

“The Three Levels of Practice in Pure-Land Buddhism,” One Meditation #17, May 2026 (5-26-26)

One Meditation

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Welcome to this monthly meditation email. Subjects range from modern to ancient, Western to Eastern, and scientific to spiritual. I began meditating and researching meditation in 1962 and have a couple of graduate degrees in religions. The listserv has over 1000 members, many in Minnesota, where I live in south-central Minneapolis. I do not share email addresses, and you can easily unsubscribe anytime. – Richard Jewell

“THE THREE LEVELS OF PRACTICE IN PURE-LAND BUDDHISM”

Regarding meditation and mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh (“tick nut hawn”) describes, in *finding our true home*, what I long have thought of as “mindful flow”:

Here is the Pure Land
The Pure Land is here
I smile in mindfulness
And dwell in the present moment
[It] is seen in an autumn leaf...
My true home is right here.

Breathing in
Flowers are blooming
Breathing out
I am aware that
Bamboo is swaying
My mind is free
And I enjoy every moment. (3)

What is Pure-Land Buddhism?

“Pure Land” is the most popular form of Buddhism in China, Vietnam, and Japan. It developed 2000 years ago. It encourages us find a realm of calm, awareness, and love all around us that we can access anytime. Nhat Hanh, often nicknamed the Father of Modern Mindfulness, was thrown out of Vietnam in 1966, in part for advocating Pure Land Buddhism as a nonviolent compromise to the country’s civil war. Descriptions of the Pure Land also exist in other religions. One example, says Nhat Hanh, is Jesus of Nazareth’s kingdom or realm of the spirit that is “here and now” (85).

How do you find the Pure Land? Nhat Hanh notes that in the instant a person wishes for it, they start to “attain the fruit” (19). He adds that “One-Pointed Concentration” makes the Pure Land blossom within. He urges us to practice with “all our mind and heart” (103), as do Jewish and Christian scriptures commanding a person to love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind. Nhat Hanh adds that we should “gather kind and good people” in the place we live (88). “Where there is...purity in the form of security, understanding, peace, joy, love, balance, and the great

aspiration, then that is the Pure Land” (137-8).

Three Levels of Mindfulness

Nhat Hanh describes three levels of mindful or meditative practice to take you to the Pure Land. You likely move through two of the levels often, perhaps visiting all three at times:

1. “When we are beginners, we need images and sounds as the conditions for us to maintain our mindfulness[:] body, speech, and mind... If we practice sincerely and do good deeds...then we will reap the benefits sometime in the future...” (35). This is the level of ritual prayers, handshakes, and handing out gifts of food in earnest goodness.

2. “The practitioners of the middle level always strive to maintain mindfulness [and] maintain recollection of what is wholesome, and [then] recollection of what is unwholesome does not arise” (32-3). They “offer devotional prayers and do good deeds to cultivate...wholesomeness” to realize “paradise here on Earth” (36). You learn to feel the clarity and positive energy of what you are doing.

3. The highest level, says Nhat Hanh, is “the Eternally Silent Light.” It is “not caught in ideas and expressions...” (29). In it, you float in “the Kingdom of God [as] a living reality...here and now” (36). It becomes “the autumn moon that lies in the high, vast sky..., its brilliance shin[ing] far over the ocean” (31)—the embrace, in some form, of Presence.

Nhat Hanh’s point is: “Each of us can realize the Pure Land according to our own level of practice...” (34). “The Kingdom of God is in our hearts and...everything we touch” (94). Practicing one, two, or all three levels is good. “When we come to our church, to our synagogue, to our mosque it is not only to benefit from the peace, the brotherhood, and love we find but to contribute our part in living the spiritual ideals of our community” (136).

Next Month: “Two Nature Metaphors: Of Weeds and Seeds”

Peace, Strength, Joy

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“Meditation has two major definitions: (1) science says it is a conscious calming of the body and mind, and (2) experienced practitioners often define it as aware attention for the purpose of inner growth. Using these two meanings, the word covers most major spiritual practices. Mindfulness, too, say the Mayo Clinic and other scientists, is a type of meditating. All of these outer forms and more are linked by having, in common, very similar purposes and scientific results.” – “One Meditation #1,” Jan. 2025

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