

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Healthy Seeds

Let's nourish them.

### What's NOT Wrong?

Incline our minds to joy.

### The Secret to Happiness

Is happiness itself.

### One Word, One Action

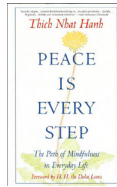
One thought...

### Breathing & Mouth Yoga

Let's practice 'em!

### Engaged Mindfulness

Is where it's at.



# Peace Is Every Step

The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life

BY THICH NHAT HANH · RANDOM HOUSE © 1992 · 160 PAGES

“We can smile, breathe, walk, and eat our meals in a way that allows us to be in touch with the abundance of happiness that is available. We are very good at preparing to live, but not very good at living. We know how to sacrifice ten years for a diploma, and we are willing to work very hard to get a job, a car, a house, and so on. But we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive. Every breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment.”

~ Thich Nhat Hanh from *Peace Is Every Step*

A humble Buddhist monk, [Thich Nhat Hanh](#) is one of the most revered spiritual leaders on the planet.

This book is a collection of wisdom from his talks and private conversations and is packed with peaceful wisdom.

I'm excited to share a handful of my favorite Big Ideas and I hope you love 'em.

Let's jump in!

## NOURISHING HEALTHY SEEDS

“Consciousness exists on two levels: as seeds and as manifestations of these seeds. Suppose we have a seed of anger in us. When conditions are favorable, that seed may manifest as a zone of energy called anger. It is burning, and it makes us suffer a lot. It is very difficult for us to be joyful at the moment the seed of anger manifests.

Every time a seed has an occasion to manifest itself, it produces new seeds of the same kind. If we are angry for five minutes, new seeds of anger are produced and deposited in the soil of our unconscious mind during those five minutes. That is why we have to be careful in selecting the kind of life we lead and the emotions we express. When I smile, the seeds of smiling and joy have come up. As long as they manifest, new seeds of smiling and joy are planted. But if I don't practice smiling for a number of years, that seed will weaken, and I may not be able to smile anymore.”

What seeds are YOU planting?!?

Let's look at a few other seed and gardener metaphors we've discussed in these Notes.

First, from [Geshe Michael Roache's](#) *The Diamond Cutter* where he tells us: “You are now in the additional business of mental gardening: choosing the seeds or imprints you want to put in your mind by studying which imprints create the things you want to achieve— consciously planting those seeds, and then sitting back to enjoy the extraordinary success that will come to you.”

*“Peace and happiness are available in every moment. Peace is every step.”*

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

*"Real strength is not in power, money or weapons, but in deep, inner peace."*

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

[Robin Sharma](#) puts it this way in *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*: "You have now learned that the mind is like a fertile garden and for it to flourish, you must nurture it daily. Never let the weeds of impure thought and action take the garden of your mind. Stand guard at the gateway of your mind. Keep it healthy and strong—it will work miracles in your life if you will only let it."

[Emerson](#) wrote an entire essay called *Compensation* where he describes the power of reaping what you sow. He tells us: "Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end preexists in the means, the fruit in the seed."

In *When Things Fall Apart* (see Notes), [Pema Chödrön](#) tells us: "Now is the only time. How we relate to it creates the future. In other words, if we're going to be more cheerful in the future, it's because of our aspiration and exertion to be cheerful in the present. What we do accumulates; the future is the result of what we do now."

*When we find ourselves in a mess, we don't have to feel guilty about it. Instead, we could reflect on the fact that how we relate to this mess will be sowing the seeds of how we will relate to whatever happens next. We can make ourselves miserable, or we can make ourselves strong. The amount of effort is the same. Right now we are creating our state of mind for tomorrow, not to mention this afternoon, next week, next year, and all the years of our lives."*

And, here's one of my favorite passages from all of these Notes. [Sonia Choquette](#) gives us this wisdom in her great book *Trust Your Vibes*: "Timing is the Divine's way of again reminding us that we co-create with the Universe—we aren't doing it alone. We plant, water, and weed the seeds of creativity, but we don't have the power to make them grow, let alone grow according to our schedule. How it all unfolds is up to God. God's wisdom will fulfill our deepest intentions once we set them in motion. Our part is to create the perfect conditions for the Universe to flow through us—much like our job is to create the perfect conditions for the garden to grow—but that's all we can do. God flows through us and develops our gardens according to his own timetable. And thank goodness for that, because God knows and grows better than we do."

Here's to planting the good seeds and letting God take care of the rest! :)

## WHAT'S \*NOT\* WRONG?

"We often ask, "What's wrong?" Doing so, we invite painful seeds of sorrow to come up and manifest. We feel suffering, anger, and depression, and produce more such seeds. We would be much happier if we tried to stay in touch with the healthy, joyful seeds inside of us and around us. We should learn to ask, "What's not wrong?" and be in touch with that. There are so many elements in the world and within our bodies, feelings, perceptions, and consciousness that are wholesome, refreshing, and healing. If we block ourselves, if we stay in the prison of sorrow, we will not be in touch with these healing elements."

It's so easy to fall into the trap of constantly lamenting what's \*wrong\* in our lives.

But, what's RIGHT in your world?!

In her great book *Happy for No Reason* (see Notes), [Marcy Shimoff](#) tells us we need to "incline our minds to joy."

She offers this powerful wisdom: "Have the intention to notice everything good that happens to you: any positive thought you have, anything you see, feel, taste, hear, or smell that brings you pleasure, a win you experience, a breakthrough in your understanding about something, an expression of your creativity—the list goes on and on. This intention activates the reticular activating system (RAS), a group of cells at the base of your brain stem responsible for sorting through the massive amounts of incoming information and bringing anything important to your attention. Have you ever bought a car and then suddenly started noticing the same make

*" If I am incapable of washing dishes joyfully, if I want to finish them quickly so I can go and have dessert, I will be equally incapable of enjoying my dessert."*

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

*of car everywhere? It's the RAS at work. Now you can use it to be happier. When you decide to look for the positive, your RAS makes sure that's what you see."*

Another way we can get in the habit of seeing what's right in our world is to keep a gratitude journal. As we discuss throughout these Notes, developing our gratitude is one of the easiest, most powerful ways to enhance our well-being.

In *Thanks!* (see Notes), [Robert Emmons](#) gives us a look at the science behind gratitude and tells us: *"One of the best ways to cultivate gratitude is to establish a daily practice in which you remind yourself of the gifts, grace, benefits, and good things you enjoy. One of the best ways to do this is keeping a daily journal in which you record the blessings you are grateful for. My research has shown... that this technique makes people happier. When we are grateful, we affirm that a source of goodness exists in our lives. By writing each day, we magnify and expand upon these sources of goodness. Setting aside time on a daily basis to recall moments of gratitude associated with even mundane or ordinary events, your personal attributes, or valued people in your life gives you the potential to interweave and thread together a sustainable life theme of gratefulness, just as it nourishes a fundamental life stance whose thrust is decidedly affirming."*

So, if you aren't already keeping your gratitude journal, what're you waiting for!?

Get on that!! :)

And, let's take a moment to reflect on what's right in our world right now.

Here are five things that are rockin' in my life that I'm deeply grateful for:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## THE SECRET TO HAPPINESS

*"Awareness of the precious elements of happiness is itself the practice of right mindfulness. Elements like these are within us and all around us. In each second of our lives we can enjoy them. If we do so, seeds of peace, joy, and happiness will be planted in us, and they will become strong. The secret to happiness is happiness itself. Wherever we are, any time, we have the capacity to enjoy the sunshine, the presences of each other, the wonder of our breathing. We don't have to travel anywhere else to do so. We can be in touch with these things right now."*

→ *"The secret to happiness is happiness itself."*

Love that.

Reminds me of [Michael Singer](#)'s wisdom in *The Untethered Soul* (see Notes) where he tells us: *"If you decide that you're going to be happy from now on for the rest of your life, you will not only be happy, you will be enlightened. Unconditional happiness is the highest technique there is. You don't have to learn Sanskrit or read any scriptures. You don't have to renounce the world. You just have to really mean it when you say that you choose to be happy. And you have to mean it regardless of what happens. This is truly a spiritual path, and it is as direct and sure a path to Awakening as could possibly exist."*

→ *"Unconditional happiness is the highest technique there is."*

Nice.

So, let's practice it! :)

*"When you understand, you cannot help but love. And when you love, you naturally act in a way that can relieve the suffering of people."*

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

## ONE WORD, ONE ACTION, ONE THOUGHT

"The source of love is deep in us, and we can help others realize a lot of happiness. One word, one action, or one thought can reduce another person's suffering and bring him joy. One word can give comfort and confidence, destroy doubt, help someone avoid a mistake, reconcile a conflict, or open the door to liberation. One action can save a person's life or help him take advantage of a rare opportunity. One thought can do the same, because thoughts always lead to words and actions. If love is in our heart, every thought, word, and deed can bring about a miracle. Because understanding is the very foundation of love, words and actions that emerge from our love are always helpful."

Beautiful.

Reminds me of [Leo Buscaglia](#)'s beautiful wisdom from his classic book, [Love](#) (see Notes) where he tells us: *"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."*

In [The Power of Intention](#) (see Notes), [Wayne Dyer](#) gives us this kindness wisdom-mojo: *"The positive effect of kindness on the immune system and on the increased production of serotonin in the brain has been proven in research studies. Serotonin is a naturally occurring substance in the body that makes us feel more comfortable, peaceful, and even blissful. In fact, the role of most anti-depressants is to stimulate the production of serotonin chemically, helping to ease depression. Research has shown that a simple act of kindness directed toward another improves the functioning of the immune system and stimulates the production of serotonin in both the recipient of the kindness and the person extending the kindness. Even more amazing is that persons observing the act of kindness have similar beneficial results. Imagine this! Kindness extended, received, or observed beneficially impacts the physical health and feelings of everyone involved!"*

In [Everyday Enlightenment](#) (see Notes), [Dan Millman](#) tells us: *"As you have seen, the emotion of love comes and goes like waves. Enduring love of the awakened heart is not a feeling but an action. Combining love and will, you walk the same path as the saints by showing loving-kindness to all other beings whether or not you feel like it."*

So...

What small act of kindness can you do today?

Let's not underestimate the power of one word, one action, or one thought!! In fact, let's actually take some time to document some kind words or actions we can share!

Here are some kind things I will do today:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Now, get on that! And, let's make it a habit! :)

*"Most of the time, we think too much, and mindful breathing helps us to be calm, relaxed, and peaceful."*

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

## BREATHING AND MOUTH YOGA

"Breathing in and out is very important, and it is enjoyable. Our breathing is the link between our body and our mind. Sometimes our mind is thinking of one thing and our body is doing another, and mind and body are not unified. By concentrating on our breathing, "In" and "Out," we bring body and mind back together, and become whole again. Conscious breathing is an important bridge.

To me, breathing is a joy that I cannot miss. Every day, I practice conscious breathing, and in

*"You know a smile can relax hundreds of muscles in your face. Wearing a smile on your face is a sign that you are master of yourself."*

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

my small meditation room, I have calligraphied this sentence: "Breathe, you are alive!" Just breathing and smiling can make us very happy, because when we breathe consciously we recover ourselves completely and encounter life in the present moment."

Two things I want to highlight here: breathing and smiling.

First, our breath. It's THE primary link between our minds and our bodies.

Here's what [Sonia Choquette](#) has to say about breathing in her great book [Trust Your Vibes](#) (see Notes): "...breathing deeply and regularly is not only the key to remaining calm, but also instantly connects us to a higher vibration. When we're stressed or fearful, we tend to hold our breath, which cuts us off from our Higher Self and our intuitive vibes."

Thich Nhat Hanh shares a number of simple breathing exercises in the book. How about a super simple one?

Try this: On your in-breath say "Breathing In" and on your out-breath say "Breathing Out."

Do that a few times. Totally relaxing, eh? :)

And how about smiling?!

Thich Nhat Hanh loves it so much he actually calls smiling "mouth yoga."

Hah.

How awesome is *that*?! :)

But, this isn't just a nice idea. Did you know that we can actually change our psychological well-being just by smiling?

Yep.

In his great book, [Thanks!](#) (see Notes), [Robert Emmons](#) tells us this: "An ingenious series of experiments conducted a number of years ago showed that when people mimicked the facial expressions associated with happiness, they felt happier—even when they did not know they were moving "happy muscles" in their face. Researchers have found that smiling itself produces feelings of happiness."

(In case you're wondering how they got people to simulate a smile: They had them hold a pen in their teeth. Try it. That alone is enough to boost your mood! :)

So, here's to breathing deeply and smiling broadly today! :) :)

## ENGAGED MINDFULNESS

"When I was in Vietnam, so many of our villages were being bombed. Along with my monastic brothers and sisters, I had to decide what to do. Should we continue to practice in our monasteries, or should we leave the meditation halls in order to help the people who were suffering under the bombs? After careful reflection, we decided to do both—to go out and help people and to do so in mindfulness. We called it engaged Buddhism. Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what's the use of seeing?"

Powerful stuff.

—> "Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what's the use of seeing?"

Seriously.

What's the use of seeing great truths unless we LIVE them?

Reminds me of [Michael Beckwith](#)'s wisdom from [Spiritual Liberation](#) (see Notes) where he tells

*"The foundation of happiness is mindfulness."*

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

us: *"That which transforms your life is what you practice. And what you practice constitutes your personal laws of life—not what you merely believe in, but what you practice. It's all well and good to read books, and to attend seminars, lectures, and workshops, and to say, 'Oh, that really resonates with me! It's now part of my life's philosophy.' Your philosophy may give you a temporary state of euphoria, but if you want to be anchored in reality, it takes practice, practice, practice. We are not here to be euphoric but to get free. Rudimentary spirituality is theory; advanced spirituality is practice."*

I repeat:

—> *"Rudimentary spirituality is theory; advanced spirituality is practice."*

And Zen Master [Genpo Roshi](#) echoes this wisdom in his great book [Big Mind Big Heart](#) (see Notes) where he tells us: *"We're at the point in our evolution that we all have to become conscious. This is a time of revolution. There's no holding back. So I'm about tearing down the monastery walls and seeing the whole world as the monastery, as the practice, as the spiritual temple. What we're all working on is this very being, this very life. This is the temple, it has no walls."*

So, here's to tearing down the temple walls and moving from theory to practice as we strive to give our greatest gifts in mindful service to the world!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

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

[Happy for No Reason](#)

[The Selected Writings of  
Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

[Thanks!](#)

[Trust Your Vibes](#)

[The Dhammapada](#)

[The Diamond Cutter](#)

## About the Author of "Peace Is Every Step"

THICH NHAT HANH



Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet, and peacemaker who was nominated by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for the Nobel Peace Prize. The author of many books, including *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, he lives in France in the monastic community known as Plum Village and lectures and gives retreats regularly in North America.

## About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



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](http://brianjohnson.me).