

Our North Star Value

Homage: We honor the life and work of our teacher, TNH by offering to him our practice of using our best inner values as guidelines for our daily lives.

Traditionally this is the week to make New Year's resolutions, but since those things are notoriously hard to keep, I thought that instead tonight we'd look at our most deeply held values and see how we might train ourselves to use them as a guide for 2021—and beyond.

We'll begin with incense offering followed by a guided meditation.

Meditation

Relaxed upright posture. Dignity. Balance between at ease and alert.***

Relax into a light awareness of body and breath. **

Nothing to do but enjoy your breathing. ***

Being here...right now, is enough. * There is nothing else to do.***

Please bring to your mind some qualities that you value and when you're at your best, you're good at. Don't be shy here.

Maybe you think something like, "When I'm at my best, I'm confident. I believe in myself." Or "I really value kindness and I usually find it easy to be kind." Or "I like it when I'm being in touch

with my strengths and accepting of my shortcomings.” Or “I feel good when I’m generous.”

Get in touch with a few of the qualities that you have that you really value—the values that guide you in your very best moments*****

Let’s narrow the list. Which is the *one* value that’s most important to you? That, at least today, you hold most dear. ****

The quality you picked is your personal north star. It’s a value that you *have* at some level, though you may want to tweak it a bit tonight and as you work with it. It’s one that you would like to lead you through your life.

Let your value really sink in. Let it rest in your body and mind. Notice how it feels to stay connected to this quality. ****

Let’s take a little break from the reflection for a moment and just Be for awhile. Rest. ****

Now think of someone who *manifests* your north star value. Maybe it’s a friend, your grandma, a teacher— or maybe it’s someone you don’t know personally, but know *of*—Thay, Jesus, MLK, Gandhi, Mother Theresa— someone who is a role model for your value. **

Recall a situation, in as much detail as you can, that you saw or read about where that person exhibited your north star value.*****

Now remember one of your recent situations in which you were not at your best. Not a big deal, just a situation that didn't go exactly the way you would've liked.****

Re-imagine that situation happening again but this time, picture yourself using your north star value.*****

Do you feel differently about the situation? Is there a different outcome?***

Now think of one thing that you're going to do in the next 24 hours.**
Imagine bringing your north star value to mind as you engage in that situation. See yourself keeping your awareness of your north star value forefront in your mind as you do your activity. ****

Now drop any effort to meditate and just Be. Rest in open spacious, relaxed awareness.***

Relax your meditation pose.

[Movement meditation.]

DHARMA TALK

Meditation: Let's sit silently for a few moments, coming back *home* to our in-breath, bringing our full awareness to our out-breath.****

Relax your pose.

We're familiar with the phrase "Be the Change" which is attributed to Gandhi. The story goes that an anxious mother asked Gandhi to tell her son not to eat sweets anymore. (As a mom and grandma, I admire this woman for her optimism for thinking anyone, even Gandhi can get a kid to stop eating sweets) but anyway she took him to Gandhi and asked him and Gandhi listened and.... said to come back in 2 weeks.

So, she did what he asked and when she came back Gandhi said to the boy, "Stop eating sweets!" The mom was confused. She said, "Why didn't you just tell him that the first time?" "Because," Gandhi said, "I myself was still eating sweets at that time. And... We must be the change we want to see in the world."

The story is inspiring and motivating, but unfortunately, it's totally made up.

I think we see "Be the Change" on t-shirts and posters and bumper stickers because we like the encouragement it offers us to create some purpose in our lives.

It surprised me that scientists tell us that having a strong sense of meaning and purpose in our lives is the single most important factor in predicting psychological and physical well-being. They tell us that people with a strong sense of purpose live longer, recover from stress more quickly and are happier.

So, our mind and our body work their best when we feel a sense of purpose. And the good news is that we can *train* ourselves to *cultivate* meaning and purpose in our lives—based on our core values—by using just these 3 steps:

1. Pause. Make a habit of pausing throughout the day. Thay tells us that transitions are a good time for this: when you walk out your door, before you send an email, as you sit down for a meal. Pause. Take a mindful breath. Bring yourself back into the present moment. It's pleasant and easy to do—the hard part is to *remember* to do it. I have a friend who uses post-it notes to remind herself. Or some folks program their computer or phone to sound a bell at specific times. (You can use the Plum Village app to do this).

Each of us needs to find *some* way—some *ways*—to remember our most cherished values so that we don't get lost in the busyness of our daily life. So, now and then, pause for 1 breath.

2. Second step: Using your core values, shift your perspective. You might say to yourself, “Life is fragile, at some time I may not be able to walk to my car, so today I’m going to enjoy it.” Or “This might be the last time I write an email to this person. I’m going to be as kind as I can.” Or, “A lot of work went into this food; I’m going to eat it as if it were my last meal.” Simple thoughts like those, based on your core values, can dramatically shift your attitude.

Thay offers this poem as a way to shift your perspective about your *whole day*: “Waking up this morning I smile. 24 brand new hours are before me. I vow to live them in mindfulness. I vow to greet each being with the eyes of compassion. “

Step 1 in cultivating meaning and purpose in your life: Pause, take a mindful breath and step 2: shift your perspective.

3. Step 3: Take action. It is not enough to *think* about being grateful or kind, we need to put our values into action. It doesn’t have to be big action or even something other people notice. For example, you might ask about a friend’s family. Or smile to a stranger through your mask.

Throughout each day, find some small ways to put your values into practice—your north star value, and some of your other values: kindness, compassion, understanding, generosity, gratitude, deep listening, patience.

Step 1: Pause. 2: Shift your perspective. 3: Act.

We can't fully control how our life works out, but one thing we *can* do is to stay true to our deepest values. It's what gives us purpose in our lives.

I'd like to share my north star value: "tender strength." I know it's possible because I've seen Thay, my daddy, my friend Scottie manifest it. Those 3 folks are soft and gentle but definitely not push-overs. So, when I am impatient or feel overwhelmed or angry, my aspiration is to acknowledge the *strength* in my difficult feeling, but instead armoring up, getting rigid and hard, I aspire to hold my difficult feeling with tenderness, light, and understanding. I aspire to manifest my power tenderly.

()

Gustavo and I were talking about what we've gained from quarantining. He quoted a line from one of Gloria Estefan's songs: "No hay mal que por bien no venga."
"There is no bad thing that doesn't bring good."

() May the fruit of our practice benefit all beings which includes,
of course, our teacher TNH.