

# Terrorism and Peace

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Two days after the events of September 11th, I spoke to 4,000 people in Berkeley, California. I said that our emotions are very strong right now, and we should calm ourselves down. With lucidity and calm we would know what to do and what not to do in order not to make the situation worse. I said that the terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center must have been very angry. They must have hated America a lot. They must have thought of America as having tried to destroy them as individual people, as a religion, as a nation, and as a culture. I said that we had to find out why they did such a thing to America.

America's political leaders can ask the question, calmly and with clarity: "What have we done that has made you suffer so much?" America's political leaders can say, "We want to know about your suffering and why you hate us. We may have said something or done something that gave you the impression that we wanted to destroy you. But that is not the case. We are confused, and that is why we want you to help us understand why you have done such a thing to us."

We call this loving or gentle speech. If we are honest and sincere, they will tell us how they feel. Then we will recognize the wrong perceptions they have about themselves and about us. We can try to help them to remove their wrong perceptions. All these acts of terrorism and violence come from wrong perceptions. Wrong perceptions are the ground for anger, violence and hate. You cannot remove wrong perceptions with a gun.

When we listen deeply to another person, we not only recognize their wrong perceptions, but we also identify our own wrong perceptions about ourselves and about the other person. That is why mindful dialogue and mindful communication is crucial to removing anger and violence.

It is my deepest hope that our political leaders can make use of such instruments to bring peace to the world. I believe that using force and violence can only make the situation worse. Since September 11th, America has not been able to decrease the level of hate and violence on the part of the terrorists. In fact, the level of hate and violence has increased. It is time for us to go back to the situation, to look deeply and to find another less costly way to bring peace to us and to them. Violence cannot remove violence—everyone knows that. Only with the practice of deep listening and gentle communication can we help remove wrong perceptions that are at the foundation of violence.

America has a lot of difficulty in Iraq. I think that America is caught in Iraq the same way that America was caught in Vietnam. We have the idea that we have to go and destroy the enemy. That idea will never give us a chance to do the right thing to end violence. During the Vietnam War, America thought that it had to go to North Vietnam to bomb. The more America bombed, the more communists they created. I am afraid that the same thing is happening in Iraq. I think that it is very difficult for America to withdraw now from Iraq. Even if they want to leave, it is very difficult.

The only way for America to free itself from the situation is to help build the United Nations into a real body of peace so that the United Nations will take over the problem of Iraq and of the Middle East. America is powerful enough to make this happen. America should allow other nations to contribute positively to building the United Nations into a true organization for peace with enough authority to do its job. To me, that is the only way out of our

current situation.

We have to wake up to the fact that everything is connected to everything else. Our safety and well-being cannot be individual matters anymore. If they are not safe, there is no way we can be safe. Taking care of other people's safety is taking care of our own safety. To take care of their well-being is take care of our own well-being. It is the mind of discrimination and separation that is at the foundation of all violence and hate.

My right hand has written all the poems that I have composed. My left hand has not written a single poem. But my right hand does not think, "Left Hand, you are good for nothing." My right hand does not have a superiority complex. That is why it is very happy. My left hand does not have any complex at all. In my two hands there is the kind of wisdom called the wisdom of nondiscrimination. One day I was hammering a nail and my right hand was not very accurate and instead of pounding on the nail it pounded on my finger. It put the hammer down and took care of the left hand in a very tender way, as if it were taking care of itself. It did not say, "Left Hand, you have to remember that I have taken good care of you and you have to pay me back in the future." There was no such thinking. And my left hand did not say, "Right Hand, you have done me a lot of harm give me that hammer, I want justice." My two hands know that they are members of one body; they are in each other.

I think that if Israelis and Palestinians knew that they were brothers and sisters that they were like my two hands they would not try to punish each other anymore. The world community has not helped them to see that. If Israelis and Palestinians and Muslims and Hindus knew that discrimination was at the base of our suffering, they would know how to touch the seed of nondiscrimination in themselves. That kind of awakening that kind of deep understanding brings about reconciliation and well-being.

I believe that that in America there are many people who are awakened to the fact that violence cannot remove violence. They realize there is no way to peace: peace itself is the way. Those people must come together and voice their concern strongly and offer their collective wisdom to the nation so the nation can get out of this current situation. Every one of us has the duty to bring together that collective insight. With that insight, compassion will make us strong and courageous enough to bring about a solution for the world.

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