

Present Moment, Engaged Moment

**Applying Meditation
to Daily Life in
Challenging Times**

By Jack Lawlor



The past two years have been startling, haven't they?

We go to bed one evening, hoping for progress in relations among diverse groups, but we wake up to find a human right or an entire group of our world's most vulnerable people in jeopardy.

How do students of Thich Nhat Hanh respond?

First, don't panic. We don't need to wonder what They would do. They is in us. No newspaper headline or tweet changes that. When we act mindfully with love and compassion as a Sangha, They acts through us.

Second, take refuge in the basics of a meditation-based mindfulness practice. Why meditation-based? I have learned that I need a very deep practice to navigate today's waters without being pitched around by waves of bad news with corresponding emotional highs and lows. In response to turbulent times, I have more than ever become devoted to pre-dawn sitting meditation. It is a small adjustment to enjoy sitting early each morning, and the fruits of a daily meditation practice are boundless.

If life is especially complicated, I don't worry much about the length of the sitting. What's most helpful is to sit every day, every morning. Sit. Relax. Practice mouth yoga. Evoke memories of Thay sitting

in peace. Enjoy a cleansing breath. Immerse one's mind and body in the technique for sitting most appropriate for that day. I no longer sit judgmentally, worrying whether my breaths are smooth or choppy, slow or fast. I don't stress if ruminations and daydreams interrupt my no-thought Zen meditation. Regardless of what my morning sitting is like, I know from experience that eight or ten hours later I may be the only calm person in the conference room, in the courtroom, in the city council chambers, at a Buddhist Peace Fellowship meeting, or at a Sangha gathering.

Morning sittings result in a more relaxed, less reactive way of living, characterized by a measure of grace and ease in these disturbing times. My experience confirms what Zen Master Hakuin proclaimed in his "Chant in Praise of Meditation": "the countless good deeds and the way of right living all come from zazen." Practicing in this way, our Zen ancestors lived with great resilience through nourishing and not-so-good eras, including the incredibly violent twentieth century.

Third, take good care of our anger. When recent political disappointments began, many Buddhist practitioners wondered if the energy surge of anger might rouse people to appropriate political