



**THE KINDNESS  
HANDBOOK**  
**A Practical Companion**

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### **EXCERPT: Contentment**

The cultivation of contentment is also a way to cultivate kindness toward ourselves. I was once teaching at a center in New York City, in a lovely room on the tenth floor of a building.

A friend who was attending the class sat close to the windows, which faced another building across a courtyard. She told me that as she was sitting there, feeling great contentment and ease of heart, and thinking, "There is nowhere else in the world I'd rather be, nothing else I'd rather be doing," she glanced across the courtyard and noticed a ballroom dancing class in one of the rooms in the nearby building. She immediately started thinking, "I should be doing ballroom dancing instead of meditating. That would make me happier."

When she told me the story I just laughed — it sounded so typical of our habitual seeking and restlessness, our easy dissatisfaction with where we are if we are not mindful. It reminded me of my quest for the perfect cherry blossom viewing experience in Washington, DC. The famous trees, a gift from Japan in 1912, signal the coming of spring with their beautiful pale pink and white flowers. A few years ago, when I was teaching there, a friend took me to the Tidal Basin to see the cherry blossoms, but because of my schedule I could only go at night. It was glorious, but I kept thinking that something must be missing.

The following year I resolved to go during the day. Another friend was kind enough to bring me. I stood there, awed by the delicate beauty before me, until she said, "Oh no, they are past the peak." Suddenly I realized I was having an inferior experience (she knows she will never live down that remark). I felt a little let down, realizing that I had missed the "best" sighting, and I began to notice every little ragged edge and wilting petal. But it had looked perfectly fine before.

The year after that I was again in DC, and never once made it down to the Tidal Basin. I kept meaning to go, but somehow always found myself too busy. That was very disappointing. One day I was in a cab on my way to meet friends at a restaurant and I passed some cherry trees on the street, in full and magnificent bloom. My heart just swelled at their beauty. Once at the restaurant, someone asked me if I had seen the cherry blossoms and I started to say no, meaning I hadn't made it to the Tidal Basin, hadn't seen an abundance of trees. Then I remembered the trees I had just passed in the cab and the joy the short glimpse had given me. Smiling, I said, "Yes. They were perfect."

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