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Take Refuge in Mother Earth

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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photo by Ron Forster

**Let go, release,
take full refuge
in the Earth and
in the sun, and
allow yourself
to be healed.**

Editors' note: This is Part I of the Dharma talk from November 29, 2012.

Good morning, dear Sangha. We are in the Assembly of Stars Meditation Hall of the Dharma Nectar Temple, Lower Hamlet, in our winter retreat.

Our society is not very healthy. Therefore, many of us are sick, and we need healing and nourishment. We have intoxicated ourselves with poisons. Our mind has a lot of poisons, like craving, hate, anger, and despair. Our body also has a lot of poisons because we don't know how to consume.

Mother Earth has the capacity to heal herself and has the capacity to help us heal if we know how to take refuge in her. When the Buddha was teaching his son, Rahula, he talked about the Earth as having the virtues of patience and equanimity. Patience and equanimity are the two great virtues of the planet Earth. If needed, Mother Earth can spend one million years or ten million years to heal herself. She is not in a hurry. She has the power to renew herself. We have to see that. If we study the history of the Earth, we know that she has had a lot of patience, and now she is a very beautiful star.

When we walk, we are aware that the Earth is holding our steps. But Mother Earth is not just below us, under our feet; Mother Earth is inside of us. To think that Mother Earth is only the environment outside of us, around us, is wrong. Mother Earth is inside of us. We don't need to die to go back to Mother Earth. We are already in Mother Earth. That is why we have to learn how to take refuge in her. That is the best way to heal and to nourish ourselves.

Walking meditation is one of the ways to heal. Walking meditation is successful when we know how to allow the Earth to

be in us and around us. Just to be aware that we are the Earth. We don't have to do much, we don't have to do anything at all, to get healing and nourishment. Just like when we were in our mother's womb, we did not have to breathe, we did not have to eat, because our mother breathed for us and ate for us. We did not have to worry about anything. It is possible to behave like that now.

When you sit, allow Mother Earth to sit for you. When you breathe, allow Mother Earth to breathe for you. When you walk, allow Mother Earth to walk for you. Don't make any effort. Allow her to do it. She knows how to do it.

When you are sitting, allow the air to enter your lungs. Allow the air to go out of your lungs. We don't need to try to breathe in. We don't need to try to breathe out. We just allow nature, allow the Earth to breathe in and out for us. We just sit there and enjoy the breathing in and the breathing out. There is no "you" who is breathing in and breathing out. The breathing in and the breathing out happen by themselves. Try it.

We allow our body to relax totally, without striving or even making an effort. Behave like the fetus in the womb of the mother. Allow your mother to do everything for you, to breathe, to eat, to drink. This is possible if you know how to take refuge in Mother Earth. She's a great *bodhisattva*; she's the mother of all the buddhas, all bodhisattvas, all saints. Shakyamuni is her son. Jesus Christ is also her son. We are also her sons and daughters, and we have to learn how to take refuge in her and to allow her to continue to do everything for us.

Healing Is Taking Place

We don't need to do anything at all. Just allow yourself to be seated; let the sitting take place. If you don't strive to sit, relaxation will come. And you know something? When there is relaxation,

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healing begins to take place. There is no healing without relaxation. Relaxation means doing nothing, not trying.

So while there is breathing in, it's not you who is breathing in. While there is breathing out, you just enjoy it. You say, "Healing is taking place; healing is taking place." Allow your body to renew herself, to heal herself, to be nourished. This is the practice of non-practice.

If we observe, we see that Mother Earth has the power, the capacity to heal herself and to heal us. You believe in that power, which comes from your own observation, your own experience, not something people tell you and ask you to believe in. Mother Earth can renew herself, can transform herself, can heal herself, and can heal us. That is a fact. If we recognize that fact, faith is there, and we can take refuge. We allow ourselves to be healed by Mother Earth. While sitting, we get the healing. While walking, we get the healing. While breathing, we get the healing. We do not have to do anything at all. Just surrender ourselves to Mother Earth and she will do everything.

When breathing in is taking place—I don't want to say when *you* are breathing in—you say, "Nourishment is taking place; nourishment; nourishment." Allow yourself to be nourished. You are nourished by the air, you are nourished by the sunshine, because the air is breathing you, penetrating you. And the sunshine also penetrates you. Father Sun and Mother Earth are there twenty-four hours a day for us. Even during the night, the sun is present; otherwise, we would freeze. Like Mother Earth, Father Sun is also in us, not only up there, outside us. When I wrote *The Sun My Heart*, I had the insight, the vision, that the sun is my heart outside of me.

If we know the practice of non-practice, we don't have to strive or fight in order to practice. You may believe that you need a lot of medicine, a lot of exercise, to heal. But the only exercise that can heal you is the exercise of non-exercise. Allow yourself to relax and release all the tension in your body, and all the worries

and the fear in your mind, because these things are preventing you from healing. Let go, release, take full refuge in the Earth and in the sun, and allow yourself to be healed. Do this in the four positions: sitting, lying down, walking, standing. Allow Mother Earth and Father Sun to penetrate you, to act for you so you can heal.

It is our experience that no healing is possible without releasing, relaxing. So when you sit, sit in such a way that you don't have to try, you just enjoy deeply your sitting. Nothing to do, nowhere to go. I just enjoy my sitting. With a half an hour of sitting like that, you have a half an hour of healing. You enjoy every in-breath. It's not you who are making the in-breath and out-breath. You don't have to make an in-breath and an out-breath. It will happen by itself.

The in-breath does not need a self in order to happen. I don't have to breathe; the breathing just happens by itself. I just enjoy. If I know how to enjoy the breathing, the breathing will become more pleasant. The quality of breathing will increase, because I don't try to interfere and to force it.

So the sitting should be natural, without effort. The breathing also, and walking also. Don't try to walk; just allow yourself to walk. The walking will take place without you. Only be there and enjoy, because if there is letting go and relaxation, every step is healing, every step is nourishing. No healing is possible without relaxation and letting go.

We should practice this simple thing in order to get healed and to help heal our society and the world. If you do it for one hour, you have one hour of healing. If you do it for one day, there is one day of healing. This is possible. Make it pleasant; make it healing and nourishing. Everything you do, don't try; don't make any effort. Take refuge in Mother Earth. She knows how to do it. She continues to do it for you, just like during the time you were in the womb of your mother.



Edited by Barbara Casey