



## Spending the Night with a Wise Man

By Wendy Marks  
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I spent all night last night with Thich Nhat Hahn. I have an insomnia problem. I didn't always, but for the past few years, even with my regular meditation practice, there are nights when I just can't stay asleep. I get to sleep pretty well but around three in the morning, unless I take an herbal remedy to help me get back to sleep, I'm pretty much awake until the sun comes up, and then I can fall asleep again. So what keeps me awake? Well, pretty much the same thing that keeps everybody awake: finances, work, relationships, family... the usual. Did I remember to call Jane Smith back? Of course I know that there's nothing I can do about it at 3 AM but nonetheless I can worry about it.

Lately my favorite strategy for getting back to sleep has been listening to Ruth Bader Ginsberg's biography. That worked pretty well. I'd set the timer for 15 minutes and be gone ... But I'm down to the last half hour of the book and decided I should probably come up with a better strategy. So I went onto YouTube and found a nice long meditation by Thich Nhat Hahn.

For those of you unfamiliar with his work, Thich Nhat Hanh is a 90-year-old Vietnamese Zen Master Buddhist Monk. He lives in Plum Village in the south of France. Exiled from his home due to his peace activism during the Vietnam war (and again when he returned in 2007), he continues to work for non-violent resolutions for humans and animals. He has written over 100 books, 40 of them in English, taught at Columbia, Princeton, and Cornell, and visited universities and monasteries worldwide. He is known for the movement named "engaged Buddhism."

I figured a 40-minute meditation should do the trick; I would definitely be asleep in 40 minutes. This might work even better than Ruth. But, as I have been in the past, I was captivated by this man, and just rested in contemplation of his teachings. The simple joy that he takes in teaching and practicing mindfulness meditation was literally "breath-giving."

At first it all seemed so simple: listen, get calm, fall asleep. Over the course of my life I have probably done a thousand different meditation practices, including some of Nhat Hanh's, but perhaps last night there was an opening in my heart that allowed me to better hear what he was saying. When he said that he taught little children meditation by using an in-breath of oui and an out-breath of merci, I felt a little piece of my world shift. Breathe in, say yes- breathe out, say thank you. Yep, that about covers it. He went on to talk about the joy of just being alive every minute of the day. This was made more poignant by the fact that he himself had a serious stroke a few years ago, from which he has recovered.

Then he spoke about the gratitude of just waking up each day and what a miracle that was. Everything works! Hooray! A miracle each morning. It was the simplicity of

the man that got me. I have spent much time studying Vedic works, Kabbala, Benedictine theory etc. and here is this guy saying oui, merci- that's the whole game- and talking about how peace is generated through all of our individual practices. WOW! I mean, I knew that, but he was so clear. Get your own self in line, work with community, and we can change the world. You can tell he believes it, after all he has seen, being Vietnamese and living through all that horrible war, famine, and devastation. Oui, merci... Oui, merci... Oui, merci...

Namaste,

Wendy Marks