

# The Fifty Verses

Thich Nhat Hanh's Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness, in six parts. Beneath each verse is a plain-English line to help it land — ours, not Thay's.

## Part I - Store Consciousness Verses 1–15

1

Mind is a field  
in which every kind of seed is sown.  
This mind-field can also be called  
"all the seeds."

*Mind is a field; every seed is sown in its soil.*

2

In us are infinite varieties of seeds—  
seeds of samsara, nirvana, delusion, and enlightenment,  
seeds of suffering and happiness,  
seeds of perceptions, names, and words.

*It holds every kind of seed — both samsara and nirvana.*

3

Seeds that manifest as body and mind,  
as realms of being, stages, and worlds,  
are all stored in our consciousness.  
That is why it is called "store."

*Some seeds are innate, some inherited, some sown in childhood.*

4

Some seeds are innate,  
handed down by our ancestors.  
Some were sown while we were still in the womb,  
others were sown when we were children.

*Every seed is at once individual and collective.*

5

Whether transmitted by family, friends,  
society, or education,  
all our seeds are, by nature,  
both individual and collective.

*The quality of our life reflects the quality of our seeds.*

6

The quality of our life  
depends on the quality  
of the seeds  
that lie deep in our consciousness.

*Store consciousness receives, keeps, and ripens what we water.*

7

The function of store consciousness  
is to receive and maintain  
seeds and their habit energies,  
so they can manifest in the world, or remain dormant.

*Its work is to hold our seeds and habit energies.*

8

Manifestations from store consciousness  
can be perceived directly in the mode of  
things-in-themselves,  
as representations, or as mere images.  
All are included in the eighteen elements of being.

*What we perceive are images the mind itself makes.*

9

### RIPENING & EMANCIPATION

All manifestations bear the marks  
of both the individual and the collective.  
The maturation of store consciousness functions in the same  
way  
in its participation in the different stages and realms of being.

*All things bear both marks; store consciousness ripens through the realms of being.*

10

Unobstructed and indeterminate,  
store consciousness is continuously flowing and changing.  
At the same time, it is endowed  
with all five universal mental formations.

*Ever-flowing and unobstructed, it moves with the five universals.*

11

Although impermanent and without a separate self,  
store consciousness contains all phenomena in the cosmos,  
both conditioned and unconditioned,  
in the form of seeds.

*Impermanent and without a separate self, it holds all things as seeds.*

12

Seeds can produce seeds.  
Seeds can produce formations.  
Formations can produce seeds.  
Formations can produce formations.

*Seeds give rise to seeds, and to formations, and back again.*

### 13

Seeds and formations  
both have the nature of interbeing and interpenetration.  
The one is produced by the all.  
The all is dependent on the one.

*Interbeing: the one contains the all.*

### 14

Store consciousness is neither the same nor different,  
individual nor collective.  
Same and different inter-are.  
Collective and individual give rise to each other.

*Neither the same nor different, neither one self nor many.*

### 15

When delusion is overcome, understanding is there,  
and store consciousness is no longer subject to afflictions.  
Store consciousness becomes Great Mirror Wisdom,  
reflecting the cosmos in all directions.  
Its name is now Pure Consciousness.

*When delusion ends, it becomes Great Mirror Wisdom.*

## Part II - Manas Verses 16–22

### 16

Seeds of delusion give rise  
to the internal formations of craving and afflictions.  
These forces animate our consciousness  
as mind and body manifest themselves.

*Seeds of delusion give rise to craving and inner knots.*

### 17

With store consciousness as its support,  
manas arises.  
Its function is mentation,  
grasping the seeds it considers to be a "self."

*Leaning on store consciousness, manas arises and grasps a self.*

### 18

The object of manas is the mark of a self  
found in the field of representations  
at the point where manas  
and store consciousness touch.

*Manas finds a self where it touches store consciousness.*

### 19

As the ground of wholesome and unwholesome  
of the other six manifesting consciousnesses,  
manas continues discriminating.  
Its nature is both indeterminate and obscured.

*Obscured and indeterminate, it colours the wholesome and unwholesome.*

### 20

Manas goes with the five universals,  
with mati of the five particulars,  
and with the four major and eight secondary afflictions.  
All are indeterminate and obscured.

*Manas moves with the universals, the particulars, and the afflictions.*

### 21

As shadow follows form,  
manas always follows store.  
It is a misguided attempt to survive,  
craving for continuation and blind satisfaction.

*As a shadow follows a form, manas always follows store.*

### 22

When the first stage of the bodhisattva path is attained,  
the obstacles of knowledge and afflictions are transformed.  
At the tenth stage, the yogi transforms the belief in a  
separate self,  
and store consciousness is released from manas.

*On the bodhisattva path, the belief in a separate self dissolves.*

## Part III - Mind Consciousness Verses 23–27

**23**

With manas as its base  
and phenomena as its objects,  
mind consciousness manifests itself.  
Its sphere of cognition is the broadest.

*Resting on manas, mind consciousness opens the widest field.*

**25**

Mind consciousness is the root of all actions of body and speech.  
Its nature is to manifest mental formations, but its existence is not continuous.  
Mind consciousness gives rise to actions that lead to ripening.  
It plays the role of the gardener, sowing all the seeds.

*It is the root of our actions of body and speech.*

**27**

Mind consciousness operates in five ways—  
in cooperation with the five sense consciousnesses  
and independent of them,  
dispersed, concentrated, or unstably.

*It operates in five ways — with the senses, or alone.*

**24**

Mind consciousness has three modes of perception.  
It has access to the three fields of perception and is capable of having three natures.  
All mental formations manifest in it—  
universal, particular, wholesome, unwholesome, and indeterminate.

*It perceives in three modes, three fields, three natures.*

**26**

Mind consciousness is always functioning  
except in states of non-perception,  
the two attainments,  
deep sleep, and fainting or coma.

*It works always, except in a few deep states like dreamless sleep.*

## Part IV - The Sense Consciousnesses Verses 28–30

**28**

Based on mind consciousness,  
the five sense consciousnesses,  
separately or together with mind consciousness,  
manifest like waves on water.

*The five senses arise like waves upon water.*

**30**

They arise with the  
universal, particular, and wholesome,  
the basic and secondary unwholesome,  
and the indeterminate mental formations.

*They arise with the universal, the particular, and the wholesome or not.*

**29**

Their field of perception is things-in-themselves.  
Their mode of perception is direct.  
Their nature can be wholesome, unwholesome, or neutral.  
They operate on the sense organs and the sensation center of the brain.

*They touch things directly, resting on the sense organs.*

## Part V • The Nature of Reality Verses 31–40

**31**

Consciousness always includes  
subject and object.  
Self and other, inside and outside,  
are all creations of the conceptual mind.

*Consciousness always holds both a subject and an object.*

**33**

Birth and death depend on conditions.  
Consciousness is by nature a discriminatory manifestation.  
Perceiver and perceived depend on each other  
as subject and object of perception.

*Birth and death depend on conditions; perceiver and perceived  
inter-are.*

**35**

Space, time, and the four great elements  
are all manifestations of consciousness.  
In the process of interbeing and interpenetration,  
our store consciousness ripens in every moment.

*Space, time, and the elements are all manifestations of mind.*

**37**

When a seed gives rise to a formation,  
it is the primary cause.  
The subject of perception depends on the object of  
perception.  
This is object as cause.

*There is a primary cause, and the object as a cause.*

**39**

Interdependent manifestation has two aspects—  
deluded mind and true mind.  
Deluded mind is imaginary construction.  
True mind is fulfilled nature.

*Two aspects: the deluded mind, and the true mind.*

**32**

Consciousness has three parts—  
perceiver, perceived, and wholeness.  
All seeds and mental formations  
are the same.

*Perceiver, perceived, and the wholeness that holds them.*

**34**

In individual and collective manifestation,  
self and nonself are not two.  
The cycle of birth and death is achieved in every moment.  
Consciousness evolves in the ocean of birth and death.

*Self and non-self are not two; consciousness is an ocean.*

**36**

Beings manifest when conditions are sufficient.  
When conditions lack, they no longer appear.  
Still, there is no coming, no going,  
no being, and no nonbeing.

*When conditions are enough, beings appear — no coming, no going.*

**38**

Conditions that are favorable or non-obstructing  
are supporting causes.  
The fourth type of condition  
is the immediacy of continuity.

*Supporting conditions, and the unbroken flow of continuity.*

**40**

Construction impregnates the mind with seeds of delusion,  
bringing about the misery of samsara.  
The fulfilled opens the door of wisdom  
to the realm of suchness.

*Construction makes samsara; the fulfilled is suchness.*

## Part VI • The Path of Practice Verses 41–50

**41**

Meditating on the nature of interdependence  
can transform delusion into enlightenment.  
Samsara and suchness are not two.  
They are one and the same.

*Looking deeply at interdependence turns delusion into awakening.*

**42**

Even while blooming, the flower is already in the compost,  
and the compost is already in the flower.  
Flower and compost are not two.  
Delusion and enlightenment inter-are.

*The flower is already in the compost; the two inter-are.*

**43**

Don't run away from birth and death.  
Just look deeply into your mental formations.  
When the true nature of interdependence is seen,  
the truth of interbeing is realized.

*Don't flee birth and death — look deeply into your formations.*

**45**

When sunlight shines,  
it helps all vegetation grow.  
When mindfulness shines,  
it transforms all mental formations.

*Like sunlight on plants, mindfulness transforms what it touches.*

**47**

The present moment  
contains past and future.  
The secret of transformation  
is in the way we handle this very moment.

*This present moment holds both past and future.*

**49**

Nothing is born, nothing dies.  
Nothing to hold on to, nothing to release.  
Samsara is nirvana.  
There is nothing to attain.

*Nothing is born, nothing dies; samsara is itself nirvana.*

**44**

Practice conscious breathing  
to water the seeds of awakening.  
Right View is a flower  
blooming in the field of mind consciousness.

*Conscious breathing waters the seeds of awakening.*

**46**

We recognize internal knots and latent tendencies  
so we can transform them.  
When our habit energies dissipate,  
transformation at the base is there.

*Recognise the knots within; transformation happens at the base.*

**48**

Transformation takes place  
in our daily life.  
To make the work of transformation easy,  
practice with a Sangha.

*Transform in daily life — and practise with a sangha.*

**50**

When we realize that afflictions are no other than  
enlightenment,  
we can ride the waves of birth and death in peace,  
traveling in the boat of compassion on the ocean of delusion,  
smiling the smile of non-fear.

*Afflictions are not other than awakening — the smile of non-fear.*