

From *Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh  
(pp 101–103)

### **“Healing the Wounds of War”**

If only the United States had had the vision of nonduality concerning Vietnam, we would not have had so much destruction in both countries. The war continues to hurt both Americans and Vietnamese. If we are attentive enough, we can still learn from the war in Vietnam.

Last year we had a wonderful retreat with Vietnam Veterans in America. It was a difficult retreat because many of us could not get free of our pain. One gentleman told me that in Vietnam, he lost four hundred and seventeen people in one battle alone, in one day. Four hundred and seventeen men died in one battle, and he has had to live with that for more than fifteen years. Another person told me that out of anger and revenge, he took the life of children in a village, and after that, he lost all his peace. Ever since that time, he has not been able to sit alone with children in a room. There are many kinds of suffering, and they can prevent us from being in touch with the non suffering world.

We must practice helping each other be in touch. One soldier told me that this retreat was the first time in fifteen years that he felt safe in a group of people. For fifteen years, he could not swallow solid food easily. He could only drink some fruit juice and eat some fruit. He was completely shut off and could not communicate. But after three or four days of practice, he began to open up and talk to people. You have to offer a lot of loving kindness in order to help such a person touch things again. During the retreat, we practiced mindful breathing and smiling, encouraging each other to come back to the flower in us, and to the trees and the blue sky that shelter us.

We had a silent breakfast. We practiced eating breakfast the way I ate the cookie of my childhood. We did things like that, making mindful steps in order to touch the earth, breathing consciously in order to touch the air, and looking at our tea deeply in order to really be in touch with the tea. We sat together, breathed together, walked together, and tried to learn from our experience in Vietnam. The veterans have something to tell their nation about how to deal with other problems that are likely to happen. Problems that will not look different from Vietnam. Out of our sufferings, we should learn something.

We need the vision of interbeing—we belong to each other; We cannot cut reality into pieces. The well-being of “this” is the well-being of “that,” so we have to do things together. Every side is “our side”; There is no evil side. Veterans have experience that makes them the light at the tip of the candle, illuminating the roots of war and the way to peace.