

The Sun My Heart

*Exploring the Dharma with Brother Phap Hai, senior Dharma Teacher
ordained by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh*



Brought to you by the

Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation

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www.thichnhatanhfoundation.org

INTRODUCTION

To help us with our study and practice, the Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation is excited to announce that Brother Phap Hai, senior Dharma teacher living at Deer Park Monastery, co-chair of the Foundation board, and author of *Nothing to It: Ten Ways to Be at Home with Yourself*, will lead a book club study with reflection questions, practice exercises, guided meditations, and a live webinar. He was ordained as a monk in 1997 and was formally authorized to teach in January 2003.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Sun My Heart is one of Thich Nhat Hanh's most beloved books. It was written as a sequel to *Miracle of Mindfulness* and contains the journey, on the path of everyday practice, from mindfulness to insight in an informational, conversational manner. Using the objects and events of everyday life in his hermitage in Plum Village—the gradual settling of the pulp in a glass of apple juice or the wind blowing into the room and scattering papers about—Thich Nhat Hanh draws from Buddhist psychology, epistemology, and the world of contemporary literature and science to guide the reader along the path of clarity and understanding.

This book can be read straight through, but is also designed to be opened randomly and experienced chapter by chapter, paragraph by paragraph. Thich Nhat Hanh suggests in the Introduction that *The Sun My Heart* “prefers to be a friend rather than a book. You can take it with you on the bus or subway as you do your coat or your scarf. It can give you small moments of joy at any time.”

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

While reading through the book, take your time. Use moments in the book, whether it be a profound quote, the end of a paragraph, or the closing of a chapter in order to stop, put down the book, and breathe. Let the Dharma permeate not only your intellectual consciousness but your physical body. This study guide will help you apply the intellectual Dharma into daily practice. Bring the reflection questions to your Sangha and discuss them together, or journal about them.

We hope you enjoy the journey!

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INTRODUCTION

"Meditators have always known that they must use their own eyes and the language of their own times to express their insight. Wisdom is a living stream, not an icon to be preserved in a museum. Only when a practitioner finds the spring of wisdom in his or her life can it flow to future generations. All of us must keep the torch of wisdom glowing in order to light the path ahead."

Br. Phap Hai's Reflection (17 min audio mp3): [Click here to download](#)

Discussion and Reflection Questions:

1. In the introduction, Thay invites us to "find the spring of wisdom in our own lives". What is one of the sources of inspiration in your own practice life?
2. How do you think it colors and informs your practice and path?
3. What does it mean to you when Thay invites you to become the author of the text yourself?

CHAPTER 1: SUNSHINE AND GREEN LEAVES

"Being at peace doesn't mean our thoughts and feelings are frozen. Being at peace is not the same as being anesthetized. A peaceful mind does not mean a mind empty of thoughts, sensations, and emotions...Fury, hatred, shame, faith, doubt, impatience, disgust, desire, sorrow, and anguish are also mind...Our mind is our self. We cannot suppress it. We must treat it with respect, with gentleness, and absolutely without violence."

"Meditation lets the sun of awareness rise easily, so we can see more clearly. When we meditate, we seem to have two selves. One is the flowing river of thoughts and feelings, and the other is the sun of awareness that shines on them. Which is our own self? Which is true? Which is false? Which is good? Which bad? Please calm down, my friend. Lay down your sharp sword of conceptual thinking. Don't be in such a hurry to cut your "self" in two. Both are self. Neither is true. Neither is false. They are both true and both false."

Br. Phap Hai's Reflection (13 min audio mp3): [Click here to download](#)

Guided Meditation (11 min audio mp3): [Click here to download](#)

Discussion and Reflection Questions:

1. What does it mean when Thay invites us to “not cut our self into pieces?”
2. What does living simply and happily mean to you?
3. One phrase in this chapter is “An environment that reminds us to return to awareness.” What are some of the tools in your daily life that help you to return to awareness?
4. What is the “question that is planted deep in your flesh and bones”?

CHAPTER 2: THE DANCE OF THE BEES

"If we need to guard our senses, it's because we're not yet strong enough to fully encounter the world."

"If you live in awareness, everything is a miracle."

"We all need time to relax and to live, but how? Usually when we have some free time, we watch whatever is on TV in order to avoid 'having nothing to do,' which means staying home alone with ourselves...The free time we struggle so hard for is seized by TV broadcasting companies and the products of their advertisers...We can choose good TV shows to watch, beautiful places to go, meetings with dear friends, books and records that suit us well. And we can live in a relaxed, contented way with what we have chosen. Remember, we are whatever we choose."

"To be aware is to be aware of something. When the mind settles on the mountain, it becomes the mountain. When it settles on the sea, it becomes the sea. When we say 'know,' both the known and the knower are included. When we meditate on our body, we are our body...If we meditate on limitless space, we become limitless space...Where is mind to be found? Can you identify it in space?"

"Abandoning concepts is of prime importance for a meditator."

Br. Phap Hai's Reflection (16 min audio mp3): [Click here to download](#)

Discussion and Reflection Questions:

1. What are some choices that make sense to you in terms of creating a good environment for guarding your senses?
2. Is it possible for you to do nothing? What would that look like? If you have already begun to practice this, how has the experience been for you?
3. What are some of the ideas/concepts you have of yourself? E.g. meditator, doctor, man, woman, American, compassionate, liberal, conservative? Once you have gone through a number of layers of identification, what lies below?
4. Apply the Teachings: What meditative practice does this chapter inspire you to do?

CHAPTER 3: THE UNIVERSE IN A SPECK OF DUST

"Meditation is not imitation. It is creation. Meditators who only imitate their instructors can only go so far."

"Some people think that to meditate is to separate ourselves from a world of thoughts and feelings and to return to a kind of pure state...It is a lovely idea, but it is basically misleading...The world reveals itself, even when our eyes are closed...Whatever the object...it contains the vast totality of reality."

"We know that if our heart stops beating, the flow of our life will stop, and so we cherish our heart very much. Yet we do not often take the time to notice that there are other things, outside of our bodies, that are also essential for our survival. Look at the immense light we call the sun. If it stops shining, the flow of our life will also stop, and so the sun is our second heart."

"Discard the idea that you must close your eyes to look inside. Open them to look outside."

"Seeing and loving always go together. Seeing and loving are one. Shallow understanding accompanies shallow compassion. Great understanding goes with great compassion."

Br. Phap Hai's Reflection (22 min audio mp3): [Click here to download](#)

Discussion and Reflection Questions:

1. Have you had some experience with “ease” these past weeks? What does it feel like?
2. “Seeing and loving always go together”- what is your experience of this?
3. Reality is transformed by our looking at it. What does this mean to you?
4. What does it mean to you to see the “outside within our body and the inside outside?”
5. Apply the Teachings: What meditative practice does this chapter inspire you to do? Practice it with your sangha.

CHAPTER 4: CUTTING THE NET OF BIRTH AND DEATH

"In most schools of Buddhism, it's understood that the way we experience time as flowing from past, present, and future, is an illusion."

"Being itself is time. Time is not separate from you, and as you are present, time does not go away. As time is not marked by coming and going, the moment you climb the mountains is the time being right now. If time keeps coming and going, and you are the time, being right now. You are the time, the tiger is time, bamboo is time. If time is annihilated, mountains and oceans are annihilated. If time is not annihilated, mountains and oceans are not annihilated."

"The mind which perceives reality in fact creates it."

Br. Phap Hai's Reflection (20 min audio mp3): [Click here to download](#)

Discussion and Reflection Questions:

1. It has been said that we don't see things as they are, but rather as we are. Can you think of any examples in your own life where this has been true for you?
2. What does it mean to you to "return to everyday life"?
3. What is one way that Thay continues on in you this very moment?
4. Zen Master Tue Trung wrote:

"Birth and death,
You have been crushing me,
Now you can no longer touch me."

But, Master Tue Trung died in the 14th century. Was he right or wrong? Speak without words.

Apply the Teachings: What meditative practice does this chapter inspire you to do?

CHAPTER 5: LOOK DEEPLY AT YOUR HAND

"If you're mindful, you have everything. You are everything."

"We need to find an inner peace which makes it possible for us to become one with those who suffer, and to do something to help our brothers and sisters, which is to say ourselves."

"The first few months of your practice might lack continuity, but you can always start again."

"If you need a topic for meditation, choose one that you care about, one that you find interesting."

"All the work of meditation is aimed at awakening us in order to know one and only one thing: birth and death can never touch us in any way whatsoever."

Br. Phap Hai's Reflection (14 min audio mp3): [Click here to download](#)

Discussion and Reflection Questions:

1. You are already what you want to become. What does this mean to you?
2. "Keeping our mind present in each moment is the foundation of meditation practice." What are some of the concrete tools that you find helpful in this?
3. Do you find that your personal practice has continuity? What are some of the ways that you begin again and again each moment?
4. In this chapter Thay says "We need to find an inner peace which makes it possible for us to become one with those who suffer, and to do something to help our brothers and sisters, which is to say ourselves." What for you is the connection between spiritual practice and social engagement? Is there one?
5. Apply the Teachings: What meditative practice does this chapter inspire you to do?

CONCLUDING: VIDEO DHARMA TALK

To conclude our book club study of "The Sun My Heart", the community was invited to join the Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation and Brother Phap Hai for a fun and engaging webinar discussion of the book. A guided meditation, Dharma talk, and Question & Answer session were offered, and many seeds of mindfulness and insight were watered.

We hope you enjoy the following clips taken from the webinar discussion recorded on April 29, 2017.

"Listening to Your Life" (2:20):

<https://youtu.be/9kF27U7pcgw>

"The Meaning of Engaged Buddhism" (2:35):

<https://youtu.be/uZoQypuNnL8>

"Finding Your True Teacher" (2:56):

<https://youtu.be/fjzLPpLWtE8>

To view the entire webinar, click on the following link (1:15:49):

<https://youtu.be/KSNehqu7wgg>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation: www.thicnhathanhfoundation.org

Parallax Press: www.parallax.org

Mindfulness Bell Magazine: www.mindfulnessbell.org

Wake Up International (Young adult sangha): www.wkup.org

Plumline Sangha (Online sangha): <http://plumline.org>

Wake Up Schools (Mindfulness in education): www.wakeupschools.org

USA Mindfulness Practice Centers

Blue Cliff Monastery: www.bluecliffmonastery.org

Deer Park Monastery: www.deerparkmonastery.org

Magnolia Grove Monastery: www.magnoliagrovesmonastery.org

International Mindfulness Practice Centers

Plum Village Monastery: www.plumvillage.org

European Institute of Applied Buddhism: www.eiab.eu/

Thai Plum Village Monastery: www.thaiplumvillage.org

Asian Institute of Applied Buddhism: <http://pvfhk.org/index.php/en/>