



**The first subject of Full Awareness:
following the breath in daily life**
Breathe! You are alive
THICH NHAT HANH

Most readers of this book do not live in forests, under trees, or in monasteries. In our daily lives, we drive cars, wait for buses, work in offices and factories, talk on the telephone, clean our houses, cook meals, wash clothes, and so on. Therefore, it is important that we learn to practice Full Awareness of Breathing during our daily lives. Usually, when we perform these tasks, our thoughts wander, and our joy, sorrow, anger, and unease follow close behind. Although we are alive, we are not able to bring our minds into the present moment, and we live in forgetfulness.

We can begin to enter the present moment by becoming aware of our breath. Breathing in and breathing out, we know we are breathing in and out, and we can smile to affirm that we are in control of ourselves. Through Awareness of Breathing, we can be awake in, and to, the present moment. Being attentive, we already establish "stopping" and concentrating the mind. Full Awareness of our Breathing helps our mind stop wandering in confused, never-ending thoughts.

Most of our daily activities can be accomplished while following our breath according to the exercises in the sutra. When our work demands special attentiveness to avoid confusion or an accident, we can unite Full Awareness of Breathing with the task itself. For example, when we are carrying a pot of boiling water or doing electrical repairs, we can be aware of every movement of our hands, and we can nourish this awareness by means of our breath: "Breathing in, I am aware my hands are carrying a pot of boiling water." "Breathing out, I am aware that my right hand is holding an electrical wire." "Breathing in, I am aware that I am passing another cat." "Breathing out, I know that the situation is under control." We can practice like this.

It is not enough to combine Awareness of Breathing only with tasks that require so much attention. We must also combine Full Awareness of our Breathing with every movement of our body: "Breathing in, I am sitting down." "Breathing out, I am wiping the table." "Breathing in, I smile to myself." "Breathing out, I light the stove." Stopping the random progression of thoughts and no longer living in forgetfulness are giant steps forward in our meditation practice. We can realize this by following our breath and combining it with awareness of each daily activities.