

Buddha's Five Remembrances

from Thich Nhat Hanh in *The Plum Village Chanting Book*

These are basic human anxieties we all share. The goal of the meditation is to get your brain out of avoiding these fears. The more we expose the brain to these truths, the more it will get used to them. It will eventually get bored of these ideas and the anxiety will fade.

I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old.

I am of the nature to have ill health. There is no way to escape ill health.

I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.

All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.

My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions.
My actions are the ground upon which I stand.

You can meditate on the 5 remembrances many different ways. Here are a few ideas:

- Breathe deeply and slowly with mindfulness as you say the remembrance to yourself.
- Pick one and say it to yourself. Then sit and observe the feelings and thoughts it brings up. Do not judge your reaction, but just observe it.
- For each remembrance, you can follow a pattern like:
“Breathing in, I know I am of the nature to grow old. Breathing out, I know I can’t escape getting old.”

Antidotes to the 5 Remembrances

These are responses to the anxious brain that you can use to get your brain to be more at peace with these existential fears.

Although I am of the nature to grow old and there is no way to escape growing old, there are gifts in growing old. Many never get the opportunity to grow old. I can be grateful that I have lived long enough to be old.

Although I am of the nature to have ill health and there is no way to escape ill health, I don't need to fear ill health. Pain will be managed and the loss of ability I might experience does not mean I have to be miserable. Misery is optional. The loss of one ability opens the door to others I would never have explored.

Although I am of the nature to die and there is no way to escape death, I don't need to fear death. Death is natural and normal and makes way for new life. I don't need to be greedy about life. I can make space for others when my time comes.

Although all that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change and there is no way to escape being separated from them, I need not fear this. Change is healthy and I want those dear to me to be healthy, even if it means I have to work through my sadness at losing them. Sadness is temporary if I treat it respectfully.

My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my action. My actions are the ground upon which I stand There is nothing to fear here. It is freeing to realize that all I need concern myself with are my own actions. If I am reading this, then I am already doing the work to be responsible with my actions. I am already on the path.