

travel thousands of miles. May my words create mutual understanding and love. May they be beautiful as gems, as lovely as flowers." I have compiled a book of traditional and modern gathas entitled *Present Moment Wonderful Moment: Mindfulness Verses for Daily Living*, for your use in the practice.

When I was sixteen, I thought *The Little Manual* was written for young people and those just beginning the practice of Zen. I thought this method was just for preparation. But today, more than fifty years later, I know that *The Little Manual* is the very essence of Zen Buddhism.

NECESSARY AWARENESS

I remember a short conversation between the Buddha and a philosopher of his time.

"I have heard that Buddhism is a doctrine of enlightenment. What is your method? What do you practice every day?"

"We walk, we eat, we wash ourselves, we sit down . . ."

"What is so special about that? Everyone walks, eats, washes, sits down . . ."

"Sir, when we walk, we are aware that we are walking; when we eat, we are aware that we are eating. . . . When others walk, eat, wash, or sit down, they are generally not aware of what they are doing."

In Buddhism, mindfulness is the key. Mindfulness is the

energy that sheds light on all things and all activities, producing the power of concentration, bringing forth deep insight and awakening. Mindfulness is at the base of all Buddhist practice.

To shed light on all things? This is the point of departure. If I live without mindfulness, in forgetfulness, I am, as Albert Camus says in his novel *The Stranger*, living "like a dead person." The ancient Zen masters used to say, "If we live in forgetfulness, we die in a dream." How many among us live "like a dead person"! The first thing we have to do is to return to life, to wake up and be mindful of each thing we do. Are we aware when we are eating, drinking, sitting in meditation? Or are we wasting our time, living in forgetfulness?

To produce the power of concentration? Mindfulness helps us focus our attention on and know what we are doing. Usually we are a prisoner of society. Our energies are dispersed here and there. Our body and our mind are not in harmony. To begin to be aware of what we are doing, saying, and thinking is to begin to resist the invasion by our surroundings and by all of our wrong perceptions. When the lamp of awareness is lit, our whole being lights up, and each passing thought and emotion is also lit up. Self-confidence is reestablished, the shadows of illusion no longer overwhelm us, and our concentration develops to its fullest. We wash our hands, dress, perform everyday actions as before, but now we are *aware* of our actions, words, and thoughts.

The practice of mindfulness is not only for novices. It is a lifelong practice for everyone, even the Buddha himself. The power of mindfulness and concentration is the spiritual force behind all of the great men and women of human history.

To bring forth deep insight and awakening? The aim of Zen Buddhism is a clear vision of reality, seeing things as they are, and that is acquired by the power of concentration. This clear vision is enlightenment. Enlightenment is always enlightenment about something. It is not abstract.

MINDFULNESS

This process—to *shed light on all things*, to *produce the power of concentration*, and to *bring forth deep insight and awakening*—is called in Buddhism the "Threefold Training": *Sila* (precepts), *samadhi* (concentration), and *prajña* (insight). The word "sila" also means mindfulness, because the essence of the precepts is mindfulness. Precepts in Buddhism are not imposed by some outside authority. They arise from our own insight based on the practice of mindfulness. To be attached to the form without understanding the essence is to fall into what Buddhism calls *attachment to rules*. We realize insight by practicing mindfulness of our body, feelings, mind, and the objects of our mind, which are the world. That is why the first part of *The*

Little Manual consists of mindfulness verses to memorize, and is called "Practice in Everyday Life."

When a scientist works in her laboratory, she does not smoke, eat sweets, or listen to the radio. The scientist refrains from doing these things not because they are immoral, but because she knows that they impede perfect concentration on the object of her study. It is the same in Zen. The precepts help us live in mindfulness.

In Zen, insight cannot be obtained just by the intellect—study, hypothesis, analysis, synthesis. The Zen student must use his or her entire being as an instrument of realization; the intellect is only one part of our being, and a part that often pulls us away from living reality, which is the very substance of Zen. That is why *The Little Manual* does not present Buddhism as a theory—it introduces the practitioner directly into the daily practice of Zen.

In the monastery, the practitioner does everything in mindfulness: carries water, looks for firewood, prepares food, plants lettuce. . . . Although we learn to meditate in the sitting position, we also learn to be mindful while carrying water, cooking, or planting lettuce. We know that to carry water is not merely a utilitarian action, it is the very essence of Zen. If we do not practice while carrying water, it is a waste of time to seclude ourselves in a monastery. But if we are mindful of each thing we do, even if we do the exact same things as others, we can enter directly into the world of Zen.

A Zen master observes the student in silence, while the student tries to bring the practice into every moment of life.

The student may feel that he is not receiving enough attention, but his ways and acts cannot escape the observation of the master. The master can see if the student is or is not "awake." If, for example, the student shuts the door noisily or carelessly, he is demonstrating a lack of mindfulness. Closing the door gently is not in itself a virtuous act, but awareness of the fact that you are closing the door is an expression of real practice. In this case, the master simply reminds the student to close the door gently, to be mindful. The master does this not only to respect the quiet of the monastery, but to point out to the student that he was not practicing mindfulness, that his acts were not majestic or subtle. It is said in Buddhism that there are ninety thousand "subtle gestures" to practice. These gestures and acts are expressions of the presence of mindfulness. All that we say, think, and do in mindfulness are described as having "the flavor of Zen."

If a practitioner hears himself reproached for lacking the "flavor of Zen" in what he says and does, he should recognize that he is being reminded to live his life in mindfulness.

ZEN KEYS



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with an Introduction by Philip Kapleau

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