



BE BEAUTIFUL; BE YOURSELF

The Art of Living
Thich Nhat Hanh

We may be able to see the wonders around us and yet still doubt that we ourselves are a wonder too. We feel inadequate. We're yearning for something else, something more. We are like a saucepan wandering around looking for a lid. We lack confidence in ourselves and in our capacity to be peaceful, compassionate, and awakened. We feel overwhelmed by our difficulties. And so we continue to go about our daily life feeling that we lack something. We've got to ask ourselves, "What am I lacking? What am I looking for?"

To practice aimlessness is to identify what it is you're looking for, waiting for, or running after, and let it go. By removing these objects of seeking that are pulling you away from the here and now, you will discover that everything you want is already right here in the present moment. You don't need to "be someone" or do something in order to be happy and free. If you ask a flower blooming on the mountainside, or a tree standing majestically in the forest, "What are you looking for?" how would they reply? If you have some mindfulness and concentration, you will hear their answer in your heart.

*Each one of us has to be our true self:
fresh, solid, at ease, loving, and compassionate.
When we are our true selves, not only do we benefit,
but everyone around us profits from our presence.*

You are enough

The renowned ninth-century Chinese Zen master *Lin-Chi* taught that "humans and buddhas are not two" and declared, "There is no difference between you and the Buddha!" He was saying that you are already enough. We don't need to do anything special to be a buddha and cultivate our buddha body. We just need to live a simple, authentic life. Our true person, our true self, doesn't need a particular job or position. Our true self doesn't need money, fame, or status. Our true self doesn't need to do anything. We just live our life deeply in the present moment. When we eat, we just eat. When we wash the dishes, we just wash the dishes. When we use the bathroom, we just enjoy using the bathroom. When we walk, we just walk. When we sit, we just sit. Doing all these things is a wonder, and the art of living is to do them in freedom.

Freedom is a practice and a habit. We have to train ourselves to walk as a free person, sit as a free person, and eat as a free person. We need to train ourselves how to live.

The Buddha also ate, walked, and went to the toilet. But he did so in freedom, not rushing from one thing to the next. Can we live like that? Can we use our time just to live true to ourselves? If we are still seeking or pursuing something else, something more, we're not yet aimless. We're not yet free, and we're not yet our true self. Our true self is already there within us, and as soon as we can see it, we become a free person. We have been free from beginningless time. We just need to be able to recognize it.

I once had a chance to visit the Buddhist Ajanta Caves in the state of Maharashtra in India. They are entirely carved out of the mountain rock. There are living quarters, with holes dug out for monks to put their alms bowls and sanghati robes in. The day I visited it was very hot, and I lay down to enjoy the pleasant coolness and freshness of the cave.

Nothing was brought from the outside to make those caves. The temples were simply dug out of the rock. The more rock they removed, the larger the caves became. Touching our true self, our true nature, is like that. All the things we think we've got to find on the outside are already there inside us. Loving-kindness, understanding, and compassion are there within us. We need only to clear some of the rock obstructing the way in order to reveal them. There is no essence of holiness we need to seek outside. And there is no essence of the ordinary we have to destroy. We already are what we want to become. Even in our most difficult moments, everything that is good, true, and beautiful is already there, within us and around us. We just have to live in such a way that allows it to be revealed.