

Thich Nhat Hanh



Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist.

He lives in Plum Village spiritual community in the South of France and travels extensively giving talks on peace and spiritual values. He has been a lifelong peace-activist dedicated to finding peaceful solutions to conflicts. Thich Nhat Hanh has also written extensively on ways to find inner peace and inner happiness. He is credited with coining the term ‘Engaged Buddhism’ – a series of teachings which seek to bring practical Buddhist wisdom into daily life.

He was born Nguyen Xuan Bao, in the city of Quang Ngai in Central Vietnam in 1926. At the age of 16, he entered into a Zen Buddhist monastery and took the name Thich Nhat Hanh. He founded the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS) – this was a voluntary organisation in Vietnam helping to provide education, healthcare services and improving local infrastructure.

In 1960, Thich Nhat Hanh moved to the US, where he studied comparative religion at Princeton University. He became fluent in several languages and was well versed in different religious traditions. During the 1960s, Thich Nhat Hanh was active in supporting non-violent efforts to promote peace in Vietnam – a country racked by civil war. In 1965, Thich Nhat Hanh issued an influential document ‘Call for Peace’. He wrote:

“It is time for North and South Vietnam to find a way to stop the war and help all Vietnamese people live peacefully and with mutual respect.”

Thich Nhat Hanh was also critical of the US involvement in the Vietnam war. In the mid-1960s, he became acquainted with Martin Luther King. Hanh urged King to speak out and denounce the Vietnam war. King was deeply moved by the requests and teachings of Hanh; in 1967, Dr King made his first statements criticising the war in Vietnam. At the time it was highly controversial, though as the war dragged on, Americans became increasingly wary of the conflict. Martin Luther King publicly nominated Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967,

In 1966, Hanh created the order of Inter-Being. This included a retreat centre in Plum Village, France where mindfulness is practiced. Later several centres were established

around the world and are open to both monks and lay people, who are able to visit for periods of retreat. A diverse range of people have visited the Mindfulness centres, attracted by the opportunity to practise meditation and mindfulness. Hanh's approach has been to combine different elements of Buddhist traditions, such as Zen and Mahayana.

“Many people think excitement is happiness.... But when you are excited you are not peaceful. True happiness is based on peace.”

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Hanh has concentrated on more practical elements of Buddhism and places less emphasis on dogma. His books such as *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* have become worldwide best-sellers.

A cornerstone of Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching is the simplicity of being in the present moment.

His book *Peace is Every Step* is available in the library and features as one of our book of the week.

‘I have read the book *Peace is Every Step* and it really changed my perspective on how to find and be at peace in the present moment. A beautiful book and introduction to mindfulness which helps heal anxiety and depression. I recommend this book to all.’ Miss Lunn