

COMMUNITY OF MINDFUL LIVING-UUFR

Welcome. We are a mindfulness-meditation community (Sangha) that practices in the tradition of Zen Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hahn and his Order of Interbeing. We meet every Monday night to meditate together and share in the joy of living mindfully. Individuals of all ages, faiths, traditions, backgrounds, and levels of experience are welcome to join us.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet, and peacemaker and the author of more than 35 books, including The Miracle of Mindfulness, Peace Is Every Step and Living Buddha, Living Christ. He lives in France, where he heads the monastic community and retreat center known as Plum Village. His monastic/retreat centers in the US include Blue Cliff in New York; Deer Park in Escondido, CA; and Magnolia Grove in northern Mississippi.

We meet every Monday evening from 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. in the Clara Barton Room, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh, 3313 Wade Avenue in Raleigh. Chairs are available; however, you're welcome to bring a cushion or bench for sitting, if you wish.

Our general format for each week is:

1st Monday: Dharma sharing using a book by Thich Nhat Hanh or other spiritual teacher

2nd Monday: Recitation of the Five Mindfulness Trainings

3rd Monday: Silent meditation and/or guided meditation

4th Monday: Leader's choice but with a focus on meditation

5th Monday: If there is a 5th Monday we have a potluck dinner at 6:30pm (bring a vegetarian dish to share plus your own dishes), followed by business and meditation at 7:30pm.

We usually start and end each session with silent meditation. At each session there will be time for introductions, announcements, Sangha business, and sharing of joys and concerns. Hot tea is normally available before the meditation starts at 7:30pm and also during the break.

The leader will explain their use of the bell and give a short overview of the evening. We usually take a mindful stretch break of 5-10 minutes sometime in the middle of the session. Feel free to adjust your position before this break if you are feeling uncomfortable.

We request an optional donation (dana) of \$1 from each person to contribute to the support of children in need in Vietnam, to the UUFR for utilities, and to other local, national, and international organizations, and to buy supplies we need like books or candles. Donations are accepted at the end of the evening and are placed in the red bag next to the leader.

We are a lay-led group and people sign up ahead on a calendar to lead sessions. As a new participant you are not expected to lead until you feel comfortable doing so.

We have supplies and a lending library in the closet of the Clara Barton room (honor system).

Our webpage is at <http://www.raleighmindfulness.org>. There is much good information on the website, so please check it out. E-mail Gail O'Brien at ncgailobrien@gmail.com to be added to our email list serv.

The Plum Village website at www.plumvillage.org contains information about Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings, daily practices, monasteries and mindfulness practice centers in France and the US, retreat schedules, available books, and much more.

Other useful internet resources include:
The Mindfulness Bell: www.iamhome.org
Parallax Press: www.parallax.org
Buddhanet: www.buddhanet.net

Helpful Hints for Beginning Meditators

Welcome to the wonderful practice of meditation. This practice can bring you a lot of peace and happiness, so please relax and make yourself as comfortable as possible. This is not a contest. No one is checking you out to make sure that you do it “right.” If you can sit happily and enjoy your breathing for just a few minutes or a few seconds you will have succeeded in your first efforts at sitting meditation.

While meditation has many benefits that you can begin to experience right from the start, it is normal to have some difficulties as well. Two of the most common difficulties that people experience are physical discomfort and a restless mind. These challenges are perfectly normal and will lessen as you continue to practice. Below are some helpful hints for working with these challenges.

PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT WHEN SITTING

Most people find it difficult to sit for more than 5 or 10 minutes when beginning meditation. This is normal; so please do not denigrate yourself if this is your experience. Things will gradually get better as you continue to practice. Posture is important, but there is no need to sit on the floor in full lotus. Use whatever props you need or sit in a chair. Seek a posture that is a good balance for you between comfort and alertness. Experiment. Try to have three points of contact with the ground. If you are in a chair have both feet on the floor and your buttocks squarely on the chair. If you choose the floor you can kneel resting your buttocks on a bench or cushion; or you can sit cross-legged up on a cushion and try to get your knees on the floor. These tips will help you keep a fairly straight back, which will allow you to breathe fully and remain alert. If you need to support your back you can use a cushion against the back of the chair or against the wall. Be sure to keep your shoulders relaxed.

Whatever posture you choose, you will likely soon feel the urge to move. Stillness is helpful, because when the body is still it is easier for the mind to be still. So you might want to resist the urge to move at first, focusing on your breathing, and see what happens. If the urge subsides a bit then you can label it “restlessness” and move on. If the urge gets louder and refuses to go away, then you might need to label it “pain”. When you feel pain, it is perfectly OK to shift and adjust your position mindfully, i.e. breathe in and think about how you will alter your position; breathe out and adjust it; continue your breathing in and out as before. Remember, the practice should bring you happiness and peace, not angst.

RESTLESS THOUGHTS WHEN SITTING

Having a restless mind when sitting is such a common experience that the ancients had a name for it. They called it “monkey mind” or “wild puppy mind”. The teaching for how to work with this is to keep bringing the mind back to the breath, focusing attention on each in breath and each out breath. Do this as many times as necessary. Mindful breathing is the key Breathing in, know that you are breathing in. Breathing out, know that you are breathing out. Breathing in is wonderful, because it means that you are alive. Breathing out is wonderful, because it allows you to release whatever is on your mind. Breathe, you are alive! And enjoy your sitting.