

Cuong Lu
The Collective Dimension of Happiness
December 1, 2023



Dear friends, first of all I would like to invite you to do a small practice with me: the practice of listening to the sound of the bell.

I invite the bell in your practice. Listening to the sound of the bell when you're breathing in, you know *I'm breathing in*. When you are breathing out you know, *I'm breathing out*. You practice following your breath during the sound of the bell. You listen to the sound of the bell and practice following your breathing.

Breathing in, *I know I'm breathing in*. Breathing out, *I know I'm breathing out*. Breathing in, breathing out. Breathing in deeply and breathing out slowly. Deep. Slow.

Dear friends, my name is Cuong Lu. I am a Zen teacher. I am a disciple of Thich Nhat Hanh. I'm also the author of three books. The first one is *The Buddha in Jail: Restoring Lives, Finding Hope and Freedom*. The second one is *Wait: A Love Letter to Those in Despair*. And the third one is *Happiness Is Overrated: Simple Lessons on Finding Meaning in Each Moment*.

I would like to share with you that the practice of breathing in and breathing out is a very powerful practice. Thanks to that practice, you can be yourself. And thanks to that practice, I can be myself. So the practice brings us to our true selves. It's like coming home.

The practice of breathing deeply and slowly is also a very powerful practice. It helps you to be more concentrated and to be more yourself. If not for a good practice, you may lose yourself in your daily life.

Losing Yourself

You lose yourself. You can be carried away by a feeling, by an emotion. It can be an unpleasant feeling—suffering—but it can be a pleasant feeling or happiness.

You might think that a pleasant feeling is better than an unpleasant feeling. I can tell you that's not true. It's not true.

You can be a victim of a pleasant feeling and you can be a victim of an unpleasant feeling. And you don't want to be a victim. You just want to be yourself. You just want to be your true self.

The practice of breathing in and out helps you to come back to your true self.



Sometimes we are victims of the past. We become the victim of the past and we suffer because something—some feeling, some perception, some emotion—is manifesting from the past. It can be a painful memory, a painful experience from the past. And when it's there, you lose yourself. You suffer.

But it can happen when something very pleasant is manifesting from the past. And you also become the victim of that kind of happiness. It's not true happiness because you're losing yourself in that feeling, in that memory, in that perception, in that emotion. If you don't have a good practice, you can easily become a victim of the past.

You can also become a victim of something—some emotion, some feeling, some perception—manifesting in the present moment.

Your suffering may come from the past. Your suffering may come from the present moment. Or your suffering may come from an idea about the future. The future is an idea. The past is also an idea, and our present moment is very often an idea too. You easily become a victim of ideas and feelings coming from the past, the present, and the future.

Two Kinds of Happiness

Today, I would like to share with you a practice of looking deeply into two kinds of happiness.

To make it easy, I call the first kind of happiness Happiness Number One. And the second kind of happiness is Happiness Number Two.

Happiness number one is a happiness that has a cause. A cause in my life in the past, in the present, or in the future.

When we talk about causes of happiness, the cause can be sex, money, power, good food, fame, love, expectation, and understanding.

So there are many kinds of causes, and each of us is attached to a certain kind of cause. It can be money, it can be sex, it can be power.

Right now, what is your cause of happiness? That is Happiness Number One. And that kind of cause of happiness may come from the past, present, or the future. When it's there, you are very happy. And when it's not, you're not happy. You suffer. That's why we can see that is not a solid happiness.



I want to introduce to you the second kind of happiness. This happiness is without cause. You don't need a cause to get in touch with this happiness. This happiness does not manifest from the past, the present, or the future. It has no cause.

When you practice the practice of breathing in and out and you come back to yourself, you'll see it is there. When you can come back to your true self, you see it is there. It doesn't need any cause to be there. It's just there. "Hey, I'm here. I'm here."

It is a kind of energy that helps you to be stable, to be joyful, to be peaceful. To be yourself. It doesn't come from time. It is a product of timelessness. It's very interesting. It comes from a very special place because it is not dependent on time. And it doesn't come to you. It's there. It's there for you to enjoy. It's there in you.

If you listen to this talk and you apply the teaching to practice breathing in and out, you come back to the self, and you'll see it is there.

When you have the time, the occasion, the need to ask your happiness a question, "Where do you come from Happiness Number Two?"

Your Happiness Number Two will reply, "I come from nowhere."

"Where will you go? When do you go?"

"I don't go. I go to nowhere." Meaning, "I'm always there. I'm always there with you."

The second aspect of Happiness Number Two is you are *touching* your happiness. It is the kind of happiness that you cannot say, "It is *my* happiness."

When you're happy in this way, your happiness is also the happiness of your beloved ones. When you're happy, your beloved ones are happy too.

You have to try to practice in such a way, to be able to touch this happiness, and you'll see that you become happier, but also your children, your husband, your wife, your friends.

This is not a happiness you can possess. You cannot say, "It's mine. Don't touch this; it's mine. It's not yours."

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So when someone is practicing coming truly, deeply to himself, and is touching Happiness Number Two, he is nourishing you too.

I think you should do this practice every day. Breathing in, breathing out. Breathing in deeply. Breathing out slowly. And you will see how beautiful life is.

Two Selves

I said to you there are two kinds of happiness. There are also two selves. Do you have an idea about yourself? That is not a true self.

When you practice breathing deeply, in and out, and you come back to yourself, you see this kind of self is not an idea. This kind of self is a reality.

Looking deeply into yourself as a reality, you see you're connected with everyone. In your self, I see your father. In your self, I see your mother. In your self, I see your ancestors.

A true self, a self that is not met from ideas, is very wonderful. You only can touch the self with solid practice. Do you have a good practice to come back to your self?

Today Cuong Lu would like to offer you a practice so that you can come back to your true self, to your true happiness. I want to offer to you this practice from my love that you can be your self. You can be happy, and you can be connected with all your loved ones.

Good luck.