bliss outside of this world. Instead, this path will allow us to discover where we come from and where we are going. And most of all, it will generate happiness, understanding, and love, so we can live deeply in each moment of our life, right where we are.

The Art of Living: Peace and Freedom in the Here and Now Details

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From Reader Review The Art of Living: Peace and Freedom in the Here and Now for online ebook

KC says

This is a quick read about being and staying present. Embracing love, loss, and being mindful of what you have. I will be making some changes, breathe deeper, and become more aware of the now.

Cheryl says

I will start with some lyrics from a favorite song, and try to connect them to the art of living. Greg Brown, Rexroth's Daughter:

*Coldest night of the winter working up my farewell
In the middle of everything under no particular spell
I am dreaming of the mountains where the children learn the stars
Clouds roll in from nebraska dark chords on a big guitar
My restlessness is long gone I would stand here like an old jack pine
But I'm looking for rexroth's daughter the friend of a friend of mine
I heard a man speak quietly I listened for a while
He spoke from his heart to my woe & then he bowed & smiled
What is real but compassion as we move from birth to death
I am looking for rexroth's daughter & I'm running out of breath*

It felt like a journey, a drive, traffic, northern California blue sky splendor; I stood waiting in a mass of people, all of us to hear Thich Nhat Hanh speak at Berkeley, all of us with a story, and I felt the crowd's energy as a balm, a hush. This was one of my first experiences with Buddhism, other than reading it, and trying to meditate, and all the people around me had different stories and goals; some were just there to be in the presence of as many holy Buddhist teachers as possible, some to find answers, some to find enlightenment, some out of intellectual curiosity. I was hoping it wasn't sold out, and someone came by with a free ticket and gave it to me, karma, my walking in line companions said, and then a few more free tickets, and we all laughed at the supposed windfall. It was so very hard to hear and understand Thich Knat Hanh, with his soft spokenness and accent, we were all leaning forward in silence beyond silence, as he spoke to our woe from his heart, so much so I had a headache afterwards from concentrating so hard, barely breathing.

I tell you this, so you understand his words have always been important to me, even though I am not a practicing Buddhist, I just love all religions and love how he loves the divine, however we as human beings perceive it, which is in each of us, in the here and now. Nothing, no words, no phrases, no readings, no sermons, no passages, no psalms, no hymns ever rocked me as much as these words:

Looking into a flower, we can see that it is full of life. It contains soil, rain, and sunshine. It is also full of clouds, oceans, and minerals. It is even full of space and time. In fact, the whole cosmos is present in this one little flower. The flower cannot exist by itself alone. We too are full of so many things and yet empty of a separate self. Like the flower, we contain earth, water, air, sunlight, and warmth. We contain space and consciousness. We contain our ancestors, our parents and grandparents, education, food, and culture. The whole cosmos has come together to create the wonderful manifestation that we are.

That unlocked it all for me, so I always treasure revisiting his words. I was restless, woebegone, despairing, and the source of my woe was a deep disillusionment for all the sleepwalking people I encountered every day, and that feeling there were more expansive, abundant points of view out there, and his is one of them. Such a beautiful human being.

We're so close to Earth that sometimes we forget how beautiful it is. Seen from space, our blue planet is remarkably alive—a living paradise suspended in a vast and hostile cosmos. On the first trip to the moon, astronauts were stunned to see Earth rise above the moon's desolate horizon. We know that on the moon there are no trees, rivers, or birds. No other planet has yet been found to have life as we know it. It is reported that astronauts orbiting high up in space stations spend most of their free time contemplating the breathtaking sight of Earth far below. From a distance, it looks like one giant living, breathing organism. Seeing its beauty and wonder, astronauts feel great love for the whole Earth. They know billions of people are living out their lives on this little planet, with all their joy, happiness, and suffering. They see violence, wars, famine, and environmental destruction. At the same time, they see clearly that this wonderful little blue planet, so fragile and precious, is irreplaceable. As one astronaut put it, "We went to the moon as technicians; we returned as humanitarians."

Spirituality is not religion. It is a path for us to generate happiness, understanding, and love, so we can live deeply each moment of our life. Having a spiritual dimension in our lives does not mean escaping life or dwelling in a place of bliss outside this world but discovering ways to handle life's difficulties and generate peace, joy, and happiness right where we are, on this beautiful planet.

To meditate is to look deeply and see the things that others cannot see, including the wrong views that lie at the base of our suffering. When we can break free from these wrong views, we can master the art of living happily in peace and freedom.

Emptiness, signlessness, and aimlessness. They are known as the Three Doors of Liberation and are available in every school of Buddhism. These three concentrations offer us a deep insight into what it means to be alive and what it means to die. They help us transform feelings of grief, anxiety, loneliness, and alienation. They have the power to liberate us from our wrong views, so we can live deeply and fully, and face dying and death without fear, anger, or despair.

In our sangha, we have a porch we call, Listening to the Rain Veranda. We made it specially for that purpose—so we could sit there and listen to the rain and not need to think about anything. Listening to the rain can help the mind come to stillness.

Breathing in, you know you are breathing in. You bring all your attention to your in-breath. As you breathe in, there is peace and harmony in the whole body. As you breathe out, you know you are breathing out. As you breathe out, there is calming, relaxation, and letting go. You allow all the muscles in your face and shoulders to relax.

Emptiness means to be full of everything but empty of a separate existence.

About thirty years ago I was looking for an English word to describe our deep interconnection with everything else. I liked the word "togetherness," but I finally came up with the word "interbeing." The verb "to be" can be misleading, because we cannot be by ourselves, alone.

We are the continuation of all our ancestors. Thanks to impermanence, we have a chance to transform our inheritance in a beautiful direction.

Impermanence means that nothing remains the same thing in two consecutive moments. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus said, "You can never bathe in the same river twice." The river is always flowing, so as soon as we climb out onto the bank and then return again to bathe, the water has already changed.

I think (too much), therefore I am (not there to live my life).

“If I am to be found anywhere, it is in your peaceful way of breathing and walking.” That is my continuation. Even though we may never have met in person, if, when you breathe in, you find peace in your breathing, I am there with you.

In the light of emptiness and interbeing we know they have not died or disappeared: they continue in their actions and in us. We can still talk to them. We can say something like, “I know you are there. I’m breathing for you. I’m smiling for you. I’m enjoying looking around with your eyes. I am enjoying life with you. I know that you are still there very close to me, and that now you continue in me.”

You carry your mother in every cell of your body. You have to look deeply to see that she is in fact always with you. Her hand is still in your hand. If your parents have already passed away and you practice looking deeply like this, you can have an even closer relationship with your parents than that of someone whose parents are still alive but who cannot communicate easily with them. You may like to take a moment now to look at your hand. Can you see your mother’s hand in your hand? Or your father’s? Look deeply into your hand. With this insight, and with all the love and care of your parents, bring your hand up to your forehead and feel the hand of your mother or father touching your forehead. Allow yourself to be cared for by your parents in you. They are always with you.

Long before the moment of your conception, the elements you are composed of were already present in the sperm and egg that came together to help you manifest. You also existed in all the conditions that supported and nourished your mother as she was pregnant. And long before that, you were in your grandparents. In fact, you could keep pushing your date of birth back infinitely. There is no moment when you did not exist. This is why in the Zen tradition we ask questions like “What did you look like before your grandmother was born?” The day you call your birthday is really a day to remember your continuation. Every day you are alive is a continuation day. Within your body, birth and death are always taking place. We are coming into existence and going out of existence at every moment of our life. When you scratch or scrub yourself, dry skin is flaked off and new skin cells are born. In the time it takes you to read this paragraph, thousands of cells will have died. But there are so many, you do not have time to organize funerals for them. At the same time, thousands of new cells have been born, but it would be impossible to organize birth celebrations. Every day you transform. Some part of you is being born and some part is dying. There is an intimate connection between birth and death. Without the one, we cannot have the other. As it says in the gospel, unless the seed dies, it could never bear fruit.

Our body is a masterpiece of the cosmos. Our body carries within it the stars, the moon, the universe, and the presence of all our ancestors. How many millions of years of evolution has it taken to give rise to these wondrous two eyes, legs, feet, and hands? Countless life-forms are supporting our existence in this moment. Reconnecting with our physical body takes only a few moments of stopping and breathing with awareness.

Every human being can become a buddha. This is good news. We all have the seeds of mindfulness, love, understanding, and compassion, and whether these good seeds have a chance to grow depends on our environment and our experiences. Don’t doubt that you have a buddha body. There have been times in the past when you had the capacity to understand, to forgive, and to love. These are the seeds of your buddha body. You have to give the buddha in you a chance. Allowing the buddha in you to grow doesn’t require special effort. If you wake up to the beauties of nature, you are already a buddha. And if you know how to maintain that spirit of being awake all day, you are a full-time buddha.

To be a buddha—to wake up—also means to wake up to the suffering in the world and find ways to bring relief and transformation. This requires a tremendous source of energy. Your strong aspiration—your mind of love—is that immense source of energy that helps wake you up to the nourishing and healing beauties of nature and to the suffering of the world. It gives you a lot of energy to help. This is the career of a buddha. And if you have that source of strength in you, if you have the mind of love, you are a buddha in action.

Spiritual practice is the art of knowing how to generate happiness and handle suffering, just as a gardener knows how to make good use of mud in order to grow lotus flowers. Spiritual practice is what helps us to overcome challenging and difficult moments. It is the art of stopping and looking deeply to gain deeper insight. It is very concrete. We cultivate our spiritual practice body—which we can also call our “Dharma body”—by cultivating the seeds of awakening and mindfulness in our daily life.

It is possible to transform not only our home but also our work, school, corporation, or hospital into a beloved community, into a kind of family, where there is love, understanding, and true communication.

Throughout our life we produce energy. We say things and do things, and every thought, every word, and every act carries our signature. What we produce as thoughts, as speech, as action, continues to influence the world, and that is our continuation body. Our actions carry us into the future. We are like stars whose light energy continues to radiate across the cosmos millions of years after they become extinct.

Can you see how you are continued in your parents, in your brothers and sisters, in your teachers and friends? Can you see the continuation body of your parents and loved ones? We don’t need to get old or die in order to see our continuation body. We don’t need to wait for the complete disintegration of this body in order to begin to see our continuation body, just as a cloud doesn’t need to have been entirely transformed into rain in order to see her continuation body. Can you see your rain, your river, your ocean? Each one of us should train ourselves to see our continuation body in the present moment. If we can see our continuation body while we’re still alive, we’ll know how to cultivate it to ensure a beautiful continuation in the future. This is the true art of living. Then, when the time comes for the dissolution of our physical body, we will be able to release it easily.

Just as it’s impossible for a cloud to die, it’s impossible for me to die.

We are children of the Earth, made of all the same elements and minerals. We contain mountains, rivers, stars, and black holes. In every moment of our life the cosmos is going through us, renewing us, and we are returning ourselves to the cosmos. We are breathing the atmosphere, eating the earth’s food, creating new ideas, and experiencing new feelings. And we are emitting energy back into the cosmos, in our thinking, speech, and actions, in our out-breath, in our body’s warmth, and in releasing everything we have consumed and digested. In this very moment many parts of us are returning to the earth. We don’t return to the earth and cosmos only when our body disintegrates. We are already inside the earth, and the earth is inside us.

I am the whole of the river of life, of blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors, that has been continuously flowing for thousands of years and flows on for thousands of years into the future. I am one with my ancestors and my descendants. I am life manifesting in countless different forms. I am one with all people and all species, whether they are peaceful and joyful or suffering and afraid. At this very moment I am present everywhere in this world. I have been present in the past and will be there in the future. The disintegration of this body does not touch me, just as when the petals of the plum blossom fall it does not mean the end of the plum tree. I see that I am like a wave on the surface of the ocean. I see myself in all the other waves, and I see all the other waves in me. The manifestation or the disappearance of the wave does not lessen the presence of the ocean. My Dharma body and spiritual life are not subject to birth or death. I am able to see my presence before this body manifested and after this body disintegrates. I am able to see my presence outside this body, even in the present moment. Eighty or ninety years is not my life span. My life span, like that of a leaf or of a buddha, is immeasurable. I am able to go beyond the idea that I am a body separate from all other manifestations of life, in time and in space.

GUIDED MEDITATION: BREATHING WITH THE COSMOS Breathing in, I see the element earth in me, the element air in me. I see clouds, snow, rain, and rivers in me. I see the atmosphere, wind, and forests in me, the mountains and oceans in me. I see the earth in me. Breathing out, I smile to the earth in me. I am one with Mother Earth, the most beautiful planet in our solar system. Mother Earth in me. Smiling to the most

beautiful planet in our solar system. Breathing in, I see the element of light in me, I am made of light; I am made of the sun. I see our star as an infinite source of life, nourishing us in every moment. Buddha Shakyamuni was a child of Father Sun; so too am I. Breathing out, I smile to the sun in me. I am the sun, a star, one of the most beautiful stars in our entire galaxy. I am a child of the sun. I am a star. Breathing in, I see all my ancestors in me: my mineral ancestors, plant ancestors, mammal ancestors, and human ancestors. My ancestors are always present, alive in every cell of my body, and I play a part in their immortality. Breathing out, I smile to the cloud in my tea. A cloud never dies. A cloud can become snow or rain but never nothing. I also play my part in the immortality of the cloud. I am my ancestors. Playing my part in the immortality of my ancestors. Breathing in, I see the stars and galaxies in me. I am consciousness manifesting as cosmos. I am made of stars and galaxies. Breathing out, I smile to the stars in me. I play my part in the immortality of clouds, rain, stars, and the cosmos. Smiling to the stars and galaxies in me. Playing my part in the immortality of stars and cosmos. Breathing in, I see that nothing is created, nothing is destroyed; everything is in transformation. I see the nature of no birth and no death of matter and energy. I see that birth, death, being, and nonbeing are only ideas. Breathing out, I smile to my true nature of no birth and no death. I am free from being and from nonbeing. There is no death; there is no fear. I touch nirvana, my true nature of no birth and no death. Nothing is created. Nothing is destroyed. I am free from being, free from nonbeing.

I remember one morning contemplating a mountain in the early light of dawn. I saw very clearly that not only was I looking at the mountain, but all my ancestors in me were looking at the mountain with me. As dawn broke over the mountain peak we admired its beauty together. There was nowhere to go and nothing to do. We were free. We needed only to sit there and enjoy the sunrise. Our ancestors may never have had a chance to sit quietly, peacefully, and enjoy the sunrise like that. When we can stop the running, all our ancestors can also stop at the same time. With the energy of mindfulness and awakening, we can stop on behalf of all our ancestors. It is not the stopping of a separate self alone, but of a whole lineage

Madhusree says

this book was something I needed but I didn't know how much. it offered a new paradigm for living. Life and death, suffering and pleasure cannot exist in isolation. His focus on breathing always needs reiteration in my opinion. I will read and annotate this book and add some more to this skeletal review.

Diana says

Book received from Edelweiss

Religious Diversity @emojiathon

I first heard of this author in my Eastern Religions class, while I'm not Buddhist some of the teachings of the religion really resonated with me. This book was sent to me by the publisher at an interesting time. At the end of the month we'll be coming up on the 1st anniversary of my niece's death and things are starting to get rough as we get closer to her birthday which was also this month. Reading through this book and remembering that I need to focus on the present has helped me quite a bit to put things back on an even keel. This is one book that I want to add to my own religious bookshelves for when I need that reminder again.

Magdelanye says

In his sincere and straightforward way TNH elucidates a modern Buddhism that is curiously free of dogma, considering that this book is a presentation of Buddhist dogma.

TNH is fearless and humble. His understanding bridges the abyss between ignorance and familiarity. His terminology expands our comprehension of some of the slipperier of the essential Buddhist concepts such as no-self, God and nirvana.

This is a stream of devotion outside the box, giving it a new shape.

Cyndi says

I love me some Thich Nhat Hanh and his guidance, reality, straightforwardness! I love the simplicity! It is filled with great little stories about his life, about nothing, about beauty and the world around us so many are missing. I think (way to much) therefore I am (what are you exactly?) Another book I will leave laying around the house to pick up when I need to be reminded I am way to serious!

Trevor says

Fascinating book. A must read for those interested in mindfulness.

Joanne says

This is the audio version so beautifully narrated by Eduardo Ballerini. I just ordered a copy for listening to again and again, it is that lovely.

Leslie Reese says

from page 70:

"When I was eighty years old, a journalist asked me if I ever planned to retire as a spiritual teacher. I smiled and explained that teaching is given not by talking alone but by the way we live our life. Our life is the teaching. Our life is the message. And so I explained that as long as I continue to practice mindful sitting, walking, eating, and interacting with my community and those around me, I will continue to teach. I told her that I had already started encouraging my senior students to begin to replace me by giving their own Dharma talks. Many of them have given wonderful Dharma talks, and some have been better than mine! When they teach, I see myself continued in them."

I find nourishing and healing food-for-thought in the writings of Zen master Thich That Hanh (b.1926). The edition I read was from the library, and I was moved to copy out a number of passages - which indicates that I probably need a personal copy!

Bibi Larson says

Awesome way to live our lives - being mindful!!

Jim says

According to Thich Nhat Hanh, the key to the art of living can be summarized in one word: Mindfulness. Or to use his words:

Happiness is not something that arrives in a package in the mail. Happiness does not fall out of the sky. Happiness is something we generate with mindfulness.

I am inclined to agree with him.

For over a year, I have been attending weekly guided meditations on Thursdays at the Los Angeles Central Library conducted by the Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC) at UCLA. I was able to do this because my job was reduced from a full-time job to a part-time job. Curiously, I have been feeling better as a result, and my overall health has improved. On the other hand, two of my co-workers have died during the same period, and the remaining ones, including my boss, are incredibly stressed.

There's a lot to this practice. Although Thich Nhat Hanh was a Buddhist monk, his advice in **The Art of Living** is non-denominational. In every way, this is a highly useful book.

Kevin says

Not my kind of book I guess. Saw the 5 star rating and thought it would be good. It seemed that he repeated himself over and over again in the book.

Liza Nahas says

Thoughtful, thought-provoking advice to help one advance on your spiritual journey through life. You'll need to own your copy because there is so much to highlight & underline! I've already referred back to my marked passages several times.

Chris says

The Art of Living by Thich Nhat Hanh

Does Zen master, global spiritual leader, poet and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh need any further introduction?

For me it is the first of his books I have read and it won't be the last. I enjoyed his clear and simple way of writing and explaining. (Is that because he writes his insights after -walking- meditation and with a brush in short calligraphy phrases?) It helped me to understand the Buddha's teachings and the basics of mindfulness a little better.

I gladly share some of Thich Nhat Hanh's insights with you:

Time is life and life is love.

Love is a long-term commitment made known to my family and friends.

The four basic elements of true love are loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness.

When you start a relation with someone you should also need to find out what their dreams are and also need to help them understand your dream.

My happiness depends on my mental attitude not on external conditions.

Seven concentrations (and the seven chapters of this book)

1. Emptiness, means to be full of everything but empty of a separate existence.

2. Signlessness 'a cloud never dies'

death is essential to making life possible, death is transformation, death is continuation.

We should take time to understand living and dying and free our self from anxiety, fear and sorrow.

3. Aimlessness 'you already are what you want to become' 'the way out is in'

It is the quality of our life that is important, not how long we live.

Spiritual practise is the art of knowing how to create happiness and handle suffering.

Your dream is now. What can I do today to realize my dreams? Realize your dreams with joy, ease and freedom. Our dream gives us vitality, it gives meaning to our lives.

4. Impermanence, thanks to impermanence everything is possible.

When we agree with the truth of impermanence we have to behave according to that truth. You do everything you can and you do it now. Make the person you love happy, live the kind of life you would like to live. Make it a living insight that is with us every day.

(don't exercise to get fit or be healthier, do it because you enjoy being alive)

Take good care of your garden, so you can help your beloved take care of theirs.

Cultivate flowers of peace, compassion, gratitude, understanding and joy,
and you can offer, patience acceptance, understanding and compassion,
and grow together.

Our suffering is impermanent and that is why we can transform it, and because happiness is impermanent that is why we have to nourish it.

5. Non Carving (you have enough)

As soon as we realize that in this very moment we already have enough and we already are enough true happiness becomes possible.

Mindfulness can only help reduce our stress and tension if it provides us with insight.

Our spiritual practice (meditation) has the power to transform the roots of our suffering and transform the way we live our daily life. It is insight that helps us calm our restlessness, stress and craving.

True happiness depends on our capacity to cultivate compassion and understanding and bring nourishment and healing to ourselves and our loved ones.

It is possible to learn to sit in peace, breath in peace and walk in peace. To be at peace is an art we cultivate with daily mindful practice.

As we nourish and heal ourselves, our understanding of the meaning of life will deepen day by day.

We can become a victim of our success but never of our happiness.

6. Letting go.

Our idea of happiness may be the very obstacle of our happiness.

Peace, freedom and happiness can be found right here in this very life, if only we can learn the art of handling our suffering.

Happiness and peace are born from transforming suffering and pain. If there was no mud, how could a lotus grow.

A meditator is both an artist and a warrior.

7. Nirvana is now

Nirvana is a pleasant state of coolness and freshness that we can all touch in this very life.

As we learn to handle our suffering we are learning to generate moments of nirvana.

Awakening can be found right in the heart of suffering. So it's okay to suffer, we just need to learn how to handle it.

time is life an time is love

This is my life and I want to live it deeply.

The five Remembrances of the Buddha:

I am of the nature to grow old
There is no way to escape growing old

I am of the nature to have ill health
There is no way to escape ill health

I am of the nature to die

There is no way to escape death

All that is dear to me and everyone I
love are of the nature to change
There is no way to escape being separated from them

My actions are my only true belongings
I cannot escape the consequences of my actions
They are the ground upon which I stand

Suha Hallab says

My favorite spiritual teacher ♥? Read this book for an escape from the fast paced routine, the surrounding sufferings we endure, the existential dread we live in.. this book's teachings remind you of life's simple pleasures reflected in mindfulness, the joy of being, the appreciation of aliveness and the acceptance of the "beyond evil".
