



Teachings on Love

Thich Nhat Hanh

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Relationships are always complex and challenging, but never more so than in today's hectic, stressful world. Weaving together traditional stories, personal experiences, and a deep understanding of the Buddha's way of mindful living, Thich Nhat Hanh's *Teachings on Love* provides step-by-step practices that foster understanding and intimacy in any relationship and extend our love even to those who cause us pain. This book, written in the author's trademark clear, encouraging style, contains essential guidance for couples, families, co-workers, or friends who wish to nourish the gift and strength of their relationships and deal creatively with weaknesses and difficulties. *Teachings on Love* provides a time-tested path that anyone can follow to nurture the deepest love in themselves and others. Nhat Hanh has written an illuminating new introductory chapter for this second edition.

Teachings on Love Details

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From Reader Review Teachings on Love for online ebook

Eduardo says

I've been to a couple Mindfulness retreats held by Thich Nhat Hanh students, and I recommend this book to anyone interested in Buddhism and Mindfulness. This is one of Thay's most beautiful books. Chapter 14 was my favorite. The Three Earth Touchings are a wonderful practice.

Rachel says

The concept that really stuck with me is the metaphor that your partner is a garden with all different types of seeds -- seeds of jealousy, seeds of compassion, seeds of generosity, seeds of anger...and as their partner, you need to water the positive seeds so that they grow stronger than the negative seeds. BUT each person's garden is already planted with a certain amount of each type of seed so you should also pick the partner with a good garden.

YHC says

Again, another very powerful book about how we need to love ourselves first to be able to love others. I think in modern relationship, people got to know much more people in their life time compared to our ancestors, they lived most of time just in one or 2 places, intensively interact with small group of people deeply. They didn't feel lonely. In this social media abundance era. we are connected but lonely...why? I think because we contact each other but don't really feel each other. We all care about "I", "I", how "I" feel, how others see me on line, how i look, how good life i live....etc. We feel less from inner self. This book teaches me to have a truly understanding about those who have hurt us, whom we hate. If you can meditate and put yourself into an imaginary mindset about what this person has been through in his childhood, being tortured, ignored by parents, bullied by peers...etc. The real forgiveness will generate from your heart. After all, hurting others is the last thing that a health and complete person would do. For the couple life. We always count on other half to offer us a "complete" life. But this is so wrong to wish this. We are all an independent individual, we can only responsible for ourselves, a person without inner peace can neither get along with oneself, nor get along with others(spouse). i learned this little by little during these years. If you are not happy to be single, you might not be happy in a relationship...I read this sentence somewhere. I totally agree with it. We should try to avoid being a parasite of love, jumping from one temporary passionate feeling into another by thinking about finding true love from it. There isn't true love without cultivating it. True love never falls from the sky, but by the time you interact and grow with someone or with your family. Make peace with yourself first, let go of your anger, or whoever caused you miserable life before and now. Live in this moment and enjoy! This book is a very important self exam book..we should read it like looking into the mirror at ourselves every now and then.

Volkert says

This is the second book by Thich Nhat Hanh that I've read in the past month (the first one was Living Buddha, Living Christ). I began exploring the teachings of Hanh thanks to the writing of Jim Forest, founder of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship, and long ago affiliated with the Catholic Peace Fellowship and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. That is how Jim got to know Thich Nhat Hanh back in the Sixties, as the War in Vietnam was still raging. Thich Nhat Hanh was welcomed to this country by, among others, two heroes of mine, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Roman Catholic Monk, Thomas Merton.

I say all this to point out that I find nothing incompatible with the teachings of Nhat Hanh and the teachings of Jesus Christ, not to mention the spiritual disciplines as practiced in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In this volume I gained a better understanding of mindfulness, in other words how to be more present in the here and now. Also deep breathing, which can be related to "prayer of the heart." The teachings cover things like anger, loving enemies, respect for our ancestors (biological and spiritual ancestors), being part of a spiritual community, joy, happiness, being fully present when you are with others.

The practice he calls "touching the Earth" is closely related to Christian prayer, connecting gratitude to blood ancestors, spiritual ancestors, this land and all of the ancestors who made it possible, those I love, those who have made me suffer, and my ancient spiritual roots.

Near the end of the book Thich Nhat Hanh states: "Once persons from other traditions see that Buddhist practice and their own spiritual tradition are not opposed, they will be able to enrich and illumine their own tradition and in so doing become truly happy."

I recommend this book to those who embrace the Christian spiritual tradition, as well as those of other traditions.

Liz says

Although this book is written by a Buddhist monk, anyone can benefit from its teachings. Reading it is like receiving nourishment after being parched and starved in the desert for days. I am without religion yet I embrace any teachings from any religion that spread love and humanity. This book is a guidebook on how to treat ourselves in order to live better lives. It was gently suggested to me for study by a friend who saw that I suffered ills within my soul. It's packed with meaning behind every word so that I found it challenging to summarize it. ALL of it was vital to the message for me. I offer these following notes I took for my own future reference; I had to take notes because I couldn't highlight as I read as I would have ended up with the entire book highlighted.

****I highly recommend reading this book from cover to cover.****

I hope the following of what I got out of it thus far helps you on your way to healing as well.

There are four immeasurable minds of true love: loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. If you learn how to practice these elements in your daily life, you will be able to heal yourself of the illnesses of

anger, sorrow, insecurity, sadness, hatred, loneliness and unhealthy attachments, and therefore gain enlightenment. These four aspects of true love are within us all.

The book offers practices to realize the Four Immeasurable Minds like love meditation which empties the mind of anger and hatred. This requires mindfulness - "the energy that allows us to look deeply at our body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness and see clearly what our real needs are, so we will not drown in the sea of suffering."

Love Meditation Practice- there are different ways, suggestions. I like this one:
Sit still without preoccupation, calm your body and breathing, look deeply within and recite:

"May I be peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit.
May I be safe and free from injury. May I be free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety."

When you practice, you should be observing what you feel and your own self-understanding will deepen once you identify and address your fears, anxieties, concerns, angers that bubble up. This examination will help you to live mindfully when you are not meditating.

Take notice that those words "May I" in the meditation are aspirational for good reason: we're not just repeating a mantra or auto-suggesting words to ourselves here. We begin with aspiration because we're not there yet so we're being honest instead of merely repeating words or imitating notions of having reached an ideal. *We will get there with time. By beginning the practice this way we are opening ourselves up to love so that love becomes a deep intention*.

Similarly, in a walking meditation, go outside and make refreshing steps on the earth and touch the skies. Slow down and enjoy the present as you walk mindfully and touch the wholesome elements/seeds within yourself. (more on this wonderful 'seeds' concepts later)

If you channel this energy of mindfulness and allow love to fill your mind and will, then your speech and actions - because they are the fruits of will - then your speech and actions will be suffused with love. Whereby you will speak constructive words and act in ways that bring happiness and relieve suffering. Learning to practice the Four Immeasurables within your mind will allow you to manifest them into the real world through your words and actions.

"When we practice love mediation [sitting or walking or other forms], we don't merely visualize our love spreading into space. We touch the deep sources of love that are already in us, and then [later], in the midst of our daily lives, in our actual contact with others, we express and share our love." In other words, we're not just hoping or wishing in our minds, we practice so that we see the actual concrete manifestations / the effects of our mind onto the outside world.

Anger

The book's message is challenging in application for me because it stresses that we are to offer peace and happiness to everyone, including those who have harmed us or who have acted toward us in the most unloving ways.

When you next become easily angered, realize that when we are overcome with anger, our peace and happiness vanish. Looking deeply at why you anger and at those you think have brought you harm, you will begin to understand and let go of our habits of thought and action that perpetuate the suffering. If we see

another person causing us harm as someone who is herself/himself suffering, our heart is opened and our suffering lessened so that we can heal and be free from our afflictions within.

We get angry at someone because we have stored seeds of anger within our consciousness that were transmitted there from elsewhere - be it from our family or society - so that a small irritation can bring anger to the surface. If you can exercise self-control, you will not succumb to the cycle of anger. I found this explanation particularly profound:

"When someone shouts at you, if you shout back, you suffer, the other person suffers, and the anger continues to escalate. Avoid such actions. They only harm both sides...When you feel hurt but do not hurt the other, you are truly victorious. Your practice and your victory benefit both of you. When you get hurt, hurting the other person will only cause the suffering to continue...Looking deeply, you see that the other person is angry because of her lack of mindfulness, her wrong understanding, or the seeds of anger transmitted by her [influential sphere]. This understanding will ...[allow you to heal yourself and heal the other like a doctor.]"

What I found yet unattainable for me is moving to meditating on someone I consider to be an enemy. I've got a passive aggressive neighbor who has been a thorn in my side and I have found impossible so far to apply the practice of putting myself in her place and meditating, "May she be peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit." I obviously haven't achieved self love yet and so cannot only see her as a human being who is suffering.

The book goes through ways to get over anger for someone, depending on how or what irritates you about the person. For me, this someone cannot refrain from saying something couched as a casual remark that is negative toward me when I see her. The book addresses just such a person "who speaks with as much venom as a snake..." I need to see her as someone who is suffering and not causing suffering onto me. I need to see her as needing my love and compassion. It's hard because frankly I'm stuck with my anger seed still; I really do think she's a royal b**ch.

"We have to look deeply to find some positive qualities in those whose speech and actions are both unpleasant. If we can find any, we will be able to accept them...the wise will be able to let go of their dislike for such persons." I'll keep working on opening my heart up to see that she is in fact lashing out at me because she herself suffers deeply....and it isn't because she's simply a b**ch. I remind myself: She's hurting deeply. Breathe.

Mindfulness

If you have a knee-jerk thought that you're a fool if you don't retaliate in kind or convince yourself otherwise when someone hurts you, that you should not allow yourself to be spoken to a certain way, the book advises that when you feel anger arising, remember to breathe, look within, and practice mindful living.

Being mindful means recognizing "our habitual ways of thinking and the contents of our thoughts. Sometimes our thoughts run around in circles, and we are engulfed in distrust, pessimism, conflict, sorrow, or jealousy. When our minds are like that, our words and actions will naturally manifest these [negative] characteristics of mind and cause harm to ourselves and others. The practice is to shed the light of mindfulness on our habitual thought patterns so we can see them clearly."

I like how the mind is compared to a monkey swinging among the branches, leading us to darkness, pain, suffering. By practicing mindfulness, we are training ourselves to shine a light on those branches if you will

that are the mind's paths taking us to dark places. We see them and begin to understand ourselves better and only then can we exercise self-control to stop our minds from wandering down those dark "paths of inappropriate attention." We control where our attention goes - down appropriate or inappropriate paths. Only "[w]hen we know how to maintain a calm, joyful mind, our words and actions will manifest peace and happiness."

According to Buddhism (and again I emphasize I stand under no umbrella label of religion and consider myself a-religious), our consciousness is a wide open field/storehouse of every possible kind of feeling/emotion (seeds) that can arise in one's mind: seeds of love, compassion, joy, equanimity, anger, fear, anxiety, mindfulness. We can practice our own preventive health care by being in tune with our tendencies or "our habit energies" in order to exercise self-control over them. Looking deeply into the nature of our emotions to see where they are rooted and then to give them first-aid to transform them and nourish the joy, peace and well-being seeds from your feelings. Now, I think this concept is easy to understand and we all can stand to benefit from it regardless of anyone's labeled religion.

Mindfulness will also help us control our uttered words and physical acts through gestures, posture, smile, look, etc. Your physicality manifests your state of mind. At first I thought this was backwards but that was because I read it too quickly. We may tell ourselves that we are at peace in our mind but when our body parts act otherwise by how we are standing or looking or smiling, frowning, we act in direct conflict with ourselves. So it works both ways. We don't just think and leave it there. We must allow our mindfulness to work from outside inward as well. This was a big lesson for me from the book. Mindfulness brings attention to what we are doing, saying -- not just thinking.

Practicing mindfulness will help us to see the sources of our anger, craving, delusion, arrogance, suspicion - poisons that cause suffering. Anger can only be stimulated if we carry anger seeds within us. "Two people might hear the same words and see the same things, yet only one becomes angry. Words and events only stimulate what is inside us."

We lash out at someone who has watered our seeds of anger because we have failed to master our own anger. By arguing with them we only inflame our anger instead of putting it out. We have to use mindfulness to soothe it, transform it: "close your eyes and ears, return to yourself, and tend to the source of anger within." You will liberate yourself as well as those around you.

"Anger makes us ugly." If you don't think so, next time, stop and step in front of a mirror when you're inflamed with anger. See? Instead, force yourself to smile - the act of smiling "relaxes hundreds of tiny muscles, making your face more attractive." -- What a lovely thought.

Mindfulness of anger is like mindfulness of anything else. When you drink a glass of water, you are aware of drinking it. when you are mindful of your anger, be within it, sit within it by breathing in and acknowledging that you are angry, and breathing out, acknowledging that anger is within you. By doing so, *first the energy of anger arises and then the energy of mindfulness arises*. Look at your anger as if it were your child: recognize your child is crying, pick her up, comfort her and try to understand why she is crying.

Conscious breathing soothes and calms your anger, which is only a form of energy and all energy can be transformed. All energy can be transformed.

Loving Mind

When your meditation bears fruit, you will see the signs of a loving mind:

relaxed sleep
sans nightmares
allowing for waking states that are more at ease
and without anxiety or depression
with a sense that we are loved and protected by everyone and everything around us.
feeling well-liked, at ease
reaching meditative concentration easily

I like these passages:

"Practicing love meditation is like digging deep into the ground until we reach the purest water. We look deeply into ourselves until insight arises and our love flows to the surface. Joy and happiness radiate from our eyes, and everyone around us benefits from our smile and our presence."

"If you take good care of yourself, you help everyone. You stop being a source of suffering to the world, and you become a reservoir of joy and freshness..."

Chapter on Self-Love teaches us that in order to self-love, we must look to the five elements: (1) form, (2) feelings, (3) perceptions, (4) mental formations and (5) consciousness.

(1) Form is your body and you look to your body to see whether it is at peace or suffering from illness. We need to eat and drink and act in ways that show our love and compassion for our bodies. This will require you to look to your habits and transform them so that you act in ways that are conducive to good health and vitality.

(2) Feelings: "Feelings flow in us like a river, and each feeling is a drop of water in that river. We look into the river of our feelings and see how each feeling came to be. We see what has been preventing us from being happy, and we do our best to *transform* those things. We practice touching the wondrous, refreshing and healing elements that are *already in us* and in the world. Doing so, we become stronger and better able to love ourselves and [thereafter] others."

(3) Look to your perceptions. "The person who suffers most in this world is the person who has many wrong perceptions.. And most of our perceptions are erroneous." If we understand and can identify which wrong perceptions cause us to suffer (fear, hate, feel anxious), then we can free ourselves from suffering. The book suggests writing down this note and taping it where you can be reminded of it often: "Are you sure?" in reference to what you perceive.

(4) Look to observe your "mental formations" that are unwholesome and cause you disturbance - those ideas and tendencies that move you to speak and act they way you do. These are influences from our own consciousness, the collective consciousness of others - family, society, etc.

(5) What's stored in your consciousness? We must apply self-control or the feelings that may be ill running rampant in our consciousness.

This hit me hard: "Those who harm themselves through their thoughts, words, or actions are indeed their own worst enemies. they only bring themselves suffering." Our suffering is not caused by others but by our own actions and thoughts that stem from forgetfulness, anger, jealousy. You are responsible for nourishing your own body and mind and stopping your suffering.

Another concept I immediately understood at a subconscious level was the book's way of explaining our mind as a soil containing many seeds with both positive and negative emotions attached to them. "We have to be aware of all of them. When we are in touch with our suffering, we have to know that there are other seeds too. *Our ancestors transmitted seeds of suffering to us, but also seeds of peace, freedom, joy, and happiness.* Even if these seeds are buried deep in our consciousness, we can water them and help them grow stronger."

This concept of ancestral seeds buried within us reemerges its head from earlier in the book when it's explained that we derive our mental formations (our ideas and tendencies to act/speak the way we do) from our influential sphere - made up of our individual consciousness and the collective consciousness of family, ancestors, and society. Anyways, I like the concept. It makes sense to me. It works.

Recognizing and Caring for Seeds in Others

Your loved one has positive seeds we can identify and touch for his/her sake on daily basis to help our loved one grow toward health and happiness. The other side of that token is that we recognize negative seeds within our loved ones and we should refrain from watering those.

Nourishing our Happiness

We have ideas of what happiness is supposed to be which can get in the very way of our ability to be happy in the present. There is opportunity to find the joy in our present moment.

Everything and everyone is interconnected and interdependent of each other.

Just as the body produces antibodies against harmful bacteria, you can infuse your body and mind with feelings of the joy of meditation to strengthen your body and spirit. Nourish yourself with joyous feelings by practicing love meditation. Walk outside to enjoy the fresh air, nature, skies, stars around you. "May I know how to nourish the seeds of joy in myself every day. May I know how to nourish the seeds of joy in the person I hate and help the person I hate nourish the seeds of joy in him or herself."

If you can bring yourself to this kind of mind, then you free yourself from hatred and will be able to have true peace and joy.

That summarizes the first third of the book's principles. The rest of the book essentially applies these concepts towards specific areas in life like communicating, listening, living mindfully together with your partner, making love with a partner, as well as other methods to tackle specific personal challenges/barriers.

Thich Nhat Hanh's book is to be studied, marked up, re-read over and over. Based on my experience with this book and ongoing process applying this book's teachings, I went ahead and got a few more of his other books. His style of writing is very easy to grasp and he uses examples that hit home and make you think...and look deeply within...

Josh M says

This book changed my life. That is all I can say...there isn't much better praise than that. The meditations and knowledge contained in this book will add so much vibrance to your life...whether you are single or not.

Buy it, borrow it, or check it out...it is definitely a must read.

Meg says

If you've read something else Thich Nhat Hanh has written, then you've already read this. Unlike other books by Thich, this moves away from the general abstracts of love and instead focuses on specific Buddhist doctrine. As someone who is not a constituent of Buddhism, I found it too narrow to be readily applicable to my life. I wasn't captivated by it, nor did I get very much out of it. Skip this one and read his other book True Love instead.

Vishnu says

Amazing book. Very interesting perspective on lovingkindness. I've only recently started reading Thich Nhat Hanh, after attending a retreat at Deer Park Monastery. I am truly inspired by his work, and have already ordered more of his books to try to digest. All in all a wonderful set of teachings. Also, in my view, one of the few books on love coming out of the Zen tradition. I've always seen Zen as a bit more austere, so a Zen take on love is at times jarring. It is an awesome perspective to take, and maybe with more of an emphasis on love, I would find the Zen tradition more welcoming.

Livi Lawrence says

I honestly couldn't put down the book. Whilst I was finishing I meditated in the park and connected with the earth for 2 hours. It was a magical experience. I love nature and touching the earth is a powerful way to meditate. Highly recommend to people who have a compassionate heart and love nature.

Carol says

I don't think I've ever read a Thich Nhat Hanh book that hasn't given me life-improving inspiration. And this one is no exception. In Teachings on Love, Hanh describes the Four Immeasurable Minds as the path to true love: lovingkindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Throughout the book he gives several meditations and mindfulness practices to unlock this path. The book is filled with many illustrative personal anecdotes and stories.

As always, Hahn's book comes from an inclusive viewpoint, which I find particularly appealing. Early on, he tells the reader to not give up on her or his own religious roots, but rather to integrate meditation practice with existing ancestral spiritual practices. In other words, you can meditate and learn the teaching on love but still maintain your chosen religion.

Another great book.

James Williams says

One of the most amazing books I EVER read! It is beyond a must read. This book is life-changing. It will give you the tools to master anger and to generate love for all individuals. You will learn to envision your life beyond the physical form or manmade ideals and concepts of living.

Dr. James Arthur Williams

Author of From Thug to Scholar and How to Get Abs Like a Bodybuilder but Eat Like a Fatboy

Zhiheng says

Interesting, but at parts it was confusing...perhaps due to the translation or my lack of cultural understanding. Worth reading once I suppose.

Summer says

A book so influential to my spiritual evolution that it's hard to even rate it because it's impact is well beyond anything I could articulate. Everyone should experience this book. It's lessons are timeless and can be applied to anyone across race, sex, class and creed. If you want to learn how to love yourself and others unconditionally, read this book.

Ben Tipper says

From the Thich Naht Hanh books I've read and glanced at, it seems like if you've read one of his books you've read them all. He certainly self-references himself and his other books enough in his footnotes. Some of these chapters are actually just chapter straight up lifted from his other books. So I don't really fuck with the fact that he's put out like 30 of these mofos. I'd rather see a lesser amount with more quality. I do, however, get down with his message. Be mindful, more or less. He's got a lot of different ways to say it and a lot of exercises to help do it. I don't really mess with his exercises either though. Despite all this stuff I still think it is healthy and good for me to get a little Hanh in my life now and then, and I'm glad I read this one. I'd recommend any of his books; just take whatever one is at your library or used bookstore or whatever. They should all be more or less interchangeable.

Robert Day says

Lovely. Another book I started reading about 5 years ago and I stopped because the teachings were so deep that I wanted to read them very, very slowly and appreciate every single drop as it dripped into me like nectar. I wanted the whole experience to be a meditation on love. I found at the time that I was not able to devote enough time and attention to the book to do it justice, so I stopped reading and put it on hold... until

now.

When I started reading again it was as if I never stopped. I stepped back into a place as familiar as.. well, it was like stepping into a shower cubicle where everything is warm and familiar and cleansing. Instead of reading this book slowly, I have raced through the second half, eating up the words as they poured into my heart. I finished a few minutes ago and I feel such a glow of peace and love that I feel wonderful and connected and at one with family, friends, heart, enemies, all living things, all non-living things, all history, all future, all in the ever-present now.

Yes, you could say that I enjoyed this book very much.
