

Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced Tick-Naught-Han) is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk. He has been living in exile from his native Vietnam since the age of forty. In that year of 1966, he was banned by both the non-Communist and Communist governments for his role in undermining the violence he saw affecting his people. A Buddhist monk since the age of sixteen, Thầy ("teacher," as he is commonly known to followers) earned a reputation as a respected writer, scholar, and leader. He championed a movement known as "engaged Buddhism," which intertwined traditional meditative practices with active nonviolent civil disobedience. This movement lay behind the establishment of the most influential center of Buddhist studies in Saigon, the An Quang Pagoda. He also set up relief organizations to rebuild destroyed villages, instituted the School of Youth for Social Service (a Peace Corps of sorts for Buddhist peace workers), founded a peace magazine, and urged world leaders to use nonviolence as a tool. Although his struggle for cooperation meant he had to relinquish a homeland, it won him accolades around the world.

When Thich Nhat Hanh left Vietnam, he embarked on a mission to spread Buddhist thought around the globe. In 1966, when Thầy came to the United States for the first of many humanitarian visits, the territory was not completely new to him: he had experienced American culture before as a student at Princeton, and more recently as a professor at Columbia. The Fellowship of Reconciliation and Cornell invited Thầy to speak on behalf of Buddhist monks, and he offered an enlightened view on ways to end the Vietnam conflict. He spoke on college campuses, met with administration officials, and impressed social dignitaries. The following year, Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., nominated Thich Nhat Hanh for the same honor. Hanh's Buddhist delegation to the Paris peace talks resulted in accords between North Vietnam and the United States, but his pacifist efforts did not end with the war. He also helped organize rescue missions well into the 1970's for Vietnamese trying to escape from political oppression. Even after the political stabilization of Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh has not been allowed to return home. The government still sees him as a threat-ironic, when one considers the subjects of his teachings: respect for life, generosity, responsible sexual behavior, loving communication, and cultivation of a healthful life style.

Thầy now lives in southwestern France, where he founded a retreat center twelve years ago. At the center, Plum Village, he continues to teach, write, and garden. Plum Village houses only thirty monks, nuns, and laypeople, but thousands from around the globe call it home. Accommodation is readily available for short-term visitors seeking spiritual relief, for refugees in transit, or for activists in need of inspiration. Thich Nhat Hanh gathers people of diverse nationalities, races, religions, and sexes in order to expose them to mindfulness-taking care in the present moment, being profoundly aware and appreciative of life.

Despite the fact that Thầy is nearing seventy, his strength as a world leader and spiritual guide grows. He has written more than seventy-five books of prose, poetry, and prayers. Most of his works have been geared toward the Buddhist reader, yet his teachings appeal to a wide audience. For at least a decade, Thich Nhat Hanh has visited the United States every other year; he draws more and more people with each tour, Christian, Jewish, atheist, and Zen Buddhist alike. His philosophy is not limited to preexistent religious structures, but speaks to the individual's desire for wholeness and inner calm. In 1993, he drew a crowd of some 1,200 people at the National Cathedral in Washington DC, led a retreat of 500 people in upstate New York, and assembled 300 people in West Virginia. His popularity in the United States inspired the mayor of Berkeley, California, to name a day in his honor and the Mayor of New York City declared a Day of Reconciliation during his 1993 visit. Clearly, Thich Nhat Hanh is a human link with a prophetic past, a soft-spoken advocate of peace, Buddhist community, and the average American citizen.

Plum Village

Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh's meditation community in the south of France is an abode of harmony, peace, and ethnic diversity. As I drive past the vineyards, chateaux, and sunflower fields of southwestern France, en route to Plum Village, I find myself wondering why I'm going there for my vacation. Wouldn't I really rather be exploring the nearby medieval town of St. Emilion, famous for its macaroons? Or sampling Bordeaux wines? Or slathering Camembert onto French bread while lounging on the beach? But after five minutes in Plum Village, all doubts vanish. This is clearly not a monastery-children race about laughing and calling to each other in Vietnamese, French, and English; gray-haired women chatter in Vietnamese as they prepare rice and vegetables in the communal kitchen; a group of teenagers sit under a tree playing sitars. But permeating all of this activity is a sense of peace and simplicity that I find deeply refreshing after a week of frenzied tourism.

This interweaving of practice and daily living is the essence of Plum Village, founded in the early 1980's to fulfill Nhat Hanh's decades-old dream of a community where people involved in the work of social transformation could come for rest and spiritual nourishment. Exiled from his native Vietnam because of his antiwar activities, he finally established his spiritual oasis on eighty acres of land in the wine country east of Bordeaux. In exchange for a home, Vietnamese refugees helped clean and renovate the beautiful, rustic, eighteenth-century stone farm buildings and construct additional cinder block structures. Currently, only about fifty residents stay year-round, studying Buddhism, working to help Vietnamese refugees and political prisoners, and tending the 1,250 plum trees, whose crop earns money to send medicine to Vietnam. But for one month each summer, the community is open to the public, and nearly 1,000 visitors--about half Vietnamese and half Westerners--come to practice. This month is by no means a grueling meditation retreat. In fact, Nhat Hanh likes to use the word "treat," rather than "retreat," to describe these gatherings of Buddhist practitioners. The emphasis is on learning skills for bringing mindfulness into everyday life. Family practice is central, and children are wholeheartedly encouraged to participate in all activities, including meditation, tea ceremonies, and Dharma talks. Typically, Thầy directs the first ten minutes of every talk to the children, who then play outside for the rest of the talk. No matter what the activity, visitors are gently reminded to perform it with joy and awareness.

Thầy's 14 Precepts

1. Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. All systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth.
2. Do not think that the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice non-attachment from views in order to be open to receive others' viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout our entire life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times.
3. Do not force others, including children, by any means whatsoever, to adopt your views, whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda, or even education. However, through compassionate dialogue, help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness.
4. Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering by all means, including personal contact and visits, images, sound. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.
5. Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not take as the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.
6. Do not maintain anger or hatred. As soon as anger and hatred arise, practice the meditation on compassion in order to deeply understand the persons who have caused anger and hatred. Learn to look at other beings with the eyes of compassion.

7. Do not lose yourself in dispersion and in your surroundings. Learn to practice breathing in order to regain composure of body and mind, to practice mindfulness, and to develop concentration and understanding.
8. Do not utter words that can create discord and cause the community to break. Make every effort to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.
9. Do not say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people. Do not utter words that cause diversion and hatred. Do not spread news that you do not know to be certain. Do not criticize or condemn things you are not sure of. Always speak truthfully and constructively. Have the courage to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten your own safety.
10. Do not use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit, or transform your community into a political party. A religious community should, however, take a clear stand against oppression and injustice, and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.
11. Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to life. Select a vocation which helps realize your ideal compassion.
12. Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and to prevent war.
13. Possess nothing that should belong to others. Respect the property of others but prevent others from enriching themselves from human suffering or the suffering of other beings.
14. Do not mistreat your body. Learn to handle it with respect. Do not look on your body as only an instrument. Preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of the Way. Sexual expression should not happen without love and commitment. In sexual relationships be aware of future suffering that may be caused. To preserve the happiness of others, respect the rights and commitments of others. Be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world. Meditate on the world into which you are bringing new beings.

“Do not believe that I feel that I follow each and every of these precepts perfectly. I know I fail in many ways. None of us can fully fulfill any of these. However, I must work toward a goal. These are my goal. No words can replace practice, only practice can make the words. The finger pointing at the moon is not the moon.”

The Twentieth Century has been marred by mass violence and enormous bloodshed. With the development of technology, humanity now has the power to "conquer" Nature. We have even begun to intervene in the chemistry of life, adapting it to our own ends. At the same time, despite new and faster ways to communicate, we have become very lonely. Many have no spiritual beliefs. With no spiritual ground, we live only with the desire to satisfy our private pleasures.

We no longer believe in any ideology or faith, and many proclaim that God is dead. Without an ideal and a direction for our lives, we have been uprooted from our spiritual traditions, our ancestors, our family, and our society. Many of us, particularly young people, are heading towards a life of consumption and self-destruction.

Ideological wars, AIDS, cancer, mental illness, and alcohol and drug addiction have become major burdens of this century. At the same time, progress in the fields of electronic and biological technology are creating new powers for mankind. In the 21st century, if humans cannot master themselves, these new powers will lead us and other living beings to mass destruction.

During the 20th century many seeds of wisdom have also sprouted. Science, especially physics and biology, has discovered the nature of interconnectedness, interbeing, and non-self. The fields of psychology and sociology have discovered much of these same truths. We know that this is, because that is, and this is like this, because that is like that. We know that we will live together or die together, and that without understanding, love is impossible.

From these insights, many positive efforts have recently been made. Many of us have worked to take care of the environment, to care for animals in a compassionate way, to reduce the consumption of meat, to abandon smoking and drinking alcohol, to do social relief work in underdeveloped countries, to campaign for peace and human rights, to promote simple living and consumption of health food, and to learn the practice of Buddhism as an art of living, aimed at transformation and healing. If we are able to recognize these positive developments of wisdom and action, they will become a bright torch of enlightenment, capable of showing mankind the right path to follow in the 21st century. Science and technology can then be reoriented to help build a new way of life moving in the direction of a living insight, as expressed in terms of interconnectedness, interbeing, and non-self.

If the 20th century was the century of humans conquering Nature, the 21st century should be one in which we conquer the root causes of the suffering in human beings: our fears, ego, hatred, greed, etc. If the 20th century was characterized by individualism and consumption, the 21st century can be characterized by the insights of interbeing. In the 21st century, humans can live together in true harmony with each other and with nature, as bees live together in their bee hive or as cells live together in the same body, all in a real spirit of democracy and equality. Freedom will no longer be just a kind of liberty for self-destruction, or destruction of the environment, but the kind of freedom that protects us from being overwhelmed and carried away by craving, hatred, and pain.

The art of mindful living expressed in concrete terms, as found in the Five Mindfulness Trainings, can be the way for all of us. The Trainings point us in the right direction for the 21st century. Returning to one's root spiritual tradition, we can find and restore the equivalent values and insights. This is a most urgent task for us all.

I respectfully propose to all Venerable Monks, Nuns, and Lay people to carefully reflect upon the following recommendations, and to contribute some part in helping to create the direction for mankind in the New Century:

1. We should continue to set up monasteries and practice centers. These centers can organize retreats: one day, three days, seven days, twenty-one days, ninety days, etc. for monastics and for lay people, aimed at developing our capacity for transformation and healing. Activities at these centers should cultivate understanding and compassion and teach the art of Saṃgha building. Temples and practice centers should embody a true spiritual life, and should be places where young people can get in touch with their spiritual roots. They should be centers where the practice of non-attachment to views according to the Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing can be experienced. To cultivate tolerance according to these trainings will prevent our country and mankind from getting caught in future cycles of religious and ideological wars.
2. We should study and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings in the context of a family, and establish our family as the basic unit for a larger Saṃgha. Practicing deep listening and mindful speech, we will create harmony and happiness, and feel rooted in our own family. Each family should set up a home altar for spiritual and blood ancestors. On important days, the entire family should gather to cultivate the awareness and appreciation of their roots and origins, thus deepening their consciousness of these spiritual and blood ancestors. Accepting the stream of ancestors in our own being, we draw on their strengths and recognize their weaknesses, in order to transform generations of suffering. Each family should recognize the importance of having one member of their family devote his or her life to the learning and practice of the Dharma, as a monastic or a lay person. The family should invest in, support, and encourage this family member.
3. We should give up our lives of feverish consumption, and transfer all merits of action created by thoughts, speech, and work to the Saṃgha. Our happiness should arise from understanding, compassion, and harmony, and not from consumption. We should see the happiness of the Saṃgha as our own happiness.
4. We should invest the time and energy of our daily life in the noble task of Saṃgha building. We should share material things that can be used collectively by the Saṃgha, such as houses, cars, television,

computers, etc. We should give up alcohol, drugs, and smoking. We should learn to live simply, so that we may have more time to live our daily life deeply and with freedom. Living simply, we become capable of touching the wonders of life, of transformation and healing, and of realizing our ideal of compassion in the educational, cultural, spiritual, and social domains of our lives.

The 21st century is a green, beautiful hill with an immense space, having stars, moons, and all wonders of life. Let us climb the hill of the next century, not as separate individuals but as a Samgha.

Man is not Our Enemy

by Dhyana Master Nhat Hanh

I still remember the time when in my work for the peace movement (around 1963-1973) I was often accused of not being able to tell friends from enemies. At that time I and my friends based our struggle for peace on the realisation that "man is not our enemy" but fanaticism, hatred, ambition and violence. Because of this standpoint we were condemned by both warring parties. Our greatest crime was that we saw people of both sides as our brothers whether they were on the communist or the anti-Communist side. The collection of poems called *With Joined Palms We Pray for the White Dove to Appear* published underground in Saigon in the year 1964 was opposed by both warring parties. It was confiscated by one of them and condemned on the radio by the other.

The Green Sun

I still adhere to my standpoint of those times but now I have gone farther. Before I used to say our enemy is ambition, hatred, discrimination and violence but for the past twenty years or more I have no longer wanted to call these negative mental formations enemies which need to be destroyed. I have seen that they can be transformed into positive energies such as understanding and love, just like a gardener can transform rubbish into green manure which can be used to grow flowers and vegetables. For the last thirty years I have been practising and teaching Buddhism in the West from this perspective called the insight of *interbeing* which is explained in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. *Interbeing* can be translated into French as *inter-être* and into German as *intersein*. My friends in the West who have been able to learn and practice according to this insight have been able to transform greatly and have found much happiness.

If you wish to have the insight of Interbeing you only need to look at a basket of fresh green vegetables which you have just picked. Looking deeply you will see the sunshine, clouds, compost, gardener and hundreds of thousands of elements more. Vegetables cannot arise on their own, they can only arise when there is sun, clouds, earth etc. If you take the sun out of the basket of vegetables the vegetables will no longer be there. If you take the clouds away it is the same.

Let us take another example. Let us look at the only legal Buddhist organisation in Vietnam which people jokingly call the Government Congregation. If we look at it we shall see the elements which have created it, both positive and negative. Among these elements we see the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam represented by monks such as Huyen Quang, Quang Do, Duc Nhuan, Tue Sy, Khong Tanh etc. Because these monks have struggled keenly, the monks in the Government congregation such as Thien Sieu, Minh Chau, Tri Tinh, Tri Quang - have been allowed by the government to translate and publish Buddhist works and to organise a Groundwork for Buddhist Studies etc. The more the monks of the Unified Buddhist Church put up a struggle, are imprisoned, the more space the monks of the Government Congregation have to work. Thus the monks of the Unified Buddhist Church are those who have and who are supporting the Government Congregation in the most positive way. If you say they oppose the Government Congregation you have not yet seen the deep truth from the inside and have not understood

interbeing. The monks Huyen Quang, Quang Do, Duc Nhuan, if they were to look into the Institute of Buddhist Studies, Institute of Buddhist Research, the work of translating the Vietnamese Canon etc. could smile and say: "Do not think that this is your work alone. We have been helping you realise these things. We have been working together." Monks such as Thich Thien Sieu and Minh Chau when they look into the struggles of the Unified Buddhist Church could also smile, feel gratitude and say: "Thanks to your struggles the government has eased up and allowed us to do some work on behalf of the Buddha. We are not so naive as to say: 'What have you managed to achieve in all those years of opposition? Only we who do not oppose the government have been able to do this work.'" With the insight of interbeing monks of both congregations could look with love and understanding at each other, without needing to blame anyone, because they are all able to see that the monks of both congregations are the manifestations of bodhisattvas, all of them working for their ideal and for the people and both sides can be happy because neither side feels hatred or discrimination. If we continue to blame each other and be angry with each other we are still the victims of people outside who want to divide. If we have the insight into Interbeing that person will not be able to divide us, bring about the situation of hens in the same coop fighting each other. One side wears the colours of the Unified Buddhist Church and the other side wears the colours of the government. To fight each other because of the colours we are wearing is not intelligent, it is to lack the wisdom of interbeing. For the last thirty years there has not been a moment when I have not looked at all Buddhist monks as my brothers, whether they are part of the Government Congregation or the Unified Congregation.

The King of the Land of So Loses His Bow

For the last 30 years a number of people in Vietnam and elsewhere continue to blame me for being too close to Christians and Communists. They just want me to be close to Buddhists and anti-communists. I have tried to remind them that my actions are always based on the perception that Man is not our enemy. I want everyone to have the chance to live and the right to live happily. However not everyone has been able to accept this attitude of mine easily. My practice is to be able to embrace both Communists and Christians because I cannot just embrace Buddhists and anti-communists. Narrowness, fanaticism and prejudice are not just found among Christians and Communists. Among Buddhists there is a fair share of narrowness, fanaticism and prejudice which has brought about no small amount of suffering for families and the individuals who have prejudice or against whom the prejudice is directed. Many, including monks and nuns, who claim to be Buddhists have reached such a level of corruption, cruelty and prejudice that their children or disciples have not been able to bear it, let alone other people. They break the precepts of killing, wrong speech, sexual misconduct, wounding themselves and their society in no small measure. There are Protestants, Catholics and Communists who are far better than these Buddhists, far more wholesome and much closer to the Buddha's teachings. Thus to practise in the spirit of Buddhism I wish to embrace and love everyone without exception including all those who have made me and my people suffer. To embrace people does not mean to agree with their narrowness, prejudice and fanaticism. When they lack tolerance, compassion and the ability to look deeply human beings become narrow, prejudiced and fanatical. The responsibility of Buddhist practitioners is to help people untie (release) that narrowness, prejudice and fanaticism, to help people become understanding, tolerant and compassionate, and it is not to pick up a gun and destroy them.

In Buddhism we are taught to love according to the principles of loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity. Equanimity means not discriminating against. True love is the love which includes and can embrace all people and all species which are suffering. Whenever we see someone suffering we love that person, we do not have to know whether they are Buddhist, Communist or Christian. Practising in this spirit I have written dialogues with Christians and Communists in words of Joy, Equanimity and Compassion. Books which are aimed at dialoguing with Christians such as *Living Buddha Living Christ* and *Going Home*, *Jesus and Buddha as Brothers* have been written by me using the kind of language which

Buddhism calls loving speech. They have helped hundreds of thousands of Christians understand Buddhism, to see the true spirit of Christianity and to let go of a narrow and prejudiced attitude. Christians, including priests and nuns, have written letters thanking me deeply. As far as Catholics in Vietnam are concerned I have also used this loving speech. In the book *Lotus in a Sea of Fire* (1966) I said clearly that if our Catholic friends in Vietnam go in a direction of people's Catholicism and are determined to live in harmony with all other segments of the people there is no reason for Vietnam not opening its arms to welcome them into the heart of the nation. I have also used loving speech towards Vietnamese Communists, especially in the book *Dialogue, the Door to Peace* (1967). At that time not many Communists wanted to listen to me but now I think there are many Communists who read my books and hear my message. I know that there are many cadres and security police who have had the opportunity to read my books and hear my cassettes and thanks to that have transformed a great deal of their suffering. Sometimes I have seen the mentality of the cadres and security police, especially the security police in the cultural and religious sectors. From the highest places to the lowest in the government the policy is that Thay Nhat Hanh's books and cassettes should not be published. For that reason whenever my books and cassettes are brought into Saigon or Hanoi they are confiscated, either at the airport or by the post office. I tell my friends over here: "Do not be upset, because the people who confiscate books and tapes have a chance to listen to and read those books and tapes." That is thinking in the spirit of the King of the Land of So who lost his bow. But the people of the land got back the bow so nothing was lost.

From time to time the security police go on a raid and confiscate my books and tapes which have been printed and copied underground in every part of the country. The truth is that there are security police who after confiscating or censoring my books and tapes (without returning them to the person who properly has the right to receive them) have sat and read or listened to them all night. They have realised how interesting and beneficial these books and tapes are and have been able to transform much of their suffering through them. Nevertheless, after censoring the books and tapes they do not return them to the people who by right should receive them. Sometimes they do return them, but first of all they erase all the images and sounds on the tape. Before that they have copied the tapes, sending one copy to the Ministry of the Interior and keeping another copy for themselves to listen to from time to time. I understand and love them, because they are afraid of being reprimanded by their superiors and losing their job. There are security police who, when they have read my books or heard my tapes, are asked: "Why are those books and tapes not allowed to be circulated? Can you see in the books and tapes ways of thought which are harmful for the country, the people or the government?" They have replied: "Everything taught by Thay Nhat Hanh in these books and tapes is very interesting, wonderful, in accord with the spiritual path and very beneficial for the spiritual life and the human heart. The reason why we do not allow the books and tapes to be circulated is that we do not know whether behind the teachings and practice of Thay is hidden a political conspiracy or not?" They have spoken out what they really feel - their fear and suspicion. This fear and suspicion is not theirs alone, it is also that of their superiors.

These cadres and security police also from time to time manifest their awakened understanding and compassion. They turn a blind eye to the underground publication of some of my books and tapes. They do this because they know that the books and tapes have a good effect on the people at this point in the life of the country and the people. They know only too well that social evils abound, corruption, drug abuse, prostitution, hatred, children running away, marriages breaking up, divorce, families broken, pornographic films and books. While politicians and educators have almost given up trying to clear away these huge mountains of garbage, the tapes and books of Thay Nhat Hanh which encourage people to practice being awake, reconcile with each other and return to a pure way of life are prohibited and confiscated. The security police are forced to censor and confiscate them but in their heart of hearts they have qualms about it. They do not feel one bit at ease about this policy and that is why they have sometimes turned a blind eye to the underground publication and copying of some cultural and moral works. Monks, nuns and laypeople, whenever they conduct relief operations for the victims of flooding

or poverty often slip into the gift packages a chant or short sutra in the belief that this gift will help relieve their material distress only for a couple of weeks but the sutra will relieve their suffering and sorrow for much longer. There are security police who are narrow, prejudiced and determined not to give permission saying that these chants are political handbills. However, there are security police who are happy about, give secret approval to and even like the teachings. We have wholesome roots in our hearts. If we are accepted and dealt with in a wholesome way the seeds of compassion and tolerance in us will be watered. If we are always despised, hated and opposed we shall lose that opportunity. Therefore however severe and unpleasant the security police in the cultural and religious sectors are, the monks, nuns and lay people who know how to practise are still sweet and patient with them. One day or another with this kind of treatment they will also have a chance to transform. A security policeman in Hue was heard to say: "Thay Nhat Hanh lives far away, I cannot do anything about him. But you are here right in our hands. I can crush you into little pieces whenever I want." When I heard that I felt much compassion for that security policeman. Someone who just wanted to perform some social service for his fellow countrymen, why should we crush them into small pieces?

A True Change for the Better

My children and brothers, whether you are descendants of the Buddha, of Jesus Christ, of Communism or Anti-Communism, you are all children of Vietnam and all my children and brothers. Whenever someone is suffering and needs help I have to come and help them. It is only in this way that we can love in the spirit Buddha taught.

All of us have made mistakes - whether we are Buddhist, Catholic, Communist, the Party or the Government. Because we are so sure of our perceptions, because we are fanatic and prejudiced we could have wounded painfully our people, but if we can wake up and know how truly to begin anew we could learn from the painful lessons of the past. There are security police and cadres who have made us miserable but with Buddha's love we continue to want them to have a chance to change for the better, to make rubbish into compost and flowers, to produce understanding and love so that their life will be relieved of suffering and we can have more space to live in. If we are too trusting in ideologies we can bring about great distress for our people and our country where millions have already died in conflict. In the past (in 1964 when the collection of poems *With Joined Palms We Pray for the White Dove to Appear* was published) I said: "Ideologies are the fetters of the results of wrong action used to bind the body of our people." Tran Manh Hao puts it better than I do: "The paths which are like rods of history which whip our country." When we wake up and see our mistakes the determination to follow the path of love and compassion is always the thing we want most.

Since I have been in exile it has given me great happiness to be able to continue to write books for my countrymen to read. From 1966 although some of my books have been published in South Vietnam it has had to be under a pen name because I have committed the crime of calling for peace. From 1975 my books have only been copied by hand, and then printed and circulated underground. I myself do not know who has organised the printing and publishing. Because of my countrymen's need to learn and to practise there are people or groups of people who without regard for their own safety made possible the printing and publishing of those books. The same applies to audio and video cassette tapes. The former Prime Minister Pham Van Dong has read the three volumes of the *History of Vietnamese Buddhism* which I wrote and expressed his admiration of it. In the Ministries of Home and Foreign Affairs many have read my books especially in the Ministry of Home Affairs. All the Vietnamese Ambassadors in the West have also read my books. I am certain that many communists have read and greatly liked my books. There are elderly Party officers and members who have read books such as *Old Path White Clouds*, *Going Back Home*, *Peace is Every Step*....and liked them so much. They have felt they have rediscovered the clear ideal of their youth. I have the feeling that nearly everyone who was once infatuated by Marxist ideology but no longer has any faith in it, are those who are happiest when reading my books. Countless people

have taken up following a religion or the Party with all the purity and zeal of youth. However, after thirty years of their religious practice or following the Party they have felt they have lost a great deal because they have suffered from their religion or the Party. Such people can more easily accept the Buddhist practice of Loving Kindness, Compassion, Joy and Equanimity than anyone else. They are the people who gain most happiness from reading my books and hearing my tapes. They are very silent and very content whenever they meet someone who is truly practising. However, they are also very unhappy when they see monks and nuns who are corrupt going in search of honours or sensual pleasure without knowing they are betraying their ideal of monkhood. Among the young, children and grandchildren of the politicians and cadres living in Vietnam or outside of Vietnam, many read my books eagerly. In the Vatican there are many bishops who have read my books. To me it is not important whether people agree or do not agree with what I write. What is important is whether they are ready or not to read what I have written. Some people start reading in order to examine and censor but as they read they enjoy what they are reading because they feel it is benefitting them, making them feel well and light.

The Path of Loving Kindness

Having learnt and practised the teachings of Interbeing I no longer see anyone as my enemy and in my heart is a feeling of lightness and immense space. I do not even feel hatred towards people who have made me or my people suffer because I know how to look at them with the eyes of understanding and love. You may ask: "Then are you going to give that band of mad, cruel, fanatical thieves and murderers freedom to continue to destroy and make misery without doing anything to stop them?" No! We have to do everything we can to stop them, we cannot allow them to continue to kill, plunder, oppress and destroy, but our actions will never be motivated by hatred. We have to stop them, not allowing them to cause misery. If necessary we can bind them, put them in prison, but this action has to be directed by our bodhisattva's heart and while we act like this we continue to maintain our loving-kindness, wanting them to be able to have a chance to wake up, and change. Acting from a basis of Loving-Kindness, Compassion, Joy and Equanimity we automatically choose the path of non-violence whereon we make an effort to protect the life of all species as much as we possibly can. Obviously we cannot be absolutely non-violent, just as my plate of steamed greens cannot be 100% vegetarian, because when we boil vegetables so many bacteria die. However, going in the direction of non-violence we can spare bloodshed and protect the life of all species to the greatest possible extent.

In a struggle against a foreign invasion, all activities in the fields of information, culture and education aimed at purposefully creating trust, unification of the whole people, carrying out a policy of non-co-operation with the invaders can be directed wholly in the spirit of openness, tolerance and non-violence. If we succeed in these fields the military only need play a very small role. Even if we are forced to use military strength, we can still act in the spirit of non-violence, sparing bloodshed as much as is possible; the bloodshed of our people and of the invaders. So, the military can also practise loving-kindness and compassion as can moral leaders, statesmen and humanists. The great military victory of the Tran era (14th C.) against the invasions of the Mongols was largely possible because of the work of moral leadership, statesmanship and culture of the Tran era. The military factor is not the only factor which leads to success. The movement for democratic rights in the time of Mr. Diem was the same, the army only played a concluding role which, though necessary, was very minor. Whether our country and people, having come out of this difficult period, make progress or not depends on whether or not we know how to practise in order to give up discrimination and hatred. If we call for unification but continue to discriminate against each other, hate and eliminate each other, when can there be true unification? To be able to look well in order to see that the other person is also our brother or sister and not to try and find ways to remove that person from our daily life is the learning and practice we all have to undertake, whether we are Buddhist or not. Some people are amiable, some are difficult and some are very difficult. However if we are a descendant of the Buddha we have to try to love everyone according to the principle

"Man is not our enemy". Our enemy is not our enemy or, in other words, the person who hates us is not the person we hate. We do not have enemies. If we can see that and act according to that, when at last we lie down and close our eyes we shall be able to smile.