

## Points to Ponder from How to Love by Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist Monk and Zen Master was born in central Vietnam in 1926. At the age of 16 he became a novice at the Tu Hieu Temple in Hue City. When war came to Vietnam, monks and nuns were confronted with the question of whether to adhere to the contemplative life and stay meditating in the monasteries, or to help those around them suffering under the bombings and turmoil of war. He was one of those who chose to do both. His life has since been dedicated to the work of inner transformation for the benefit of individuals and society. In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, in nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize, called him “An Apostle of peace and nonviolence.” He was a friend of Father Thomas Merton. He has been a teacher in “the art of mindful living.” More recently Thich Nhat Hanh has founded Wake Up a worldwide movement of thousands of young people training in these practices of mindful living and he has launched an international Wake Up Schools program training teachers to teach mindfulness in schools in Europe, America and Asia.

On November 11, 2014, shortly after his 88<sup>th</sup> birthday he suffered a severe stroke. He is currently residing at Tu Hieu Temple in Vietnam where he was ordained a Buddhist Monk after 39 years in exile.

“How to Love includes meditations you can do alone or with your partner to expand your own capacity to love.”

### Sunday-Heart Like A River

If you pour a handful of salt into a cup of water, the water becomes undrinkable. But if you pour the salt into a river, people can continue to draw the water to cook, wash, and drink. The river is immense, and it has the capacity to receive, embrace, and transform. When our hearts are small, our understanding and compassion are limited, and we suffer. We can't accept or tolerate others and their shortcomings, and we demand that they change. But when our hearts expand, these same things don't make us suffer anymore. We have a lot of understanding and compassion and can embrace others. We accept others as they are, and then they have a chance to transform. So, the big question is: how do we help our hearts to grow?

### Monday-Love Is Expansive

In the beginning of a relationship, your love may include only you and the other person. But if you practice true love, very soon that love will grow and include all of us. The moment love stops growing, it begins to die. It's like a tree; if a tree stops growing, it begins to die. We can learn how to feed our love and help it continue to grow.

### Tuesday-The Four Elements of True Love

True love is made of four elements: loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. In Sanskrit, these are, maitiri, karuna, mudita, and upeksha. If your love contains these elements, it will be healing and transforming, and it will have the element of holiness in it. True love has the power to heal and transform any situation and bring deep meaning to our lives.

### Wednesday-Respect and Trust

Along with the traditional four elements of true love-loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity-there are two more elements: respect and trust. These elements can be found in the four, but it helps to mention their names. When you love someone, you have to have trust and confidence. Love without trust is not yet love. Of course, first you have to have trust, respect, and confidence in yourself. Trust that you have a good and compassionate nature. You are part of the universe; you are made of stars. When you look at your loved one, you see that he is also made of stars and carries eternity inside. Looking in this way, we naturally feel reverence. True love cannot be without trust and respect for oneself and for the other person.

### Thursday-You Are A Flower

Every child is born in the garden of humanity as a flower. Each flower differs from every other flower. There are many messages in our society that tell us, even when we're young people, that there's something wrong with us and that if we just buy the right product, or look a certain way, or have the right partner, that will fix it. As grown-ups, we can remind young people that they're already beautiful as they are; they don't have to be someone else.

### Friday-Watering the Flower in A Friend

One day I was giving a talk at our practice center in France. Two of the people in attendance were a couple from Bordeaux who visit our center on occasion. The woman was sitting in the front of the audience, and she was crying from the beginning of the talk to the end. After the talk I went to her husband and told him, "Dear friend, your flower needs some water." He understood right away. After lunch, they drove home through the countryside, and he spent the hour and a half letting her know all the things he appreciated about her. When they arrived home, their children were surprised to see their mother and father so joyful. Transformation can happen quickly.

### Saturday-Listening with Patience

When your loved one is talking, practice listening deeply. Sometimes the other person will say something that surprises us, that is the opposite of the way we see things. Allow the other person to speak freely. Don't cut your loved one off or criticize their words. When we listen deeply with all our heart-for ten minutes, half an hour, or even an hour-we will begin to see the other person more deeply and understand them better. If they say something that's incorrect, that's based on a wrong perception, we can give them a little information later on to help them correct their thinking. But right now, we just listen.