



Our Appointment with Life: Discourse on Living Happily in the Present Moment

Thich Nhat Hanh , Annabel Laity (Translation)

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Our Appointment with Life is a translation and commentary on the Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone, the earliest teaching of the Buddha on how to live fully in the present moment.

Our Appointment with Life: Discourse on Living Happily in the Present Moment Details

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Will says

Our Appointment with Life
Thich Nhat Hanh
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If a person cannot live mindfully in the present moment, then even if he or she is all alone in the forest, it is not truly living alone.

30

even a bad movie or book can teach us.

35

according to Buddhism, hope can be an obstacle . . . making plans for the future does not mean to be swept away by daydreams.

36

The best way of preparing for the future is to take care of the present, because we know that if the present is made up of the past, then the future will be made up of the present.

38

According to Buddhist psychology, regret is an 'indeterminate emotion.' This means that it can be either constructive or destructive . . . The traces of a bad drought can only be erased by a bountiful rainfall, and rain can only fall in the present moment.

44

Impermanence is the constant transformation of things. Without impermanence, there can be no life.

Maureen says

The essential teaching of Buddhism is to free oneself from all anxiety concerning the past and desire for the future in order to come back into the present. Liberation, awakening joy, and inner work can only happen in the present. This is Thich Nhat Hanh's translation of the earliest teaching of the Buddha on living in the present.

Gita says

This deceptively slim volume contains profound lessons for living in the present moment and not being haunted by ghosts of the past or the future. When Thich Nhat Hanh talks about living alone, he does not mean retreating from society, he means living unfettered by past and present hopes, fears and disappointments.

Serena Long ? says

To live alone doesn't mean to isolate oneself from society. It means to live in mindfulness. One who knows the better way to live alone can see clearly, even in a crowd of people. The Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone is the earliest teaching of the Buddha on living fully in the present moment; it is the basis for the enlightened life, and that can lead to awakened understanding and nirvana. According to the teaching of interbeing, the past makes the present, and the present makes the future.

Gail says

Book #5: Our Appointment with Life by Thich Nhat Hanh

The best way for me to describe this short book is to quote a few lines from page 42:

The best way of preparing for the future is to take good care of the present, because we know that if the present is made up of the past, then the future will be made up of the present. All we need to be responsible for is the present moment. Only the present is within our reach. To care for the present is to care for the future.

Weekend Reader_ says

The first book of 2017 was ALL about self-awareness. This quick read focused on traditional Buddhist teaching of being present. In full disclosure I'm Christian, so reading teachings about monks was different. The practice of meditation and being alone in some ways was in conflict of communal prayer and support. Even though at times I felt uncomfortable, I pushed forward and didn't let that stop me from appreciating the message. This book highlighted the power of the mind and the need for alone time. As an introvert I revel in my space, but the teachings warned against using alone time to focus on the past or the future. Worrying about things that have already happened or hopes of things to happen prevents freedom. Wow, how simple, but powerful.

I gave this book 3 stars just because the first 3 chapters were translations of teachings, so as a reader there was only one chapter of content beyond the teaching. Normally, this format wouldn't be a problem, but the last chapter felt like a summary rather than a full integration of teaching and practical application. Now, I have to admit that could be my Christianity peeking through i.e. the use of a parable to teach something followed by instruction. Either way, I think reading this book was a great way for me to start the year. I plan to the pledge to be more present!

Frank Jude says

I've read this commentary and translation of these two *suttas*, *Theranamo Sutta* and *Bhaddekaratta Sutta*

several times over the years, and this time I taught it to a group of students, both beginners and experienced, and went deeper than I'd ever done before. Simple, short, succinct as they are, they contain great wisdom, the core teachings of the Buddha, and very practical and pragmatic explication on what it means to "live in the present moment."

I am grateful to Thay Nhat Hanh for this simple book, and if conditions permit, I know I'll be sharing these profound teachings many times over!

Lawrence says

recommended by dcc

Happyreader says

An exorcism of sorts. Better living alone refers to living without your ghosts, the ghosts of regrets or better times past and future rewards or calamities. Not that the past or future are not considered but that they are considered with mindful observation rooted in the present moment. Identify less with the past and future and observe the internal formations that arise when triggered. Take care of the present and the future takes care of itself. Learn from the past to grow in wisdom in the present. Bottom line, better living alone is detaching from your triggers by actually seeing their impermanent and transparent nature.

Bryan says

Living alone right in society: My mother raised me. She worked diligently at a job that paid her less than a living-wage. Yet we lived. Mother worked hard and she worked a second-shift as mom: performing domestic work and trying to keep me from becoming a criminal and/or a substance abuser. Being raised as an only child by a single mother afforded me a great deal of alone time. I, like Thera (Elder) did many things alone growing up (some activities wholesome, others curious, and yet others downright antisocial). I am not uncomfortable being alone.

Now, as a husband and father, I mostly find myself with others. I first read this text as my wife pre-wedding co-ordinated for our friends' wedding. I had 3 hours to burn in a sweltering parking lot and I decided to read Our Appointment With Life. I felt ironic and figured 'why not read a book about being alone' prior to witnessing a marriage, a union of two into one. Thinking simply, I considered alone to mean: without human contact. Buddha (and Hanh) corrected my base thinking. In Buddha's words (to Thera, monk who thought he 'lived alone' because he avoided human contact): 'In observing life deeply, it is possible to see clearly all that is. Not enslaved by anything, it is possible to put aside all craving. The result is a life of peace and joy. This is truly to live alone,' (p. 4). I meditated on this gatha and altered my narrow definition of alone. Hanh fills this book with exhortations on how to live alone within society and the crux of the text focuses on the importance of mindfulness via living fully in the PRESENT MOMENT.

As a Sociologist, I especially enjoy Hanh's paragraphs on 'poor', 'unwholesome movies', and 'bad books' and how mindfulness can enlighten these topics.

This text contains three parts. 'The Sutras' contain translations of 'The Elder Sutra' and 'The Sutra on the Better Way to Live Alone'. These translations total 6 pages. 'The Subject Matter of the Sutras' consists of Thich Nhat Hahn's elaboration of the Buddha's sutras. Hahn utilizes various ancient Buddhist sources (_Dhammapada_, _Theragatha_, _Agamas_, _Majjhima Nikaya_, _The God of the Forest Hot Springs Sutra_, _Shakyan Hermitage Sutra_, etc.) in this section, yet he makes the material accessible to both non-Buddhists and devout Buddhists. As always, Hanh makes a concerted effort to simplify as much material as possible. This section is 11 pages in length. The third section is 'Putting the Teachings of the Buddha into Practice' and Hanh offers simple life advice. The text ends with translations of 2 Gathas.

James says

This short book is simply translations of several variations on the brief sutas and gathas which refer to what Thich Nhat Hanh translates as “living alone.” That is living in the present moment. The Theranamo Sutta, the Bhaddekaratta Sutta, and a couple from the Chinese canon.

The best part of the book is the translation in to English of the fragment which forms the basis for commentary.

Do not pursue the past,
Do not lose yourself in the future.
The past no long is.
The future has not yet come.
Looking deeply at life as it is,
in the very here and now,
the practitioner dwells
in stability and freedom.
We must be diligent today.
Tomorrow is too late.
Death comes unexpectedly.
How can we bargain with it?
The sage calls a person who knows
how to dwell in mindfulness
night and day
“one who knows
the better way to live alone.”

“Living alone” in Thich Nhat Hanh’s commentary refers to the ability to be in the moment even in the midst of life. Including being surrounded by people, activities and responsibilities.

The author is obviously very knowledgeable regarding his subject matter, and of course is a much loved Buddhist teacher. The text (about 49 pages) does make some very clear and interesting points regarding the usefulness of practicing present moment awareness. I did however feel that it was a bit simplistic, and instructional, but without giving any clear instructions to those new or only slightly familiar with the practice. I also felt it failed to address the core of the Buddhist project by sticking to a limited intellectual understanding of practice and its outcomes rather than expanding on or offering more than a superficial reference to what “understanding reality” means within the context of Buddhist practice.

Only two stars because it didn't really grab me.

Ichche says

I promise myself that I will enjoy every minute of the day that is given me to live.

Dhara says

A short and insightful read. Must read for anyone on a spiritual journey towards a more happy and liberated life.

Mina says

This is an excellent little book that manages to sum up the core of Buddhist philosophy with one sutra. Thich Nhat Hanh is always clear cut and easy to understand. This is the first discourse that I've read of his and, though it differs in style from Peace is Every Step and Living Buddha Living Christ, it in some ways spoke to me more than those two books did. When he writes "Our appointment with life is in the present moment. The place of our appointment is right here, in this very place", I had to really stop and think about that. On an intellectual level, of course, that's a basic Buddhist principle. But to put mindfulness into practice in everyday life is difficult, especially when I'm faced with work and drama of all sorts. To stop in the midst of the tornado and check in with myself, to say "here I am", it makes me a bit freaked out. When I read that passage, I was on the bus heading to a client's house and all of these questions just started coming up: what am I doing in this job? Am I in the right place? Am I associating with the kind of people I should be associating with?

I think it's far too easy to not check in with ourselves, especially with all the distractions of modern life. Change can be such a daunting thing, especially when talking about change from within. What I gleaned from this book is that it's all about babysteps - not the big "what ifs" that are so easy to get hung up on. In other words, stop worrying about the past and future and stop and look at what's happening right now.

Thanks a lot to my bff; that was some Christmas present!

Austin Wright says

This was my first book by Thích Nhất Hạnh. It was pretty chill--one of hundreds of books written by someone who got the Peace Prize from MLK in 1967...so, yeah, his credentials are there.

The book is standard Zen Buddhism, but has a handful of Sanskrit, Pali and Chinese vocabulary words (with definitions) which is a great way to dip one's feet into another language.

