

Practicing Half-Smiling and Willing Hands

1. HALF-SMILE WHEN YOU FIRST WAKE UP IN THE MORNING.

Hang a branch, any other sign, or even the word “smile” on the ceiling or wall, so that you see it right away when you open your eyes. This sign will serve as your reminder. Use these seconds before you get out of bed to take hold of your breath. Inhale and exhale three breaths gently while maintaining a half-smile. Follow your breaths. Add willing hands to your half-smile, or practice willing hands alone.

2. HALF-SMILE DURING YOUR FREE MOMENTS.

Anywhere you find yourself sitting or standing, half-smile. Look at a child, a leaf, a painting on a wall, or anything that is relatively still, and smile. Inhale and exhale quietly three times.

3. HALF-SMILE WITH WILLING HANDS WHILE YOU ARE LISTENING TO MUSIC.

Listen to a piece of music for 2 or 3 minutes. Pay attention to the words, music, rhythm, and sentiments of the music you are listening to (not your daydreams of other times). Half-smile while watching your inhalations and exhalations. Adopt a willing-hands posture.

4. HALF-SMILE WITH WILLING HANDS WHEN YOU ARE IRRITATED.

When you realize “I’m irritated,” half-smile or adopt a willing-hands posture at once. Inhale and exhale quietly, maintaining a half-smile or willing hands for three breaths.

5. HALF-SMILE IN A LYING-DOWN POSITION.

Lie on your back on a flat surface, without the support of mattress or pillow. Keep your two arms loosely by your sides, and keep your two legs slightly apart, stretched out before you. Maintain willing hands and a half-smile. Breathe in and out gently, keeping your attention focused on your breath. Let go of every muscle in your body. Relax each muscle as though it were sinking down through the floor, or as though it were as soft and yielding as a piece of silk hanging in the breeze to dry. Let go entirely, keeping your attention only on your breath and half-smile. Think of yourself as a cat, completely relaxed before a warm fire, whose muscles yield without resistance to anyone’s touch. Continue for 15 breaths.

6. HALF-SMILE IN A SITTING POSITION.

Sit on the floor with your back straight, or on a chair with your two feet touching the floor. Half-smile. Inhale and exhale while maintaining the half-smile. Let go.

(continued on next page)

Note. Exercises 1 and 3–7 are adapted from *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (pp. 77–81, 93) by Thich Nhat Hanh. Copyright 1975, 1976 by Thich Nhat Hanh. Preface and English translation copyright 1975, 1976, 1987 by Mobi Ho. Adapted by permission of Beacon Press, Boston.

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7. HALF-SMILE WITH WILLING HANDS WHILE YOU ARE CONTEMPLATING A PERSON YOU DISLIKE OR ARE ANGRY WITH.

- Sit quietly. Breathe and smile a half-smile. Hold your hands open with palms up.
- Imagine the image of the person who has caused you suffering.
- Regard the features you dislike the most or find the most repulsive.
- Try to examine what makes this person happy and what causes suffering in his or her daily life.
- Imagine the person's perceptions; try to see what patterns of thought and reason this person follows.
- Examine what motivates this person's hopes and actions.
- Finally, consider the person's consciousness. See whether the person's views and insights are open and free or not, and whether or not the person has been influenced by any prejudices, narrow-mindedness, hatred, or anger.
- See whether or not the person is master of him- or herself.
- Continue until you feel compassion rise in your heart like a well filling with fresh water, and your anger and resentment disappear. Practice this exercise many times on the same person.

Notes/Other times to half-smile and/or form willing hands:
