

THE BIG IDEAS

Contemplating the Future
Without fear.

Breathing in the Moment
Is a key practice.

Interbeing
Nothing stands alone.

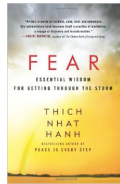
Bring It On!
No need to hide from fear.

Mind Beans
Time to soak them.

TV Can Be a Drug
You addicted?

Blue Sky of Happiness
Sometimes there are clouds.

Book Essence in 6 Words
= “the energy of mindfulness and concentration”



Fear

Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm

BY THICH NHAT HANH · HARPERONE © 2012 · 163 PAGES

“Fearlessness is not only possible, it is the ultimate joy. When you touch nonfear, you are free. If I am ever in an airplane and the pilot announces that the plane is about to crash, I will practice mindful breathing. If you receive bad news, I hope you will do the same. But don’t wait for the critical moment to arrive before you start practicing to transform your fear and live mindfully. Nobody can give you fearlessness. Even if the Buddha were sitting right here next to you, he couldn’t give it to you. You have to practice and realize it yourself. If you make a habit of mindfulness practice, when difficulties arise, you will already know what to do.”

~ Thich Nhat Hanh from *Fear*

A Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master, [Thich Nhat Hanh](#) is, essentially, a living saint.

This is our third Note (so far) featuring his wisdom. The other two: [Peace Is Every Step](#) + [Silence](#).

In this great little book, Nhat Hanh delivers his essential wisdom on how to navigate the storms of life with as much grace and poise as we can. His prose, as always, is calm, clear, and inspiring.

If you’re looking for more fearlessness/nonfear in your life, I think you’ll enjoy it. Most of my copy is underlined and marked up. It’s fantastic. (You can get a copy of the book [here](#).)

For now, I’m excited to explore a handful of my favorite Big Ideas so let’s jump straight in!

CONTEMPLATING THE FUTURE WITHOUT FEAR

“We likewise can prepare for the future without getting consumed by our plans. Often we either don’t plan at all, or we get caught up in obsessive planning because we fear the future and its uncertainty. The present moment is where we need to operate. When you are truly anchored in the present moment, you can plan for the future in a much better way. Living mindfully in the present does not preclude making plans. It only means that you know there’s no use losing yourself in worries and fear concerning the future. If you are grounded in the present moment, you can bring the future into the present to have a deep look without losing yourself in anxiety and uncertainty. If you are truly present and know how to take care of the present moment as best you can, you are doing your best for the future already.”

That’s from a section called “Contemplating the Future Without Fear.”

As Nhat Hanh tells us, often we either completely avoid planning for the future or we get all wrapped up in obsessively planning for it.

Both, of course, involve fear and anxiety about the future.

By grounding ourselves in the present—realizing that NOW is the best time to positively impact the future—we can properly take a look at and plan for coming attractions.

“The only way to ease our fear and be truly happy is to acknowledge our fear and look deeply at its source.”

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

"The Buddha taught that when we call up and get in touch with the truth that we cannot escape old age and death, our fear—and the foolish things we do to try not to feel it—will cease."

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

Here's how [Eckhart Tolle](#) puts it in [The Power of Now](#) (see Notes): "If you set yourself a goal and work toward it, you are using clock time. You are aware of where you want to go, but you honor and give your fullest attention to the step that you are taking at this moment. If you then become excessively focused on the goal, perhaps because you are seeking happiness, fulfillment, or a more complete sense of self in it, the Now is no longer honored. It becomes reduced to a mere stepping stone to the future, with no intrinsic value. Clock time then turns into psychological time. Your life's journey is no longer an adventure, just an obsessive need to arrive, to attain, to 'make it.' You no longer see or smell the flowers by the wayside either, nor are you aware of the beauty and the miracle of life that unfolds all around you when you are present in the Now."

In [Buddha's Brain](#) (see Notes), [Rick Hanson](#) tells us to be nice to our future self and reminds us: "It's impossible to change the past or the present: you can only accept all that as it is. But you can tend to the causes of a better future. Most of the ways you'll do this are small and humble... These little actions really add up over time. Everyday, ordinary activities—as well as any personal growth or spiritual practices—contain dozens of opportunities to change your brain from the inside out. You really do have that power, which is a wonderful thing in a world full of forces beyond your control. A single raindrop doesn't have much effect, but if you have enough raindrops and enough time, you can carve a Grand Canyon."

Here's to envisioning our ideals as we ground ourselves and do our best in the present!

PRACTICE: BREATHING IN THE MOMENT

"When you let go mentally, you relax physically, because the body and the mind are two aspects of one reality."

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

"Please take a moment to enjoy the simple practice of mindful breathing: 'Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in; breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.' If you do that with a little concentration, then you'll be able to really be there. The moment you begin to practice mindful breathing, your body and your mind begin to come back together. It takes only ten to twenty seconds to accomplish this miracle, the oneness of body and mind in the present moment. And every one of us can do it, even a child."

As the Buddha said, "The past no longer is, the future is not yet here; there is only one moment in which life is available and that is the present moment." To meditate with mindful breathing is to bring body and mind back to the present moment so that you do not miss your appointment with life."

Mindful breathing.

It's the easiest, most powerful way to bring ourselves back into the present moment. And I just love the simplicity with which [Thich Nhat Hanh](#) guides us. —> "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in; breathing out, I know that I am breathing out."

How about we try it right now? *Breathe in and know that you are breathing in. Feel it... Breathe out and know that you are breathing out. Feel that as well.*

Voilà. Welcome to the present moment. Try that whenever you feel yourself getting wrapped up in regrets about the past or anxiety about the future. Powerful stuff.

INTERBEING

"When we look deeply into a sheet of paper, we see that it's full of everything in the cosmos: the sunshine, the trees, the clouds, the earth, the minerals, everything—except for one thing. It's empty of one thing only: a separate self. The sheet of paper cannot be by itself alone. That is why the word *inter-be* can be more helpful than the word *be*. In fact, to be means to inter-be. The sheet of paper cannot be without the sunshine, cannot be without the forest. The sheet of paper has to inter-be with the sunshine, to inter-be with the forest."

"Concentration means you keep the insight alive for a long time. It's not just a flash; that's not enough to liberate you. So in your daily life, you keep that insight of nonself, of emptiness, of impermanence alive."

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

Interbeing.

This is one of my favorite Ideas—in *any* book.

Look deeply into anything and what do you see? If you look deeply enough, you see everything.

Take a single leaf of romaine lettuce from your market. What do you see?

The seed, the earth, the minerals, the sunshine, the clouds, the rain.

Look deeper and we see the farmers who grew it. The merchants who sold it. The people who built the roads for the trucks. And the people who built the trucks. And the people who built the parts to the truck and the people who gathered the raw materials for those parts. Then there are the people who supported those people and on and on and on.

Then there's your car (or bus) you take to get there. Who built it? Who made the clothes and shoes you wear to the store? Where did you get the money to purchase all that? And on and on and on.

All in a single leaf of romaine lettuce.

As Nhat Hanh describes, the only thing we *don't* see is a separate self.

Everything (!) is connected. Everything.

Interbeing.

Here's to embracing that truth more and more in our day to day lives.

P.S. As we embrace the reality of our interbeing, let's also remember to give thanks. I love the way [Patricia Ryan Madson](#) advocates practicing thanks for our "silent gifts." Here's how she puts it in [Improv Wisdom](#) (see Notes): *"Are you sitting right now as you read? If so, then a chair, sofa, or bed is supporting you. You probably have not paid much attention to this fact until I mentioned it. Nor have you been thinking that someone designed the chair (sofa, bed, etc.); someone manufactured it; someone brought it to where you are sitting; someone paid for it—perhaps it was you. It is likely that many people (mostly unknown to you) had a hand in the chair's creation and journey to where it is now. It is fair to say that you are receiving a service from the chair and from all of those people whose efforts were part of the story. Whether you notice it or not, whether you thank it or not, the chair offers you support, comfort. The chair is a silent gift."*

BRING IT ON

"When we suppress our fearful thoughts, they continue to fester there in the dark. We are driven to consume (food, alcohol, movies, etc.) in an attempt to forget and keep those thoughts from surfacing in our conscious mind. Running away from our fear ultimately makes us suffer and makes others suffer, and our fear only grows stronger."

Running away from our fear isn't such a great idea.

[The Tools](#) guys tell us we want to say, "Bring it on!"

They remind us that our infinite potential exists on the *other* side of our fear. Therefore, when we feel fear arise, rather than recoil, we'd be wise to see the fear for what it is: an opportunity to grow and to get a little bit stronger.

With that in mind, we accept and lean into the fear, KNOWING that we're catalyzing our growth with every step forward.

So, next time we're feeling a little wave of fear, rather than hide from it let's take a deep, mindful breath, welcome the fear and ask it what it is here to teach us. Then step forwardly confidently to meet the challenge.

SOAKING YOUR MIND BEANS

"A feeling is just a feeling. And you are much more than that feeling. We shouldn't let ourselves be carried away by a feeling, even a pleasant one, much less an unpleasant one. We just practice recognition of the feeling."

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

"When a thought comes, you say hello, and then you say good-bye right away. When other thoughts come, just say hello and say good-bye again. Don't fight. Don't say, 'Oh, I'm so bad, I think of so many things!' You don't need to think like that. You just say hi and bye, relax and let go. You bring your mind to the present moment and rest in awareness of your body. It's like soaking mung beans in water. You don't need to force the water to enter the mung bean. You let the mung bean be in the water, and slowly, slowly, it goes in. Gradually the mung bean gets saturated, swollen and tender. The same is true for you. Letting go, the tension will be released slowly, slowly, slowly. And you will become more relaxed and more peaceful. The training is to just keep bringing your mind back to the present moment with your body."

I love the image of soaking our mind beans.

Reminds me of [Marcus Aurelius](#) (see Notes on [Meditations](#)) who tells us: "Your mind will be like its habitual thoughts; for the soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts. Soak it then in such trains of thoughts as, for example: Where life is possible at all, a right life is possible."

Also reminds me of the [Buddha](#) (see Notes on [The Dhammapada](#)) who tells us: "Little by little a person become evil, as a water pot is filled by drops of water... Little by little a person becomes good, as a water pot is filled by drops of water."

As Nhat Hanh tells us, we don't need to get all up-in-our-stuff when we notice a less than awesome thought. Just say hello and say good-bye. No need to fight with the thought.

Hello. Good-bye.

Again and again and again.

Breathing in, we are aware we are breathing in.

Breathing out, we are aware we are breathing out.

Little by little.

Slowly, surely, our mind becomes more relaxed, less tense.

Here's to gently soaking our mind beans in the good stuff. :)

TV AS A DRUG. YOU ADDICTED?

"Nirvana literally means cooling, the putting out of flames; in Buddhism, it refers to extinction of the afflictions brought about by our wrong perceptions."

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

"Television can be used as a kind of drug. When the suffering in us is too much to bear, we sometimes turn on the television set to forget our pain. It fills our living room with images and sounds. Even if what we're watching isn't satisfying, we often don't have the courage to turn off the TV. Why? Because although it's uninteresting or even disturbing, we think it's better than going home to ourselves and touching the pain within. Distraction is the policy for many of us. Some of us choose to live in a television-free zone, like we have non-smoking zones or nondrinking zones. But many others of us practice television watching or video game playing to cover up our discomfort."

Let's get right to the point on this one.

Are you addicted to TV? :)

As Nhat Hanh tells us, sometimes we might be (unconsciously) running away from our pain by zoning out in front of the TV.

Are you? :)

Here's to creating TV-free zones in our house and coming home to ourselves and to our family!

"Don't allow yourself to be overwhelmed by despair. You can make good use of every minute and every hour of your daily life."

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

THE BLUE SKY OF HAPPINESS

"In our society, there is so much fear, suffering, violence, despair, confusion. But there is also, at the same time, the beautiful blue sky. Sometimes the blue sky reveals itself to us entirely. Sometimes it reveals half of itself, sometimes just a little bit of blue peeks through, and sometimes none at all. Storms, clouds, and fog hide the blue sky. The kingdom of heaven can be hidden by a cloud of ignorance or by a tempest of anger, violence, and fear. But if we practice mindfulness, it's possible to be aware that even if the weather is very foggy, cloudy, or stormy, the blue sky is always there for us above the clouds. Remembering this keeps us from sinking into despair."

The beautiful blue sky—aka the kingdom of heaven. It's always there. Sometimes it might get a little covered up by a cloud of fear or anxiety or anger or whatever, but it's there.

Fogs can roll in as well.

When *that* happens, it's good to keep this [Earl Nightingale](#) gem in mind (check out the Notes on [The Essence of Success](#) for more): "According to the Bureau of Standards, 'A dense fog covering seven city blocks, to a depth of 100 feet, is composed of something less than one glass of water.' That is, all the fog covering seven city blocks, at 100 feet deep could be, if it were gotten all together, held in a single drinking glass. It would not quite fill it. And this could be compared to our worries. If we can see into the future and if we could see our problems in their true light, they wouldn't tend to blind us to the world, to living itself, but instead could be relegated to their true size and place. And if all the things most people worry about were reduced to their true size, you could probably put them all into a water glass, too."

Here's to seeing our worries in their true light, realizing that the thick fog we can create for ourselves is really just a glass full of worry!!

THE ENERGY OF MINDFULNESS AND CONCENTRATION

"There's the energy of pain, and there's also the energy of mindfulness and concentration. When the positive energy embraces the painful energy, there will be an effect. The energy of mindfulness will penetrate, like heat waves or sunlight. In the earliest hours of the morning, a lotus flower is still closed. As the sun comes up, the sunlight begins to touch the petals. The sunlight doesn't just surround the lotus flower; its photons actually penetrate the lotus flower with energy, and soon the flower will open. That is exactly the same as what we do. When we embrace our pain, particles of the energy of mindfulness and concentration begin to penetrate, like photons, into the zone of pain. And this will bring relief after some minutes. It's like when a room is cold, you turn on your radiator, and it emits a wave of heat. Those heat waves don't chase out the cold; they embrace and permeate the cold air, and after some time, the air becomes warmer. There's no violence in this; there's no fighting. That's what a practitioner does. Mindfulness and concentration embraces the pain."

When I read a book, I like to underline the positive words.

Often, I notice an author coming back to the same words again and again. It's a really fun process to underline those words *over* and *over* as I feel the energy of the author's intention.

With this book, the most frequently underlined phrase that Nhat Hanh came back to again and again was this: "the **energy** of **mindfulness** and **concentration**."

That's the essence of the book in six words:

"the **energy** of **mindfulness** and **concentration**"

"the **energy** of **mindfulness** and **concentration**"

"the **energy** of **mindfulness** and **concentration**"

"The more we practice, the more we are gentle with our fear and are able to embrace it, the more the fear goes away."

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

When we bring the energy of mindfulness and concentration to our lives, the heat of that positive energy opens us up to our deepest potential. Let's do that! :)

THE LIVING DHARMA

"Dharma may be understood as the wise teachings. There is the spoken Dharma and the written Dharma, but there is also a living Dharma. When we practice mindful breathing, when we practice walking meditation, even if we don't say anything and we don't listen to any Dharma talk, we are embodying the living Dharma. When you see a brother or sister who walks mindfully and enjoys every step, you see that she is embodying the living Dharma. Radiating peace and joy and life all around is what we call the *living Dharma*."

The LIVING Dharma. That's where it's at.

We can study all day long but at the end of the day (and the beginning and the middle), it's *all* about who we are and what we do.

Reminds me of [Ernest Holmes](#): "I would rather see a student of this Science prove its Principle than to have him repeat all the words of wisdom that have ever been uttered."

And the [Buddha](#): "Like a lovely flower full of color but lacking in fragrance, are the words of those who do not practice what they teach." + "Dharma is not upheld by talking about it. Dharma is upheld by living in harmony with it."

Plus [Vernon Howard](#): "You see, knowing the words is not the same thing as living the meaning. Suppose I memorize the printed instructions on a first-aid kit. Does that mean I can give first aid? No. The full meaning comes when I admit I know nothing and then try, practice, succeed."

Here's to moving from theory to practice as we LIVE our truths.

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,
you'll probably like...

[Peace Is Every Step](#)

[Silence](#)

[The Dhammapada](#)

[Constructive Living](#)

About the Author of "Fear"

THICH NHAT HANH



Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master, poet, scholar, and peace activist who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He is the author of many bestselling books, including the classics *Peace is Every Step*, *Fear*, and *The Art of Power*. Hanh lives in Plum Village, his meditation center in France, and leads retreats worldwide. Connect at www.plumvillage.org.

About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.