



Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community, and the World

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Creating True Peace is both a profound work of spiritual guidance and a practical blueprint for peaceful inner change and global change. It is the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh's answer to our deep-rooted crisis of violence and our feelings of helplessness, victimization, and fear. As a world-renowned writer, scholar, spiritual leader, and Zen Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh is one of the most visible, revered activists for peace and Engaged Buddhism -- the practice he created that combines mindful living and social action. Having lived through two wars in his native Vietnam, he works to prevent conflict of all kinds -- from the internal violence of individual thoughts to interpersonal and international aggression.

Now, in this new book, perhaps his most important work to date, Thich Nhat Hanh uses a beautiful blend of visionary insight, inspiring stories of peacemaking, and a combination of meditation practices and instruction to show us how to take Right Action. A book for people of all faiths, it is a magnum opus -- a compendium of peace practices that can help anyone practice nonviolent thought and behavior, even in the midst of world upheaval.

More than any of his previous books, *Creating True Peace* tells stories of Thich Nhat Hanh and his students practicing peace during wartime. These demonstrate that violence is an outmoded response we can no longer afford. The simple, but powerful daily actions and everyday interactions that Thich Nhat Hanh recommends can root out violence where it lives in our hearts and minds and help us discover the power to create peace at every level of life -- personal, family, neighborhood, community, state, nation, and world.

Whether dealing with extreme emotions and challenging situations or managing interpersonal and international conflicts, Thich Nhat Hanh relies on the 2,600-year-old traditional wisdom and scholarship of the Buddha, as well as other great scriptures. He teaches us to look more deeply into our thoughts and lives so that we can know what to do and what not to do to transform them into something better. With a combination of courage, sweetness, and candor, he tells us that we can make a difference; we are not helpless; we can create peace here and now. *Creating True Peace* shows us how.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

If Vietnamese Zen monk and peace activist Nhat Hanh has said the same thing over and over again, it's because his message can't be restated too often in a violent world: peace can be found in every step, every breath. Nhat Hanh's books, many of which are transcriptions of talks, have ranged widely, from poetry to Buddhist commentaries to reflections on Jesus. This newest is filled with meditations and practices for individuals and families; since relatively few people choose monasticism as a lifestyle, the practice of household peace through deep listening and loving speech is eminently useable. Moreover, as Nhat Hanh shows in his stories and examples of working with people in conflict, such techniques underlie peace in the political arena as well. Like the Dalai Lama, Nhat Hanh possesses an extraordinary ability to speak simply about complex Buddhist teachings such as the true, transient nature of existence and how to act mindfully and compassionately in light of that view. His simplicity goes hand in hand with a challenging austerity, counseling against the consumption of things that lead to unmindfulness, like alcohol or "toxic" media products that feed inner "seeds," or tendencies, toward violence. Written in Nhat Hanh's characteristically soothing way, this is a practical and basic book of his profound and comprehensive teachings, especially for families with children.

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About the Author

Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced *tik-not-hawn*) is a world-renowned writer, scholar, spiritual leader, and Zen Buddhist monk. Since age sixteen, he has been a Buddhist monk, a peace activist, and a seeker of the way. He has survived three wars, persecution, and more than thirty years of exile from his native Vietnam, when he was banned by both the non-Communist and Communist governments for his role in undermining the violence he saw affecting his people. He is still the master of one of the most prominent temples in Vietnam, and his lineage is traceable directly to the Buddha himself. A prolific author, Nhat Hanh has written more than one hundred books of philosophy, poetry, and fiction. Currently, Nhat Hanh lives in a monastic community in southwestern France that he founded, called Plum Village, where he teaches, writes, gardens, and works to help refugees worldwide. More information can be found at PlumVillage.org.

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Chapter One: What Is True Peace?

True peace is always possible. Yet it requires strength and practice, particularly in times of great difficulty. To some, peace and nonviolence are synonymous with passivity and weakness. In truth, practicing peace and nonviolence is far from passive. To practice peace, to make peace alive in us, is to actively cultivate understanding, love, and compassion, even in the face of misperception and conflict. Practicing peace, especially in times of war, requires courage.

All of us can practice nonviolence. We begin by recognizing that, in the depths of our consciousness, we have both the seeds of compassion and the seeds of violence. We become aware that our mind is like a garden that contains all kinds of seeds: seeds of understanding, seeds of forgiveness, seeds of mindfulness, and also seeds of ignorance, fear, and hatred. We realize that, at any given moment, we can behave with

either violence or compassion, depending on the strength of these seeds within us.

When the seeds of anger, violence, and fear are watered in us several times a day, they will grow stronger. Then we are unable to be happy, unable to accept ourselves; we suffer and we make those around us suffer. Yet when we know how to cultivate the seeds of love, compassion, and understanding in us every day, those seeds will become stronger, and the seeds of violence and hatred will become weaker and weaker. We know that if we water the seeds of anger, violence, and fear in us, we will lose our peace and our stability. We will suffer and we will make those around us suffer. But if we cultivate the seeds of compassion, we nourish peace within us and around us. With this understanding, we are already on the path of creating peace.

The teachings of this book are offered to help anyone who aspires to lead a life of nonviolence. These practices are the living legacy of the Buddha and of my ancestral teachers. They are as powerful today as they were at the time of the Buddha's awakening, 2,600 years ago. Together, they form a practical manual of peace -- for you, your family, your community, and the world. At this time, with so much conflict in the world, I am offering this book to help us realize that violence is not inevitable. Peace is there for us in every moment. It is our choice.

The Nature of War

In 1946, during the French-Indochina War, I was a novice monk at the Tu Hieu Temple in Hue, central Vietnam. At that time, the city of Hue was occupied by the French army. One day, two French soldiers arrived at our temple. While one stayed in the jeep outside the temple gate, the other came in, carrying a gun, and demanded all of our rice. We had only one sack of rice for all the monks and he wanted to take it away. The soldier was young, about twenty, and hungry. He looked thin and pale, as if he had malaria, which I also had at that time. I had to obey his order to carry our heavy bag of rice to the jeep. It was a long distance, and as I staggered under the bag's precious weight, anger and unhappiness rose up in me. They were taking the little rice we had, leaving our community without any food. Later, to my relief, I learned that one of the older monks had buried a large container of rice on the temple grounds, deep in the earth.

Many times over the years I have meditated on this French soldier. I have seen that, in his teens, he had to leave his parents, brothers, sisters, and friends to travel across the world to Vietnam, where he faced the horrors of killing my countrymen or being killed. I have often wondered whether the soldier survived and was able to return home to his parents. It is very likely that he did not survive. The French-Indochina War lasted many years, ending only with the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Accord in 1954. After looking deeply, I came to realize that the Vietnamese were not the only victims of the war; the French soldiers were victims as well. With this insight, I no longer had any anger toward the young soldier. Compassion for him was born in me, and I only wished him well.

I did not know the French soldier's name and he did not know mine, but when we met we were already enemies. He came and was prepared to kill me for our food, and I had to comply with his order to protect myself and my fellow monks. The two of us were not, by nature, enemies. Under different circumstances, we could have become close friends, even loving each other as brothers. It was only the war that separated us and brought violence between us.

This is the nature of war: it turns us into enemies. People who have never met kill each other out of fear. War creates so much suffering -- children become orphans, entire cities and villages are destroyed. All who suffer through these conflicts are victims. Coming from a background of such devastation and suffering, having experienced the French-Indochina War and the Vietnam War, I have the deep aspiration to prevent war from ever happening again.

It is my prayer that nations will no longer send their young people to fight each other, not even in the name of peace. I do not accept the concept of a war for peace, a "just war," as I also cannot accept the concept of "just slavery," "just hatred," or "just racism." During the wars in Vietnam, my friends and I declared ourselves neutral; we took no sides and we had no enemies, North or South, French, American, or Vietnamese. We saw that the first victim of war is the person who perpetrates it. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye only makes the whole world blind."

The Nature of Peace

During the war in Vietnam, those of us who practiced nonviolence learned that it is truly possible to live happily and free from hatred, even among people who hate us. But to do so, we need to be calm, to see clearly what the real situation is and what it is not, and then to wake up and act with courage. Peace is not simply the absence of violence; it is the cultivation of understanding, insight, and compassion, combined with action. Peace is the practice of mindfulness, the practice of being aware of our thoughts, our actions, and the consequences of our actions. Mindfulness is at once simple and profound. When we are mindful and cultivate compassion in our daily lives, we diminish violence each day. We have a positive effect on our family, friends, and society.

Some people think there is a difference between mindfulness and meditation, but this is not correct. The practice of mindfulness is simply to bring awareness into each moment of our lives. Mindful living is an art. You do not have to be a monk or live in a monastery to practice mindfulness. You can practice it anytime, while driving your car or doing housework. Driving in mindfulness will make the time in your car joyful, and it will also help you avoid accidents. You can use the red traffic light as a signal of mindfulness, reminding you to stop and enjoy your breathing. Similarly, when you do the dishes after dinner, you can practice mindful breathing so the time of dish washing is pleasant and meaningful. Do not feel you have to rush. If you hurry, you waste the time of dish washing. The time you spend washing dishes and doing all your other everyday tasks is precious. It is a time for being alive. When you practice mindful living, peace will bloom during your daily activities.

Please use the guided meditations in this book to help you practice mindfulness and nonviolence. You can use these practices individually, and you and your family can enjoy them together. These step-by-step meditations help us to calm our emotions and to see our "interbeing" -- to see that there is no separation between you and me, between you and any other person, to see that we all "inter-are." As my friend Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, "All life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny."

The spiritual teachings of all traditions help us cultivate the seeds of compassion, nonviolence, inclusiveness, and reconciliation. They show us the way out of fear and conflict: Hatred cannot be stopped by hatred. Violence should not be responded to with violence. The only way out of violence and conflict is for us to embrace the practice of peace, to think and act with compassion, love, and understanding. Yet many of us have lost faith in these teachings and think that they are unrealistic and outdated. Instead, we invest ourselves in the pursuit of fame and wealth, thinking that these will make us happy. When we are honest with ourselves and look deeply into our hearts, however, we will see that even if we had unlimited wealth and power, we could still live in fear. The only way out of violence and conflict is for us to embrace the practice of peace, to think and act with compassion, love, and understanding.

A Personal Peace Treaty

Included in these pages are examples of agreements that you can make with yourself, your partner, and your family. These treaties commit us to practice reconciliation and communication with loved ones, friends, colleagues, and other people with whom we live and work. They are concrete commitments to transform our lives.

To make a personal peace treaty we can write: "Dear Self, I promise to practice and live my daily life in a way that will not touch or water the seed of violence within me." We are determined in every moment to protect ourselves from negative thinking and to nourish loving-kindness within us. We can also share this commitment with our beloved ones. We can go to our partner, our son or daughter, and say, "My dear, my beloved one, if you really love me, please do not water the seed of violence in me. Please water the seed of compassion in me. I promise to do the same for you."

You can honor this commitment in many ways. You can avoid situations that make you angry or create conflict with others. For instance, when you read a magazine you may encounter ideas and images that water the seeds of hatred and fear in you. Or while you are conversing with someone, the discussion may make you upset and you may feel anger rise up in you. During these moments, your practice is to become aware that the inner seeds of anger, fear, and hatred are being watered and that these emotions can lead to violence in your thinking, in your speech, and in your actions. Please put away any reading material that does not nurture love and understanding. Please avoid taking part in conversations that water negative seeds in you. Let your beloved ones know how they can support you in preventing irritation and anger from growing in you.

In a similar way, you can support your beloved ones in the practice of peace. When they share with you what makes them sad, angry, or depressed, take note, and with kindness act in their best interests. Try to avoid doing or saying things that you know will water the seeds of conflict within them. This is a concrete, intelligent way to practice peace.

Many young people alive today have not endured the great pain of war. They do not remember the horrors brought about by mass violence. We must help our children awaken to the fact that they have within themselves the capacity for violence and war as well as the capacity for caring and loving-kindness. With mindfulness, we must also teach our children concrete practices that nourish the positive seeds within them and avoid strengthening the negative seeds of anger, craving, and fear. We should begin this learning process when our children are young so that as they grow they have the strength and skill to be calm and to act nonviolently and insightfully.

Before he died, the Buddha instructed his disciples, "Be a lamp unto yourself." In this way, he urges each of us to light the lamp of mindfulness in our own hearts. My dear friends, let us practice energetically so that we may light the way of peace for our beloved ones, for our society, and for future generations.

From Commitment to Action

As a young monk at the Buddhist Institute in Vietnam in the 1940s, I had a deep aspiration to put into action the beautiful teachings of the Buddha that I had received. I had become a monk because of my ideals of service and compassion, but I was deeply disappointed that I had not found the opportunity to express those ideals in the monastic life as we lived it then.

At that time, our country was under foreign rule. We lived in the midst of war and oppression. Yet the teachings and practice offered to us at the Buddhist Institute did not seem to correspond to the reality of our situation. Many of us young people wanted to help others and to respond to the injustice in our society. Many were attracted by Communism because it seemed that the Communist Party offered a real chance to serve our people. So many young people joined the Communists with this sincere aspiration and a beautiful desire

to help only to find themselves fighting and killing their own brothers and sisters.

Fortunately, at that time I was in touch with the writings and teachings of some senior Buddhist monks who showed me the path of peace and nonviolence in the Buddhist tradition. I left the Buddhist Institute because I did not find an appropriate teaching and practice there for responding to the reality of life in Vietnam, but I did not leave monastic life. I stayed a monk and over time, together with like-minded friends, created a small community that combined the practice of mindfulness and dwelling peacefully in the moment with social work. In this way, we helped to initiate the movement of Engaged Buddhism, and our community offered support to the people and villages suffering from the war and political oppression.

Words and thoughts concerning compassionate action that are not put into practice are like beautiful flowers that are colorful but have no fragrance. The practice of mindfulness is already the action of peace. The practice of mindfulness has the power to transform us and to affect the whole world. We have to practice the cultivation of peace individually and in our relationships.

We need to practice peace with our partner, children, friends, neighbors, and society. Only this kind of practice will allow the flower of peace to take root in our families, in our communities, and in the world. Each one of us can draw from the wisdom of his or her own spiritual tradition -- whether it is Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, or any other.

We must examine the way we consume, the way we work, the way we treat people in order to see whether our daily life expresses the spirit of peace and reconciliation, or whether we are doing the opposite. This is the practice of deep looking that will make peace possible in our daily life. There is hope for future generations only if we can put into practice our deep aspiration for a culture of peace and nonviolence. If we cannot take practical measures to bring about a global ethic of nonviolence, we will not have enough strength to face and deal with the difficulties we will encounter in this new century. We can do this. True peace is possible.

Dear Reader, as you read this book, please do so with the understanding that peace is already here and now. It is already a part of you. Please read these pages slowly and calmly, so that the very act of reading is peace. Remember, the practice of peace always begins right here, right now.

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