

# *The Three Doors of Liberation*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

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## *Aimlessness*

The Third Door of Liberation is aimlessness, *apranihita*. There is nothing to do, nothing to realize, no program, no agenda. This is the Buddhist teaching about eschatology. Does the rose have *to do* something? No, the purpose of a rose is *to be* a rose. Your purpose is to be yourself. You don't have to run anywhere to become someone else. You are wonderful just as you are. This teaching of the Buddha allows us to enjoy ourselves, the blue sky, and everything that is freshening and healing in the present moment. There is no need to put anything in front of us and after it. We already have everything we are looking for, everything we want to become. We are already a Buddha so why not just take the hand of another Buddha and practice walking meditation? This is the teaching of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Be yourself. Life is precious as it is. All the elements for your happiness are already here. There is no need to run, strive, search, or struggle. Just be. Just being in the moment in this place is the deepest practice of meditation. Most people cannot believe that just walking as though you have nowhere to go is enough. They think that striving and competing are normal and necessary. Try practicing aimlessness for just five minutes, and you will see how happy you are during those five minutes. The *Heart Sutra* says that there is "nothing to attain." We meditate not to attain enlightenment, because enlightenment is already in us. We don't have to search anywhere. We don't need a purpose or a goal. We don't practice in order to obtain some high position. In aimlessness, we see that we do not lack anything, that we already are what we want to become, and our striving just comes to a halt. We are at peace in the present moment, just seeing the sunlight streaming through our window or hearing the sound of the rain. We don't have to run after anything. We can enjoy every moment. People talk about entering nirvana, but we are already there. Aimlessness and nirvana are one.

*Waking up this morning, I smile.*

*Twenty four brand new hours are before me.*

*I vow to live fully in each moment and to look at all beings with the eyes of love.*

These twenty-four hours are a precious gift, a gift we can only receive fully when we have opened the Third Door of Liberation, aimlessness. If we think we have twenty-four hours to achieve a certain purpose, today will become a means to attain an end. The moment of chopping wood and carrying water *is* the moment of happiness. We do not need to wait for these chores to be done to be happy. To have happiness in this moment is the spirit of aimlessness. Otherwise, we will run in circles for the rest of our life. We have everything we need to make the present moment the happiest in our life, even if we have a cold or a headache. We don't have to wait

until we get over our cold to be happy. Having a cold is a part of life. Someone asked me, "Aren't you worried about the state of the world?"

I allowed myself to breathe and then I said "What is most important is not to allow your anxiety about what happens in the world to fill your heart. If your heart is filled with anxiety, you will get sick, and you will not be able to help." There are wars- big and small - in many places, and that can cause us to lose our peace. Anxiety is the illness of our age. We worry about ourselves, our family, our friends", our work, and the state of the world. If we allow worry to fill our hearts, sooner or later we will get sick. Yes, there is tremendous suffering all over the world, but , knowing this need not paralyze us. If we practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful sitting, and working in mindfulness, we try our best to help, and we can have peace in our heart. Worrying does not accomplish anything. Even if you worry twenty times more, it will not change the situation of the world. In fact, your anxiety will only make things worse. Even though things are not as we would like, we can still be content, knowing we are trying our best and will continue to do so. If we don't know how to breathe, smile, and live every moment of our life deeply, we will never be able to help anyone. I am happy in the present moment. I do not ask for anything else. I do not expect any additional happiness or conditions that will bring about more happiness. The most important practice is aimlessness, not running after things, not grasping. We who have been fortunate enough to encounter the practice of mindfulness have a responsibility to bring peace and joy into our own lives, even though not everything in our body, mind, or environment is exactly as we would like. Without happiness we cannot be a refuge for others. Ask yourself, What am I waiting for to make me happy? Why am I not happy right now? My only desire is to help you see this. How can we bring the practice of mindfulness to the widest spectrum of society? How can we give birth to the greatest number of people who are happy and who know how to teach the art of mindful living to others? The number of people who create violence is very great, while the number of people who know how to breathe and create happiness is very small. Every day gives us a wonderful opportunity to be happy ourselves and to become a place of refuge for others. We don't need to become anything else. We don't need to perform some particular act. We only need to be happy in the present moment, and we can be of service to those we love and to our whole society. Aimlessness is stopping and realizing the happiness that is already available. If someone asks us how long he has to practice in order to be happy, we can tell him that he can be happy right now! The practice of apranahita, aimlessness, is the practice of freedom.