Mindful Eating

Group Practice – Mindful Eating

You can ask people to bring a small snack like an orange, dried fruit or something they can share with others. **https://youtu.be/UaUu30nJQaI?si=B-kXjZWAY023DBuO**

This collection of contemplations and guided meditations invites us to bring more awareness, joy and peace to the simple act of eating.

In the Plum Village tradition, we understand that meditation is not something we do only when sitting on a meditation cushion. We can practise mindfulness throughout our day, in every moment and in everything we do.

One way of practising is through looking deeply. This means bringing our full attention to something, taking time to contemplate it and to see its true nature. We begin to understand how it has come to be and all the conditions that have made it possible.

When we practise mindful eating, we look deeply into our food. We give it our full attention and, as we do, we may discover many wonderful things.

So often, when we eat, our minds are somewhere else. We may be looking at our phones, reading the newspaper, watching television or caught up in conversation. Sometimes we finish a whole meal without really remembering how the food tasted.

The meal passes by quickly, almost without our noticing. Even when we have eaten more than we need, we may not feel nourished or satisfied.

Mindful eating offers us an opportunity to slow down and come back to ourselves. We take the time to enjoy our food and recognise what a wonderful gift it is to have something to eat. So many people in the world do not have enough food. When we pause and look deeply, we can touch our gratitude for the nourishment available to us.

Eating mindfully also helps us recognise how much food we really need. We can learn to consume in a way that nourishes our bodies and minds, while caring for the Earth and all living beings.

In this way, our daily meal becomes an opportunity to nourish ourselves, reduce suffering and contribute to the healing of the world. As members of the human family, we can make more sustainable choices when we bring awareness to the way we eat.

The practice is very simple. We bring our mind back to our body and to the present moment. When we eat, we know that we are eating. When we take a piece of apple and bring it to our mouth, we are aware that we are eating a piece of apple.

This is mindfulness: being fully present with what is happening right now.

If our mind is busy thinking about work or planning what we will do next, we are not quite there with our food. But when we bring our attention to the piece of apple, we come home to the present moment.

And then we can begin to look more deeply.

As we hold a piece of apple in our hand, we may begin to see the apple tree, the orchard, the blossoms and the bees. We can see the sunshine, the rain, the wind and the farmer who cared for the tree.

We begin to see that this one piece of apple contains the whole universe. It is made up of countless conditions and the contributions of many beings. Just one bite can bring us into contact with the wonderful web of life and interbeing.

We begin to recognise that every morsel of food is a gift of the whole universe. As we chew, we can remain aware of this gift and the many things that have come together to nourish us.

There are some simple ways we can support ourselves in this practice.

You might like to try putting down your fork or spoon while you chew, rather than preparing the next mouthful. This gives you an opportunity to be fully present with the food already in your mouth.

At first, you may notice a habit of rushing to prepare the next mouthful before you have finished the one you are eating. Simply notice this tendency with kindness. There is no need to hurry. You can allow yourself to slow down and enjoy each bite.

When we give our full attention to the food, we can really taste it, savour it and appreciate it. A meal can become a moment of calm and stillness, and this peacefulness can stay with us throughout the day.

You might also like to invite your family or friends to enjoy a few moments of mindful eating together at the beginning of a meal. You could turn off the television, put away your phones and enjoy a few minutes of silence.

During this time, you can be fully present with your food and with the people sitting around the table. You can enjoy their presence without needing to fill the space with words.

When we eat in this way, the pleasure of eating can become so much greater. We are truly there, our food is truly there, and the people we share it with are truly there.

Life becomes real in each moment when we are present.

We hope you enjoy exploring the four short practices in this collection. May they help you bring more mindfulness, peace, gratitude and joy to your everyday meals.

Five Contemplations before eating

https://youtu.be/MjyQVYqr6-U?si=9PWYyoN1HYb8FUvp

his is a practice to help us pause and contemplate before we eat.

Take a moment to become aware of your breath, coming in and going out.

Become aware of all the sensations present in your body. Feel the weight of your body in the chair.

Allow your whole body to relax with each outbreath. Let your shoulders drop and release any tension in your jaw.

Place your plate or box of food in front of you and look deeply at it. Notice the different shapes and colours.

Identify each kind of food and take a moment to appreciate and feel grateful for having something to eat.

Taking a few moments to contemplate our food before eating can bring a lot of happiness. Look at your food in such a way that it becomes real to you.

Think about all the people, animals, plants, minerals and conditions that have brought this food to you today.

Our food reveals our connection with the Earth and with all beings.

As you contemplate, you may like to remember your intention to eat in a way that supports your own health and well-being, as well as the health and well-being of the Earth.

The following five contemplations can help us practise mindfulness as we eat. After listening to them, you can begin your meal.

Take your time. Chew each mouthful slowly and mindfully, being aware of each sensation and keeping the spirit of these contemplations with you throughout your meal.

First contemplation: This food is a gift of the whole universe: the Earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work.

Second contemplation: May I eat with mindfulness and gratitude, so that I may be worthy to receive this food.

Third contemplation: May I recognise and transform my unwholesome states of mind, especially my greed, and learn to eat in moderation.

Fourth contemplation: May I keep compassion in my heart by eating in a way that reduces the suffering of living beings, helps to stop contributing to climate change, and helps to heal and preserve our precious planet.

Fifth contemplation: I accept this food in order to have the energy to realise my deepest aspirations: to help others and to create a happier and healthier society.

[BELL]

Longer Meditation - The Wisdom of Summer

https://youtu.be/d3GQiH-m6i8?si=j8UixYpK2Jfuvhei

The Wisdom of Summer: Ripening in Every Moment - by Mick Makavoy

Take a comfortable position... Allow your body to settle.

If it feels comfortable, gently close your eyes.

Take a slow, deep breath in... ...and a long, easy breath out.

Again...Breathing in.....and breathing out.

Allow yourself to arrive fully in this moment.

Today, we'll explore the wisdom of summer and how it invites us to care for our own wellbeing...

while touching the insight of interbeing— between people, plants, all living beings, and the Earth.

Humility

By midsummer, the crops are in the ground. Much of the hard and loving work has already been done.

Seeds have been nurtured, young plants cared for

Now, there is an invitation to pause. To breathe. To let summer continue the work.

Because despite all our care. We cannot control the rain. We cannot command the sun.

We cannot ask the bees to visit each flower.

Nor can we conduct the orchestra of life within the soil.

It is these countless visible and invisible conditions that allow the harvest to come.

Summer gently reminds us to let go.

Not completely, but enough to trust the unfolding of life.

This is humility. Recognising that we are only one small part of something infinitely larger.

The word human comes from the word humus. Humus is the rich, dark organic matter in the soil...

formed through the patient transformation of life itself.

It is from humus that plants grow. The word humility shares the same root.

So "To be truly human is to be of the soil... and to be truly human is to be humble."

Allow those words to settle.

To be human... is to be of the soil.

To be human... is to be humble.

Perhaps there is something in your own life, that you have been trying to control.

Just notice it. And for this moment... allow yourself to soften. Allow life to meet you.

Ripening in Every Moment

This summer, young plum trees carried their first abundant harvest.

The question arose. "When will they be ready?"

No one knew exactly.

This points toward a beautiful teaching. The teaching of, ripening in every moment.

When the Happy Farm in Upper Hamlet was first established, Thích Nhất Hạnh offered these words:

"There is no way to harvest. To harvest is the way."

We don't have to wait for the perfect moment before experiencing abundance.

The harvest is not only the fruit. The harvest is planting. Watering. Weeding. Caring. Being present.

Every mindful moment is already part of the harvest.

Summer reminds us, that everything ripens. Little by little, day by day. And so do we.

There is no need to wait until life feels perfect before caring for your wellbeing.

Wellbeing is available here. Now.

In this very breath.

So let's stop together. Take one gentle breath.

Look deeply. What conditions for wellbeing already exist within you...

and around you?

Notice your breath. Notice your body.

Notice the Earth supporting you. Notice the people, the places and the experiences...

that nourish your life.

Without searching, simply receive what is already here.

A Summer Practice

If you feel called to continue learning from the wisdom of summer...

spend some quiet time outdoors.

Sit beneath a tree. Walk slowly. Tend a garden.

Or simply rest wherever you feel connected to the living world.

You may wish to reflect on the countless ways the Earth supports your life...

the lives of those you love and all life on this planet.

Remember every moment is an opportunity to harvest wellbeing.

Every moment there is ripening.

We simply need to stop and look deeply.

Take one final slow breath in and gently breathe out.

Cultivate wellbeing. Enjoy your harvest.

Remember each summer offers us so many conditions to harvest wellbeing, edible and otherwise.

The question is... What will you harvest?

Remain here for a few more gentle breaths. Allowing the wisdom of summer, to continue ripening

within you. When you're ready, bring awareness back to your surroundings.

Readings

Nothing comes from nothing - How to eat by Thich Nhat Hanh
“With just a little bit of mindfulness, you can truly see where your bread comes from. It has not come from nothing. Bread comes from the wheat fields, from hard work, and from the baker, the supplier, and the seller.But the bread is more than that. The wheat field needs clouds and sunshine. So in this slice of bread there is sunshine, there is cloud, there is the labour of the farmer, the joy of having flour, and the skill of the baker and the miraculously! - there is the bread. The whole cosmos has come together so that this piece of bread can be in your hand. You don’t need to do a lot of hard work to get this insight. You only need to stop letting your mind carry you away with worrying, thinking and planning.”

Chew your food not your worries - How to eat by Thich Nhat Hanh
“Sometimes we eat, but we aren't thinking of our food. We’re thinking of the past or the future or mulling over some worry or anxiety again and again. So stop thinking about your business, about the office, or about anything that isn’t happening right now. Don’t chew your worries, your fear, or your anger. If you chew your planning and your anxiety, it’s difficult to feel grateful for each piece of food. Just chew your food.”