

The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (born 1926) is one of the world's most influential spiritual teachers. During the Vietnam War, his work for peace brought him into friendship with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Merton, and others who shared his belief that peace must be who we are, not just something we demand through protest. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches:

*This capacity of waking up, of being aware of what is going on - in your feelings, in your body, in your perceptions, in the world - is called Buddha nature, the capacity of understanding and loving...It is in and with our capacity of smiling, breathing, and being peace ourselves that we can make peace.*

Many of us worry about the world situation. We don't know when the bombs will explode or if and when we will get infected with the virus. We feel that we are on the edge of time. Danger seems so close, injustice so widespread that, at times, we feel helpless and despairing. In this kind of situation, if we panic, things will only become worse. We need to remain calm, to see clearly.

In Vietnam, there are many people who leave the country in small boats. Often the boats are caught in rough seas or storms, the people may panic, and boats can sink. But if even one person aboard can remain calm, lucid, knowing what to do and what not to do, he or she can help the boat survive. His or her expression - their face, their voice - communicates clarity and calmness, and people have trust in that person. They will listen to what he or she says. One such person can save the lives of many.

Our world is something like a small boat. Compared with the cosmos, our planet is a very small boat. We panic because our situation is no better than the situation of the small boat in the sea. Humankind has become an endangered species. We need people who can remain calm and lucid, who can walk humbly and peacefully. People who can save others.

As Freemasons we are called to be these people. To awake from the darkness, to know, to understand, and to love our fellow human beings. This is the nature of a Freemason – to be in challenging situations and yet be able to change or influence their outcomes because of who we are and how we behave. When you are awake to yourself in this way and understand the truth of what is before us, you cannot help but love. And when you love, you naturally act in a way that can relieve the suffering of people, in a way that transforms lives.

As human beings we will suffer. But if we do not transform our suffering, we will always transmit it. You see, most people are like electric wires: what comes in is what goes out. Someone calls us a name, and we call them a name back. That is, most people pass on the same energy that is given to them. Now compare an electric wire to those big, grey transformers that you see on utility poles. Dangerous current or voltage comes in, but something happens inside that grey box and what comes out is, in fact, now helpful and productive.

I put it to you Brethren that, as Freemasons, this is exactly what we are called to do. Consider not returning the negative energy that is directed at you — instead, hold it inside, reflect on it, and turn it into something much better. Refuse to pass on the negativity that is thrown at you. That is how we can take away the negativity in the world. That is how we can build a better society of good. Until we understand that, there will be no new world, with or without a coronavirus pandemic.

The sacred scriptures of all faiths call us to love as we have never loved before. This requires effort, vigilance, and radical humility. Violence is easier than non-violence yet hate only perpetuates hate. The wisdom teachings remind us that love—active, engaged, fearless love—is the only way to transform ourselves and each other.

There is a renewed urgency to this task now. We are asked not only to tolerate the other, but also to actively engage the love that transmutes the lead of ignorance and hatred into the gold of authentic connection. This is the "narrow gate" that Freemasons choose to walk through one step at a time – with a willingness to stretch, bend, and transform for the sake of love.