

Reconciliation from Peace is Every Step by Thich Nhat Hanh

What can we do when we have hurt people and now they consider us to be their enemy? These people might be people in our family, in our community, or in another country. I think you know the answer. There are few things to do. The first thing is to take the time to say, "I am sorry; I hurt you out of my ignorance, out of my lack of mindfulness, out of my lack of skillfulness. I will try my best to change myself. I don't dare to say anything more to you," Sometimes, we do not have the intention to hurt, but because we are not mindful or skillful enough, we hurt someone. Being mindful in our daily life is important, speaking in a way that will not hurt anyone.

The second thing to do is to try to bring out the best part in ourselves, the part of the flower, to transform ourselves. That is the only way to demonstrate what you have just said. When you have become fresh and pleasant, the other person will notice very soon. Then when there is a chance to approach that person, you can come to her as a flower and she will notice immediately that you are quite different. You may not have to say anything. Just seeing you like that, she will accept you and forgive you. That is called "speaking with your life and not just with words."

When you begin to see that your enemy is suffering, that is the beginning of insight. When you see in yourself the wish that the other person stop suffering that is a sign of real love. But be careful. Sometimes you may think that you are stronger than you actually are. To test your real strength, try going to the other person to listen and talk to him or her, and you will discover right away whether your loving compassion is real. You need the other person in order to test. If you just meditate on some abstract principle such as understanding or love, it may be just your imagination and not real understanding or real love.

Reconciliation does not mean to sign an agreement with duplicity and cruelty. Reconciliation opposes all forms of ambition, without taking sides. Most of us want to take sides in each encounter or conflict. We distinguish right from wrong based on partial evidence or hearsay. We need indignation in order to act, but even righteous, legitimate indignation is not enough. Our world does not lack people willing to throw themselves into action. What we need are people who are capable of loving, of not taking sides so that they can embrace the whole of reality.

We have to continue to practice mindfulness and reconciliation until we can see a child's body of skin and bones in Uganda or Ethiopia as our own, until the hunger and pain in the bodies of all species are our own. Then we will have realized non-discrimination, real love. Then we can look at all beings with the eyes of compassion, and we can do the real work to help alleviate suffering.