

MINDFUL EATING

From Thich Nhat Hanh

BY JANET LAU

When it comes to meditation, many of us imagine we have to be sitting on our meditation cushion, palms on our laps, our eyes closed, with a peaceful look on our face. If you think of the amount of time you spend on your yoga and your meditation practice, it is still a relatively small fragment of time compared to the rest of the day. Meditation is actually a state of mind in which we bring our focus on the present moment with a total receptive and non-judgmental mind. With enough practice, it will give us some peace and various insights about life.

You can apply the mindfulness practice to the time when you eat and below are three *gathas* provided by Thich Nhat Hanh in which you can contemplate and practice when:

LOOKING AT YOUR EMPTY BOWL

My bowl, empty now,
will soon be filled with precious food.
Beings all over the Earth are struggling to live.
How fortunate we are to have enough to eat.

Many of us feel for the people in Africa and around the world who suffer from hunger everyday. This *gatha* is to remind us to be grateful for the food we have, and we vow to search for ways to help others who suffer from hunger.

SERVING FOOD

In this food
I see clearly
the presence of the entire universe
supporting my existence

If you look at a piece of broccoli deep enough, it contains the whole universe. Without the sun, the broccoli would not be on our plate; without the cloud, there would be no water to nourish this plant; without the earth, there would not be a place for the broccoli to grow from; without the farmer, the plant would not be so beautifully harvested; without the driver, we would not have the plant with such convenience; without the chef, we would not be able to enjoy such wonderful tasty food. So the broccoli contains everything inside it.

Before you start eating your meal, pick up one piece of carrot without putting into your mouth right away. Look into the carrot and

see for yourself that it contains the sunshine, the rain, the love and a lot of hard work by many others. Once you can see the inter-connectiveness of the carrot, then you can slowly place it into your mouth, chew it and taste it with mindfulness. Take your time to eat, just taking one bite at a time, put down your utensils so that you can be fully present to the food that is inside your mouth. Chew until the food becomes liquefied, which takes about 20-30 times of chewing, and this practice can lessen the workload for our digestive system.

Please be mindful to only chew the carrot, not your projects or your worries. Your carrot is present for you and you can also be present for your carrot. If you are occupied with your worries or your sadness, you can practice mindful breathing for a while until you can be present to your food. Spend time with your food, every minute of your meal can be a happy and joyful moment. Not many people have the time and opportunity to sit down and enjoy a meal like that, let our food reminds us how fortunate we are.

FINISHING YOUR MEAL

The meal is finished.
My hunger is satisfied.
I vow to live for the benefit of all being.

A lot of times we rush to the next agenda as soon as we finish our food. Instead, spend a few minutes to be grateful for the food that nourished you just now. Also, remember everything that came to be that gives you such moment of contentment. We can practice not to only show our gratitude before we eat but the entire process of eating and after.

The more we practice this way, our peace can shine upon everyone around us and this spreads the peace and joy to others who have yet to learn about peace and joy.

At last, make this practice adaptable and it should be enjoyable, not stressful. For beginners, you can invite your friends and family to practice mindful eating with you once a week to start. Slowly, as your mindfulness practice become more deeply rooted, you can start to expand your practice.