

From *Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh  
(pp 100–103)

### **“Waging Peace”**

If the earth were your body, you would be able to feel the many areas where it is suffering. War, political and economic oppression, famine, and pollution wreak havoc in so many places. Every day, children are becoming blind from malnutrition, their hands searching hopelessly through mounds of trash for a few ounces of food. Adults are dying slowly in prisons for trying to oppose violence. Rivers are dying, and the air is becoming more and more difficult to breathe. Although the two great superpowers are becoming a little more friendly, they still have enough nuclear weapons to destroy the Earth dozens of times.

Many people are aware of the world's suffering; Their hearts are filled with compassion. They know what needs to be done, and they engage in political, social, and environmental work to try to change things. But after a period of intense involvement, they may become discouraged if they lack the strength needed to sustain a life of action. Real strength is not in power, money, or weapons, but in deep, inner peace.

Practicing mindfulness in each moment of our daily lives, we can cultivate our own peace. With clarity, determination, and patience—the fruits of meditation—we can sustain a life of action and be real instruments of peace. I have seen this piece in people of various religious and cultural backgrounds who spend their time and energy protecting the weak, struggling for social justice, lessening the disparity between rich and poor, stopping the arms race, fighting against discrimination, and watering the trees of love and understanding throughout the world.

### **“Not Two”**

When we want to understand something, we cannot just stand outside and observe it. We have to enter deeply into it and be one with it in order to really understand. If we want to understand a person, we have to feel his feelings, suffer his sufferings, and enjoy his joy. The word “comprehend” is made-up of the Latin roots *cum*, which means “with,” and *prehendere*, which means “to grasp it or pick it up.” to comprehend something means to pick it up and be one with it. There is no other way to understand something. In Buddhism, we call this kind of understanding “non duality.” Not two.

Fifteen years ago, I helped a committee for orphans who were victims of the war in Vietnam. From Vietnam, the social workers sent out applications, one sheet of paper with a small picture of a child in the corner, telling the name, age, and conditions of the orphan. My job was to translate the application from Vietnamese into French in order to seek a sponsor, so that the child would have food to eat and books for school,

and be put into the family of an aunt, an uncle, or a grandparent. Then the committee in France could send the money to the family member to help take care of the child.

Each day I helped translate about thirty applications. The way I did it was to look at the picture of the child. I did not read the application; I just took time to look at the picture of the child. Usually after only thirty or forty seconds, I became one with the child. Then I would pick up the pen and translate the words from the application onto another sheet. Afterwards I realized that it was not me who had translated the application; It was the child and me, who had become one. Looking at his or her face, I felt inspired, and I became the child and he or she became me, and together we did the translation. It is very natural. You don't have to practice a lot of meditation to be able to do that. You just look, allowing yourself to be, and you lose yourself in the child, and the child in you.