

Stopping



Stop

Take a breath

Observe

Practice/Proceed

Thây (*Thich Nhat Hanh*) offers us a very simple method for remaining present and bringing mindfulness to our actions: simply to **stop and ask ourselves: “What am I doing right now?”** And: “What am I aware of right now – in my body, mind, emotions?”

Just by contemplating these questions, we practice observing deeply.

This practice of **stopping and looking deeply, in order to see**, can help us break patterns of unconscious habits (**habit energies**) that keep us stuck in our actions, causing suffering to ourselves and others.

Mindfulness is the first step to freeing ourselves from suffering.

Stopping, Resting, Calming, Healing

(Mindfulness) meditation has two aspects – “stopping” (or concentration) and "looking deeply" (or insight). We tend to stress the importance of the latter - "looking deeply" - because it can bring us insight and liberate us from suffering. But the practice of "stopping"* is fundamental. If we cannot stop, we cannot have insight.

There is a story in Zen circles about a man and a horse. The horse is galloping quickly, and it appears that the man on the horse is going somewhere important. Another man, standing alongside the road, shouts, "Where are you going?" and the first man replies "I don't know! Ask the horse!" This is also our story. [*In another telling, a rider is getting onto the saddle, but before she can take her seat, something startles the horse, and it takes off at a full gallop. Then someone calls out "where are you going?!" and she answers, "I don't know, ask the horse!"*]

We are riding a horse, we don't know where we are going, and we can't stop. The horse is our habit energy pulling us along, and we are powerless.

We are always running and it has become a habit. We struggle all the time, even during our sleep. We are at war within ourselves, and we can easily start a war with others.

We have to learn the art of stopping -- stopping our thinking, our habit energies, our forgetfulness, the strong emotions that rule us. When an emotion rushes through us like a storm, we have no peace. We turn the TV on and off, we pick up a book and put it down. How can we stop our fear, despair, anger, and craving?

We can stop by practicing mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful smiling, and deep looking in order to understand.

But our habit energies are often stronger than our volition. We say and do things we don't want to and afterwards we regret it. We make ourselves and others suffer, and we bring about a lot of damage. We may vow not to do it again, but we do it again. Why? Because our habit energies (vashana) push us.

We need the energy of mindfulness to recognize and be present with our habit energy in order to stop this course of destruction. With mindfulness, we have the capacity to recognize habit energy every time it manifests. "Hello, my habit energy! I know you are there!" If we just

smile to it, it will lose much of its strength. Mindfulness is the energy that allows us to recognize our habit energy, and prevent it from dominating us. *Thich Nhat Hanh*

We may use mindfulness to take note of our habit energy, to watch and witness, to practice being present with what is, and to begin to break free.

*dear habit energy
i see you!*

*Calligraphy and text by Thich Nhat Hanh
Minimal explanatory editing by Renee Burgard