

Peace Is Every Step Study Guide

Peace Is Every Step by Nhat Hanh

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Plot Summary

Peace is Every Step is a novel designed to instruct new students on methods of meditation, conscious breathing, and enlightenment. Based on Zen Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh's method of instruction is simple, easy to follow, and focuses on everyday activities and situations. By using anecdotes, personal stories, and meditation techniques, Hanh shows how meditation in normal situations, using conscious breathing, can remind readers to be conscious of their present existences. In doing so, readers can improve their relationships, lower their anger levels, and increase overall feelings of peace and joy. *Peace is Every Step* is a personal journey through awareness in an effort to obtain the inner peace necessary to work towards peace on a worldwide scale.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Zen master, spiritual leader and author known worldwide for his efforts to bring peace and harmony to all persons. Born in Vietnam and ordained as a Buddhist monk at a young age of sixteen, Hanh has spent his life attempting to unify religion to form a peaceful world. In *Peace is Every Step*, Hanh uses his experience throughout his journeys to inform and enlighten readers about the breathing method known as conscious breathing, and the effects of that meditative force on the lives of individuals.

His first section, "Breathe! You are Alive," focuses on one's ability to live in the present moment, and be "mindful" of each action in daily life. Hanh teaches readers to live in the present through a breathing method called "conscious breathing," which allows the individual to calm him or herself, and focus on inner peace. By being aware of one's breathing, one can stop thinking of unimportant or negative aspects, and focus solely on happiness, harmony, and peace. Through smiling, conscious breathing, and various meditations designed to be preformed specifically during every day activities, rather than in a meditation room, Hanh teaches readers to walk the path of mindfulness.

In his second section, "Transformation and Healing," Hanh uses the techniques introduced in Section 1 to instruct readers on ways to heal and transform difficult, non-peaceful psychological states into productive, mindful states. By recognizing the feeling, becoming one with the feeling, calming the feeling, releasing the feeling, and deeply analyzing one's self, one is able to transform negative emotions into tools of self-discovery and mindfulness. By dealing with anger, jealousy, frustration, negative relationships, love, and compassion in this way, readers can learn to leave more peaceful, mindful lives.

In the final section, "Peace is Every Step," Hanh teaches readers the relationship between one's own inner peace and worldwide peace and harmony. According to Hanh, everything in the universe is interconnected. A piece of paper, for example, cannot exist without sunlight and trees, which cannot exist without soil and water, and so forth. Therefore, by encouraging and nurturing peace within ones self, one can then teach others to find their own peace, and use peaceful methods to reduce war, encourage environmentalism, become better citizens, develop more positive relationships, and

become better human beings. According to Hanh, these processes, developed through conscious breathing and finding peace in every action, are the keys to world peace and harmony.



"Foreword" and "Editor's Introduction"

"Foreword" and "Editor's Introduction" Summary

Peace is Every Step is a novel designed to instruct new students on methods of meditation, conscious breathing, and enlightenment. Based on Zen Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh's method of instruction is simple, easy to follow, and focuses on everyday activities and situations. By using anecdotes, personal stories and meditation techniques, Hanh shows how meditation in normal situations, using conscious breathing, can remind readers to be conscious of their present existences. In doing so, readers can improve their relationships, anger levels, and overall feelings of peace and joy. *Peace is Every Step* is a personal journey through awareness in an effort to obtain the inner peace necessary to work towards peace on a worldwide scale.

H.H. The Dalai Lama praises the work of Hanh during "Foreword," expressing his own admiration for Hanh in his work promoting world peace. According to The Dalai Lama, love, altruism, compassion, and internal peace are the fundamental building blocks for harmony; and this harmony is then expanded to one's family, and from that family to the community, and from that community to the world, thus resulting in world peace. The Dalai Lama states "*Peace is Every Step*" is a guidebook for the worthwhile journey of self-healing and inner peace.

In "Editor's Introduction," Arnold Kotler briefly introduces readers to the life of Hanh. According to Kotler, Hanh was born in Vietnam in 1926, was ordained as a Buddhist monk at age 16, and co-founded the An Quang Buddhist Institute at age 25. After a brief teaching career in the United States, Hanh returned to Vietnam in 1964 to help lead a resistance movement against the war, based on the principles of Gandhi. Hanh also founded the School of Youth for Social Service and the La Boi Press, and was editor-in-chief of the Unified Buddhist Church publications.

By 1966, Hanh was back in the United States speaking on behalf of war-torn Vietnam to negotiate peace. Nominated by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1967 for the Nobel Peace Prize, Hanh was clearly a moving force worldwide. Hanh went on to meet with several heads of state, the Pope of the Catholic Church in Rome, and in 1969, helped to set up the Buddhist Peace Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks. However, following the signing of the Peace Accords, Hanh was refused reentry to Vietnam. Since that time, Hanh has set up two retreats, those of "Sweet Potato" west of Paris and "Plum Village" near Bordeaux, traveled to the United States to speak of mindful living and conscious breathing, and has written several essays and books on the subject of meditation and inner peace. Arnold Kotler closes his introduction by noting that the book has been assembled from various lectures writings, and personal conversations of Hanh.

"Foreword" and "Editor's Introduction" Analysis

These brief sections introduce major themes used throughout the novel, as well as the character of Hanh. First, The Dalai Lama introduces his concepts of the foundations of inner peace, those of love, compassion, and altruism, which are themes used throughout the novel. Further, The Dalai Lama also mentions the concept of world peace, foreshadowing one of the sections later in the book.

Arnold Kotler, in addition to discussing these topics, also introduces readers to Thich Nhat Hanh, the author of the book. This section provides much needed information as to the background of Hanh, including his life works, his association with world leaders, as well as his exile from Vietnam. Clearly, Hanh is a world-renowned master of meditation and Zen Buddhism, and this section helps to add credibility to the book by explaining Hanh's achievements. Further, by showing Hanh's clear dedication to Buddhist beliefs, this section proves the integrity and sincerity of Hanh, and his meditation methods.



Part 1, Chapters 1-9

Part 1, Chapters 1-9 Summary

In Part 1, "Breathe! You Are Alive," Hanh begins by discussing the concept that each day is a new opportunity for one to live in the present, in his essay "Twenty-Four Brand-New Hours." According to Hanh, humankind is adept at preparing for the future, but inept at living in the present. He believes that if one learns to breathe, smile, walk, eat, do chores, work, and live in the present, one can learn to be in touch with happiness, and thus, can find peace.

Hanh begins his lesson in mindful living by discussing the importance of smiling. In "The Dandelion has my Smile," Hanh believes that beginning the day with a smile shows one's awareness and determination to find inner peace, and that a smile is a reflection of an awakened mind. Hanh recommends hanging a reminder to smile near one's bed, such as a picture or a poem, so that each morning, one can begin the day with a smile to help greet the day with a deep sense of understanding. Further, by smiling, one has the power to bring happiness to others. Hanh closes his essay with a poem, stating, "I have lost my smile, but don't worry. The Dandelion has it." Hanh notes that as long as one knows where to find a smile, through conscious breathing, one can always find inner peace.

In "Conscious Breathing," Hanh continues his thoughts on inner peace by teaching readers the practice of conscious breathing. The concept revolves around using a meditative verse while breathing in and out slowly, which allows one to relax and find peace. While breathing in, one simply states, "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in" or "In." When exhaling, one is to state, "Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out" or "Out." According to Hanh, this concentration of breathing allows one to unify the mind and body, helping the individual to realize the present moment.

Hanh explains this realization of the present moment as a chance to be happy now, rather than in the future. In "Present Moment, Wonderful Moment," Hanh mentions that conscious breathing can be done anywhere in order to bring the body and mind back together, thereby allowing one to realize the power of the present. He gives another mantra, consisting of four lines, which he explains. "Breathing in, I calm my body," allows the body to relax, while "Breathing out, I smile," reminds one to smile, aiding in relaxation. "Dwelling in the present moment," thought on the next intake of breath, reminds one to concentrate on the current moment and on breathing, while "I know this is a wonderful moment," thought on the next exhale, reminds one to enjoy the present, rather than think of the future.

Hanh discusses this focus on the thought process in "Thinking Less." According to Hanh, conscious breathing slows down the thinking process, allowing one to let go of past sorrow and future concerns. By relaxing the mind and body, the rapid thoughts of every day life are forced from the mind more effectively than with sleeping pills or



tranquilizers, since such methods are non-restful and dangerous. By using a mantra, one is able to force the thought process to focus, thus allowing for true relaxation and nourishment.

Hanh cautions, however, to be ready to begin conscious breathing in a quiet, peaceful location, due to the pulling distractions of every day life. In "Nourishing, Awareness in Each Moment," Hanh points out that humankind is a product of environment, and that by watching violent television or movies, and through distracting friends and associates, one often finds oneself in a state of confusion and loneliness. Hanh equates this scenario to opening one's windows on a cold day. In order to regain warmth, one must close the windows, and retreat into oneself. While Hanh does not suggest leaving the "windows," or the senses, closed, he notes that while beginning to learn conscious breathing, such actions may be necessary to find peace. After practice, one will be able to open the sense, and filter out those influences that are harmful.

Hanh also points out that, to practice conscious breathing, one does not need to retire to a meditation room. In "Sitting Anywhere," Hanh teaches that when one begins to feel depleted, one can silently think the mantra while paying attention to one's breathing. This can be done in an office, traffic, shopping mall, or anywhere else. By breathing mindfully, or consciously, one can return to a state of balance. While conscious breathing can be practiced in any position, in "Sitting Meditation," Hanh recommends sitting cross-legged on a cushion, using the half-lotus, or full-lotus position.

In the lotus position, the legs are crossed by placing one foot (half-lotus) or both feet (full lotus) on the opposite knee. Hanh notes that if this is uncomfortable, one should feel free to move. In some meditation centers, Hanh points out, such movement is prohibited, but Hanh believes that such prohibitive rules are not conducive to proper meditation. Hanh finishes this chapter by suggesting that one not use meditation for intent escape from problems, but rather, as a gentle communion with life, so that one is able to face those problems following meditation.

In order to remember to stop and breathe mindfully, Hanh suggests in "Bells of Mindfulness" the use of specific sounds, such as church bells, car buzzers, or other sounds heard every day as cues to meditate. During these brief moments of meditation, Hanh suggests the mantra "Listen, Listen. This wonderful sound brings me back to my true self." Further, Hanh notes non-sounds, such as a ray of sunshine, can remind one to stop and breathe, smile, and appreciate the moment.

Part 1, Chapters 1-9 Analysis

This first collection of articles takes the reader from the concept of living in the present to reminders of conscious breathing. In "Twenty-Four Brand-New Hours," Hanh reminds readers to live in the present moment, rather than dwell on the past or future. Next, in "The Dandelion has my Smile," Hanh explains the relationship between smiling and relaxation by pointing out that smiling relaxes over one hundred muscles in the face, preparing an individual for the meditative act of conscious breathing, explained in



"Conscious Breathing." He presents a symbol for smiling, that of the dandelion. He notes that as long as one remembers, "the dandelion has" one's smile, one can always regain his or her peace. With the use of a focusing mantra, Hanh clearly explains to readers how to practice mindful breathing, and in "Present Moment, Wonderful Moment," Hanh continues this lesson with another mantra. By introducing simple, easy to remember steps and focusing words, Hanh presents a way of relaxation nearly anyone can practice.

In "Thinking Less," Hanh makes a valid point of noting that humankind often is unable to truly relax due to a constant thought process. By forcing the mind to slow, one is able to relax and find balance in a simple manner that requires no particular skills or education. Hanh continues to show his knowledge in "Nourishing Awareness in each Moment" by the use of his anecdote to explain how humankind is too lazy, selfish, and frightened to avoid harmful intrusions on the senses, instead preferring to allow the world to interfere with these senses. Hanh reminds readers to "close the windows," or withdraw occasionally to find an inner balance, using the open windows to symbolize a lack of filtering for the senses. This method, as Hanh points out, is vital to the conscious breathing method, in that the purpose of mindful breathing is to find joy in each moment. If external stresses are present, such a possibility is nearly non-existent.

Next, the articles "Sitting Anywhere" and "Sitting Meditation" remind readers that mindful breathing can be practiced anywhere, preferable in the lotus position. By practicing mindful breathing whenever life begins to cause stress, one is able to consistently find balance and center. Finally, in "Bells of Mindfulness," Hanh suggests several cues for readers to use as reminders to practice conscious breathing. Using bells or other sounds as symbols for conscious breathing, one can remember to stop and enjoy the moment.

In these nine articles, Hanh presents a full method of relaxation meditation that nearly anyone can practice. Because the method can be done in any position, any location, and using any cue, one only needs to remember a few small phrases in order to center the mind. Hanh also shows his clear dedication to true peace by disagreeing with traditional meditation centers that forbid movement. Hanh points out, in "Sitting Meditation," that since the purpose of meditation and conscious breathing is to relax, one must be comfortable. These steps to achieve conscious breathing, while simple, are vital to the concepts presented in the rest of the book, and foreshadow Hanh's narrative on the lasting effects of inner peace and conscious breathing throughout Section 2 and Section 3.

These articles also introduce many themes used throughout the novel, such as those of mindfulness, compassion, peace, and relaxation. Further, Hanh's use of symbolism to convey ideas, such as the use of a dandelion as a smile, a bell as a cue for mindful breathing, and the window as unprotected senses, Hanh allows readers to visualize the concepts presented in the book, furthering their understanding of each step in mindful breathing.



Part 1, Chapters 10-17

Part 1, Chapters 10-17 Summary

Following his instructional articles on mindful breathing, Hanh begins the next set of articles, which explain how to use conscious breathing in daily life. In "Cookie of Childhood," Hanh tells of his childhood when his mother would bring him a cookie. He would sit outside and enjoy each bite while communing with nature and his surroundings. Hanh explains that although most individuals believe they have lost the "cookie" of childhood, one must simply eat mindfully, enjoying each moment, to find that peaceful childhood state.

Hanh continues teaching of eating mindfully in "Tangerine Meditation." He begins with a story of a group of children examining tangerines. Each child meditates on the origins of the tangerine, visualizing the tree blossoms growing into fruits with the help of rain and sunshine. As the child begins to eat the fruit, he or she is filled with the smell and texture of the tangerine, having visualized the fruit from beginning to end. Hanh stresses that in looking deeply at each moment, one can see the entire universe within each portion of one's surroundings, and by taking time out to enjoy food, one can be happy.

Hanh then explains his viewpoints of the Eucharist ritual of Christianity, and how this rite can be applied to conscious breathing and mindful eating. In "The Eucharist," Hanh notes that Jesus asked his disciples to eat the bread in an effort to return them to mindful eating. The disciples had long eaten in forgetfulness, and in doing so, turned the food and their surroundings to ghosts. By reminding them to live in the present and eat mindfully, Jesus returned the disciples to mindfulness, and thus, to the richness of present life.

Hanh next continues his discussion of mindful eating by extending the concept to the dinner table in "Mindful Eating." Hanh reminds readers to breathe mindfully immediately before eating, and to look at each person at the table individually, smiling. He mentions that it doing so, one brings happiness to other members of the family, as well as allowing for complete recovery of the senses and the self. Once recovered, one can then look deeply at the food to be eaten, can connect with the universe that produces the food and, as a result, can eat in mindfulness. Hanh also recommends eating in silence on occasion, without televisions or even conversation, in an effort to truly enjoy the food. Hanh additionally recommends avoiding harmful conversations at the dinner table, such as conversations about shortcomings or daily problems. Instead, Hanh recommends discussing the food and other topics that nourish awareness. Through a combination of smiling, conscious breathing, and mindfulness, one is able to fully appreciate the gifts of companionship and food.

Even washing dishes can be done in conscious mindfulness, according to Hanh. In "Washing Dishes," Hanh expresses his belief that when completing each dish, one should be aware of the dish, the water, and the movement of one's own hands. Instead



of focusing on desert, or other future events, one should focus only on the present, and enjoy the miracle of washing dishes. Hanh believes that if one is unable to enjoy the act of completing the dishes, then one is unable to enjoy the act of eating the desert to follow. However, if one can stop to enjoy the act of washing, one will be able fully to enjoy future events.

In his next article, "Walking Meditation," Hanh explains how to practice conscious breathing and mindful living when walking. By walking slowly, and coordinating breathing with each step by saying, "In, In, In" for three steps while inhaling, then "Out, Out, Out" for three steps while exhaling, one can find inner balance while enjoying the present. Hanh points out that if one requires four breaths instead of three, or two breaths, one should simply adapt the mantra accordingly. Additionally, if one sees a beautiful flower, a playing child or other lovely image in nature, one should stop and examine it, while still practicing conscious breathing. Hanh also states that one should walk carefully and gently, since humankind has caused damage to the Earth in the past.

Hanh also gives advice for mindful breathing in relation to the telephone. In "Telephone Meditation," Hanh notes that people often waste precious time and money on the telephone, and feel obligated to answer, even though the ringing of the phone may cause anger or frustration. In response, Hanh suggests breathing consciously during the first two rings of the phone, repeating the mantra used in "Bells of Mindfulness," then walking mindfully to the telephone, and smiling before answering. In doing so, one can gain peace and harmony prior to answering the telephone, which benefits both the caller as well as the recipient. In addition, Hanh suggests using conscious breathing and smiling prior to making a telephone call. By counterbalancing daily stressors with mindful breathing prior to making or answering a telephone call, one can return to a state of balance, and spread peace to another person.

Hanh even promotes conscious breathing while driving. In "Driving Meditation," Hanh suggests using stoplights or stop signs as reminders for conscious breathing. He relates a story of a friend driving through Paris, on which many license plates are written, "Je me souviens," or "I remember." Hanh suggested to his friend that he use those words to trigger conscious breathing, so that each license plate he saw with that phrase reminded him to enjoy the present moment. The man was delighted, but when driving through England, this phrase was absent. As a substitute, Hanh suggested using stoplights as reminders. The man wrote Hanh and praised his solution, noting that by practicing conscious breathing at stoplights, one is able to negate the feeling of frustration often associated with driving. Further, Hanh suggests only using a vehicle when necessary, choosing to walk when possible. His mantra for driving meditation, "Before starting the car, I know where I am going. The car and I are one, If the car goes fast, I go fast" is designed to promote walking meditation.

By stating one knows where they are going, Hanh believes one is forced to think about one's destination, and decide if driving is necessary. Additionally, by becoming one with the vehicle, a person is able to better control his or her actions while driving. Thus, conscious breathing and mindful living can return drivers to peace and inner harmony, as well as promote walking meditation, which is better for the environment.



Part 1, Chapters 10-17 Analysis

The first four articles, "Cookies of Childhood," "Tangerine Meditation," "The Eucharist," and "Eating Mindfully" are designed to combine Hanh's instructions for smiling, conscious breathing, and mindful living from prior chapters with the act of eating and sharing a meal. Hanh first notes that children revel in their food while enjoying their surroundings. As an adult, one often forgets this fascination of childhood, or the "cookie" of childhood. Hanh's method of mindful eating returns one to this state of inner joy at foods and nature, thus returning individuals to the awe of childhood. This symbolic reference to the "cookie" of childhood is a powerful reminder to enjoy the present moment. Hanh's story of the children and the tangerine also reminds readers to look deeply into each moment, and examine their surroundings in a mindful manner. In doing so, one is able to connect with the entire universe. Even further, Hanh's symbolic use of ghosts as representation of the effects of eating in forgetfulness in "The Eucharist" demonstrates clearly the lack of substance those not living mindfully experience.

Further, the inclusion of this article shows Hanh's firm focus on enhancing the lives of people through conscious breathing and mindful living instruction, regardless of religion. Hanh is able to connect Christianity to Zen Buddhism flawlessly, displaying his own ability to connect with all of humankind. This devotion to the method, regardless of religious belief, adds credibility to Hanh's teachings, in that he practices peaceful living himself.

In "Mindful Eating," Hanh continues this lesson by advising readers to use conscious breathing, mindful living, and smiling to enhance mealtimes. By combining these practices, one brings happiness to other members of the family, as well as allowing for inner peace, which then allows one to look deeply at the food, and see the universe at work. This alone can help individuals to eat mindfully, and appreciate their loved ones, and the gift of food. The concept of seeing the universe in each object of life is also a theme used throughout the novel.

In the following four articles, Hanh again combines his previous instruction with every day living experiences. First, in his discussion of "Washing Dishes," Hanh reminds readers to enjoy every experience, including those previously thought of as chores, or labor. By enjoying the act of dishwashing, one can alter the negative feelings associated with such activities, thereby achieving an increased sense of joy and harmony. In "Walking Meditation," Hanh not only promotes mindful living and conscious breathing, but also the recognition of nature, which is a theme used throughout the remainder of the novel. Hanh suggests that one walk gently, to counterbalance the damage the human race has inflicted on Earth over the centuries. This theme of mindful living in relation to Nature is important, as it clarifies a major objective of conscious breathing.

"Telephone Meditation" reintroduces the theme of achieving inner peace in an effort to spread that peace, which was introduced by The Dalai Lama in "Foreword." Hanh's clarification that conscious breathing and smiling are not simply tools for one's self, but also for those around an individual, is an important point and one that leads to the ideas



of world peace later in the novel. Additionally, Hanh admits in this article to not knowing how telephone operators can practice such a method in the midst of their job, showing his true nature as a Buddhist, in that he does not have all the answers. However, he also states his belief that individuals can develop their own ways of practicing mindful living and conscious breathing, showing his faith in humanity to use the breathing method appropriately.

Finally, Hanh makes very valid points in "Driving Meditation" related to the same themes discussed above. His mantra, relating to focusing on the destination of an individual and the consequences of that destination, that of increased pollution, return readers to the theme of Nature and mindful living. Hanh's revelation that he was the first monk to ride a bicycle in Vietnam strengthens his image as a forward thinker and a rebel, introduced in "Editor's Introduction." With the knowledge that Hanh has consistently, throughout his life, lived in direct line with his teachings of achieving inner peace at any cost allows readers to appreciate his method even further. Additionally, Hanh's mantra, forcing individuals to see themselves as the vehicle, forces drivers to control the vehicle as they would themselves. The practice of conscious breathing while driving suggests peaceful driving practices, which would benefit the community at large. This again shows the theme of the relationship between one's inner peace and the community.



Part 1, Chapters 18-25

Part 1, Chapters 18-25 Summary

Hanh begins "Departmentalization" by pointing out that meditation is not done to purify oneself during the meditation period alone, but throughout the day. Thus, practicing conscious breathing and mindful living assists one in finding inner peace in each moment. Hanh believes that by applying meditation to all moments in life, one can drastically influence social concerns, and thus, should strive to continue.

Hanh then tells readers of his own use of conscious breathing in a daily event, that of cutting grass with a scythe, in "Breathing and Scything." According to Hanh, he purchased the scythe and tried many methods of using it before he discovered that he could complete more work with it if he timed his movements with his breathing. An old man in the neighborhood who later showed him how to use the scythe also timed his breathing, showing a link between the mind and body is essential to productive activity.

Hanh notes, in "Aimlessness," that those who approach life with a constant goal in mind often forget to live mindfully. They are so focused on achieving the end goal that many forget how to enjoy the path to reaching that goal. Hanh mentions that Buddhism has a word for "aimlessness" or "wishlessness," and that this should be the goal of all meditations. Hanh comments that humankind has difficulty stopping activity, since current culture promotes constant activity. However, as Hanh points out, by stopping one's thinking and focusing on mindfulness, one can return to the present, and enjoy and appreciate life.

He continues this concept of stopping in "Our Life is a Work of Art," by discussing art in terms of mindfulness. According to Hanh, many individuals attempt to approach art and all of life in a way that reaps benefits. Hanh believes that if one stops seeking for benefits, one can actually gain the benefits available. He mentions that by stopping and meditating, one is finally able to see the world as it is meant to be seen. Only then, can one understand the full meaning of life. By living mindfully in the present, Hanh believes every action can be a work of art. If one finds oneself, and lives in peace, each action becomes art, and benefits the world.

Hanh also mentions his views of hope in "Hope as an Obstacle." Hanh mentions his viewpoint that hope, while important, is often a barrier to happiness, in that it focuses only on the future, rather than the present. He notes that enlightenment and peace cannot be found through another, but only through oneself. Hanh realizes the strong reaction Christians may have at this notion, since their religion is based on the hope of salvation, but mentions that this reaction should be used to bring these individuals back to the present, so they may realize the beauty of today.

In "Flower Insights," Hanh tells the story of Buddha and the flower. In the story, Buddha holds a flower before a group of monks, who try desperately to find the meaning of his



action. One monk, Mahakashyapa, smiles at the flower and at Buddha, who returns the smile. According to Hanh, Buddha's point in this story is to remind others to live in the present, instead of thinking too much about meaning. Hanh notes that a child presents a smile openly and without any particular goal, and reminds readers that they too can find their inner child, and find the inner peace required for mindful living, through conscious breathing. He then tells the story of a friend who wrote a poem about a flower outside his walkway. According to Hanh, the poem is a symbol for the friend's mindful living, and Hanh believes all humankind is capable of such living.

In "Breathing Room," Hanh suggests the creation of a meditation room within one's home. Dimly lit with cushions, a bell, and a vase of flowers, the room should be designed for the whole family, and be an area of safety for the group. He gives an example of a couple that argues. The husband, knowing he needs to re-center, goes to the room, and practices conscious breathing, ringing the bell for a reminder. The wife, hearing the bell, stops cutting carrots, which she is doing with force, and practices breathing in the kitchen. The young child, who has gone to her room fearing her parents' argument, also practices her breathing. Moments later, as the husband prepares to leave the breathing room, the little girl comes in, and sits next to her father for support. Seeing her, the husband again rings the bell, reminding them both to breathe. The wife, knowing the bell signals her daughters' arrival, also goes to the room, and together, the family practices conscious breathing and mindful living.

Hanh sees this as the most beautiful moment in life, and as a moment that can change a civilization. In "Continuing the Journey," Hanh introduces readers to the next section's topic, that of dealing with difficult emotions, such as anger, hatred, remorse, and sadness. Hanh explains to readers that mindful living and conscious breathing are the building blocks of happiness, and that they can be used in conjunction with other methods, presented in the next section, to find inner peace.

Part 1, Chapters 18-25 Analysis

In this collection of articles, Hanh reminds readers of a variety of other uses for mindful living. He stresses the importance of conscious breathing when using tools, stresses the need for aimless meditation, the obstacles of hope, the importance of focusing on the present, instead of future, and the beauty of a family living mindfully together. In "Our Life is a Work of Art," Hanh reminds readers that the point of art is not necessarily a deep meaning, but instead, may simply be a representation of the artist's mindful living. This theme is repeated in "Aimlessness" with the idea that one should not always focus on a goal, but rather, the path. In doing so, individuals can stop and live in the present moment, thus finding his or her own balance.

Again, Hanh shows his willingness to challenge beliefs of individuals in pursuit of his teachings in "Hope as an Obstacle." Hanh, by challenging hope as a crutch in life and an obstacle of mindful living, may challenge strong viewpoints held by those whose religious beliefs focus on future salvation. This alone shows Hanh's faith in his own belief, and his willingness to explain that belief to others, in spite of their possible

reactions. Again, this adds credibility to Hanh's teachings, in that he clearly believes what he says.

"Flower Insights" again brings the theme of Nature to the forefront of the discussion, as Hanh's story of Buddha illustrates how mindful living can force the brain to stop thinking, and start living in the present moment. Finally, in "Breathing Room," Hanh again shows readers how mindful living and conscious breathing can come together to spread peace and joy to others. In his story of the arguing couple, conscious breathing is the first step to healing, and through the child's willingness to support her father and the wife's willingness to stop her activities to join her family, the group shows the results of mindful living. This display of the power of conscious breathing and mindful living leads readers to the next section, introduced in "Continuing the Journey" as a set of articles describing how these techniques can help individuals heal themselves emotionally and psychologically. This theme is used throughout the rest of the novel.



Part 2, Chapters 26-33

Part 2, Chapters 26-33 Summary

Hanh begins this section of the book by discussing the vast number of emotions that human beings experience throughout life, in "The River of Feelings." Hanh explains there are three types of feelings, those of the pleasant, the unpleasant, and the neutral. Those feelings play a vital role in one's thoughts and actions. Hanh also notes that individuals often wish to push away unpleasant feelings, but points out it is healthier to face those emotions through conscious breathing and mindful observation, which allows one to recognize the emotion as a part of oneself. By neither clinging to, nor rejecting emotions, one is able to let go of the emotion, and transform it into healthy energy.

Hanh continues to discuss this process of accepting one's feelings in "Non-Surgery," where he points out individuals are often led to surgically remove portions of the body that are not wanted. Hanh notes the same method of practice in psychotherapy, where therapists often promote rejection of unwanted feelings. Hanh, however, believes that since these feelings are a part of the individual, one should not reject those emotions, but rather, should learn to transform them, which he teaches readers to do in the next chapter. According to Hanh, the negative emotion will transform itself if cared for through understanding, love, and attention, and one will again be able to find inner peace.

In "Transforming Feelings," Hanh teaches individuals how to transform those negative emotions into positive sources of energy, as well as how to identify causes of such emotions. First, Hanh states, one must recognize the negative feeling as it arises, which is done through mindfulness. He believes that by simply looking at an emotion, one can identify the emotion. Next, one must identify with the emotion, and become one with the feeling. By merging mindfulness with the negative emotion, one can identify that emotion without becoming overwhelmed. Third, one must calm the feeling through mindful breathing.

Hanh uses the analogy of a mother and crying child. The mother, or mindfulness, must carefully hold and soothe the child, or the feeling, in order for it to calm down. Next, one must release the feeling, or let go of the emotion. Finally, one is able to identify the cause of the emotion, but only after it has been released. Again, Hanh uses the analogy of a child. By looking deeply at the child, or emotion, one is able to identify the source of the crying, or suffering. By identifying the source of the emotion, and fixing the underlying issue, one can be assured the issue will not arise again, and can transform the emotion to a positive energy. Hanh points out that many individuals are willing to find the source of the issue, but are often unwilling to change the situation necessary to solve the issue. He reaffirms that as one does so, one can learn to transform any feeling by transforming the beliefs, perceptions, or lifestyles that cause the problem.



Hanh combines these solutions together to explain how to resolve one particular emotion, anger, in the next five articles. He begins by discussing the emotion in "Mindfulness of Anger." According to Hanh, anger is the root of self-control problems, and is the material from which hell is made. Hanh states that it is only without hate and anger that one can experience happiness, love, and compassion. By mindfully observing anger, or by recognizing anger, the emotion loses power. Hanh notes that mindfulness does not judge the source of the anger, but simply tends to the feeling.

Hanh suggests that while mindfully observing anger, one should not think of the source of the anger or confront the source, but should focus only on observing the anger until it is transformed. Since the anger is part of the inner self, one must recognize it in order to understand the self. Hanh compares this situation to that of an organic gardener. When the gardener works with rotting compost, he or she sees only the flowers this compost will help nurture. Hanh states the same is true for anger: by recognizing anger as a source of positive energy, one can find peace and love.

Hanh next discusses ways in which individuals can, and should, deal with angry emotions. In "Pillow Pounding," Hanh recommends against expressing anger at either the source of the anger, or substitute sources, such as pillows. He notes that while pounding a pillow may make the anger subside temporarily, it does not negate the emotion. To truly negate the anger, one must deal with the source within oneself through mindful living. Hanh compares this to sunshine and flowers, in that just as sunshine nurtures flowers to beauty over time, mindfulness will transform anger to show the source, thereby freeing the individual from the feeling forever.

To do this, Hanh recommends, in "Walking Meditation When Angry," that one should practice walking meditation when he or she feels anger rising. Using a mantra that includes recognition, acceptance, letting go, calming, and nurturing the anger, one can use mindful breathing to calm the emotion. Once the anger subsides, one can then examine the source.

To examine the source, Hanh recommends meditation, mindful breathing, and mindful observation, in "Cooking our Potatoes." Hanh states that, as a raw potato needs to be cooked in order for it to be useful, so anger needs to be examined in order to be transformed. According to Hanh, if one finds the root of anger, which is often clumsiness, misunderstanding, injustice, conditioning, or resentment, one can understand the source, and find compassion for the cause. In "cooking the potato," or meditating on the anger, one can change it to a positive force.

Hanh further notes, in "The Roots of Anger," that the source of anger is often within oneself, in the form of resentment, pride, desire, suspicion, and other forms of underlying feelings. Hanh uses the example of a man shouting angrily at another man. The immediate cause of anger in the man shouted at, is the misplaced anger of his aggressor. However, if the man shouted at looks deeply, he may discover that his aggressor was abused as a child, has a very sick child, or is ill himself. By recognizing the anger, releasing it, and then finding the cause of the anger, the man shouted at can learn to feel compassion and understanding for other's situations.



Part 2, Chapters 26-33 Analysis

In this selection of articles, Hanh takes readers through the process of transforming negative emotions into positive forces of energy. In "River of Feelings," Hanh begins by discussing the entire process, enabling readers to understand the basic concept prior to attempting the process themselves. This again shows Hanh's understanding of human nature and his abilities as a competent instructor. In "Non-Surgery," Hanh shows his reluctance to accept modern methods of healing and medicine, instead preferring to deal directly with the emotional issues involved in life. As in previous articles, Hanh clearly displays a sense of rebellion against simple avoidance methods to stress reduction. This continued response allows readers to see the depths of Hanh's beliefs in his method, providing a sense of authenticity to his teachings.

In "Transforming Feelings," Hanh explains the process of negating emotions by symbolism, in which a mother represents mindfulness and a crying child represents the negative emotion. In using these symbols, Hanh allows readers to visualize the calming of negative emotion, furthering their ability to understand his points. As a child needs calming by a mother, so an emotion needs calming by the owner of the emotion. Hanh also introduces the theme of self-healing in this chapter, and the responsibility of each person to tend to their own emotional well-being, rather than simply blaming others. This theme is used throughout the novel, and is a key component to Hanh's teachings.

In the next five articles, Hanh's use of symbolism to explain concepts increases as he explains the process of anger negation. Beginning with "Mindfulness of Anger," Hanh combines his previous method of conscious breathing with his teachings of mindful observation to give readers a complete path to healing inner feelings. This combination of methods adds cohesiveness to the book, and brings the concepts together in a simple, comprehensible way that is available to anyone. Further, his use of analogy in this chapter assists readers in further understanding the benefits of mindful observation and tending of emotions.

In using the compost heap and the gardener to show his point, Hanh adds a light and simple way for readers to visualize the process of emotion stabilization. His further use of imagery, in "Pillow Pounding," forces the reader to examine an action many perform, that of a transference of anger that is often ineffective. Many individuals can identify with the scenario presented, that of pounding a pillow to rid the self of anger, and in using this scenario, Hanh presents yet another concept in a way most readers can identify with, allowing them to gain a better grasp of Hanh's teachings. In "Walking Meditation When Angry," Hanh again combines previous teachings, those of meditation and conscious breathing, with his current teachings of mindful observation of emotion. In using meditation methods listed in Part one in combination with the thorough examination of emotion while meditating, the reader is able to perform the steps listed in "Transforming Feelings," with ease and understanding. The addition of a walking mantra for anger is essential, in that such an inclusion gives readers another tool for meditation practice.



In "Cooking Our Potatoes," Hanh shows his mastery of imagery and symbolism in teaching, as he walks readers through visualizing a raw potato being cooked thoroughly. In each step of the "cooking" process, Hanh equates the step to that of emotional stabilization. The "raw potato," or emotion, is "put into a pot of water" with a lid, and placed on the fire. The lid represents the focused energy of concentration, while the fire represents mindful observation of emotion. As the "water heats up," or the mindful observation begins, one can "smell the potato cooking," or sense the emotion beginning to fade. When "the potato is finished," or the transformation is complete, one can "eat the potato," or use the new, positive energy. In using this complex, yet subtle symbolism, Hanh not only adds a simple way to view the process that helps to ensure reader comprehension, but also strengthens the message by adding substance.

Finally, in "Roots of Anger," Hanh gently guides the reader through examining his or her inner self to find the roots of anger. Again, Hanh's technique of offering examples of situations allows one to focus not only on his teachings, but also on the outcome of those teachings. This adds integrity to the content, by providing steps to solve issues and examples of those solutions in practice.

Part 2, Chapters 34-41

Part 2, Chapters 34-41 Summary

Hanh continues the discussion of learning to deal with negative feelings in the article "Internal Formations." Hanh begins by explaining a Buddhist word, translated as "knot" or "internal formation." The word represents the concept that negative emotions and encounters cause "knots" to form within one's emotional consciousness. These "knots" require untying in order for them to be transformed. Hanh presents the example of a woman overhearing her husband bragging, and as a result, finds herself feeling a loss of respect for him. If the issue is discussed, an understanding of the reasons behind the boasting can be found, and the knot can be untied. If however, the situation is not discussed, then the knot will remain. According to Hanh, these "knots" are then repressed, but continue looking for a way to manifest. As a result, one is left with destructive feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Hanh believes that by practicing mindful breathing, one can identify these "knots," examine them, release them, and untie them by facing that which created the "knot" originally. By living in the present, one can identify these "knots" as they form, and thus find peace.

Hanh continues this discussion of "knots" in "Living Together," by discussing the need for individuals cohabitating to be aware of one another's internal formations. Hanh notes that those living with one another often cause "knots" in one another, and should work together to resolve those issues. In doing so, all parties can find happiness by understanding the cause of the "knot," and repairing it. In order to do this, however, Hanh notes in "Suchness" that individuals sharing space with one another should always learn the "suchness" of the other person. "Suchness," a translated Buddhist term, means "the essence or particular characteristics of a thing or a person, its true nature."

Hanh notes that because one understands the dangers of electricity and natural gas, one is able to use them effectively, and the situation is similar with people. If one knows another person completely, he or she can understand the other, and can find happiness. If, however, "suchness" is not known, one may find him or herself in an unpleasant relationship. Hanh believes one must accept both the beauty and the "garbage" of another person in order to truly understand him or her.

Hanh next reminds readers that all things can be found in a single person, in the article "Look into Your Hand." Hanh begins by recalling a story of a friend leaving Vietnam. In his story, the young man's mother tells him to look into his hand whenever he misses home, and tells him he will see her there immediately. The young man does so throughout his life, seeing not only his mother's genetic influence in his hands, but also her spirit, hopes, and life.

Further, in his hands, the man sees past and future generations, nature, the universe, and all living and non-living things. Because all things are connected, Hanh explains,



the man never feels lonely. Hanh furthers this discussion of parental influence in "Parents." He begins by explaining that the memory of his mother is one of love and gentleness, and that the day he lost his mother was one of great tragedy. Hanh laments the idea that Western cultures are not as loving of their parents, and explains that he has heard many tell of childhood trauma at the hands of parents. However, Hanh believes these parents did not intend to cause suffering, but instead were victims themselves, and thus, these seeds of suffering were simply passed on.

Hanh believes that through mindful living, one can break the cycle of transmission, and stop the seeds of suffering from being planted in future generations. He tells the story of a young man whose father often yelled at him when he harmed himself. The young man promises himself he will not do this to his own children, but when his sister falls, he finds himself angry, and in recognizing the anger through mindful observation, does not act on it. Following walking meditation, he works through mindfulness to let go of the anger, and then faces his father to untie the "knot" within him. He tells his father he understands why he acted in anger, and wishes he too would work through mindfulness to resolve the anger within himself.

Hanh notes that when one observes parents with compassion, one can forgive them their wrongs, and help them find joy and peace. In looking at oneself, one can see the gift of the body, mind and soul given by the parents, can see the "givers" that are one's ancestors, and can see the recipient of the gift, or oneself. In doing so, according to Hanh, one will know mindful living.

Hanh revisits the issue of the "seeds" within oneself in "Nourishing Healthy Seeds." He begins by explaining that the consciousness consists of two levels, that of "seeds," and that of the manifestation of those "seeds." As each seed manifests itself, more seeds of the same kind are created. As a result, Hanh believes, one must lead a life of smiling and mindful living, because each positive seed breeds more of the same, while each negative seed, when manifested, causes more negativity to breed.

Hanh relates this to antibodies in the blood. Our positive seeds can act as antibodies around a "virus," or negative seed. In doing so, the positive seed can take care of the negative seeds. Hanh next explains that on occasion, one may need to bring a positive seed into consciousness. He relates a story in which a friend dies, and Hanh finds himself saddened. To overcome this, he practices mindful breathing, and visualizes a young girl whom the village adores. Hanh finds himself feeling better. By calling forth a positive seed, one is able to negate negative seeds. Hanh notes that if an individual is unable to recall, for example, an image of a friend due a long time between visits, one may need to be in the presence of the friend. However, the individual should practice mindful awareness during their time together, so that on their return home, the individual can use the image of the friend as a positive seed.

Hanh also recommends, in "What's Not Wrong?" that individuals learn to be in touch with these positive seeds and emotions. Hanh expresses grief that most individuals only examine what is wrong in their lives, and forget to focus on what is not wrong. By focusing on positive elements around themselves, individuals can find peace and joy in



every moment. He continues in "Blaming Never Helps," by pointing out that blaming oneself or another person for problems, rationalizing problems, or judging other does not have any positive effect. Understanding, according to Hanh, is the only way to change a situation. Hanh uses an analogy of lettuce, in that when lettuce fails to grow, people look into reasons for the failure, such as a lack of water, or too little sun. If people do the same with one another, rather than blaming one another, the "lettuce," or situation, will improve.

Part 2, Chapters 34-41 Analysis

Hanh reintroduces the theme of Buddhist faith in "Internal Formations," with the concept of "knots." While the methods presented thus far in the novel are Buddhist in nature, Hanh rarely forces the issue to the forefront, but does so in this article to illustrate the point. By using the story of a woman and her husband to further illustrate the advantages of dealing with problems, rather than avoiding issues, Hanh ensures readers can understand the idea of "knots." By extending his explanation into "Living Together," where he further solidifies the concept of working with loved ones to repair "knots," or underlying emotional issues, Hanh furthers this understanding. Hanh yet again introduces a Buddhist term in "Suchness," showing his background in Zen-Buddhist teachings.

In "Look into Your Hand," Hanh reintroduces the themes of nature and a sense of companionship with all living and nonliving things. By using the story of the young boy and the mother, and thereby introducing the concept of genetic and natural influences on life, Hanh is able to explain the idea of "interbeing," which is an idea described in detail later in the book. In "Parents," Hanh shows his disapproval for Western culture by denouncing the treatment of parents by adult children. His disapproval, stemming from a belief that parents are victims of their environment, does not provide an excuse for the mistreatment of children, but instead focuses on the forgiveness of the parents by the adult child. By focusing the reader in such a way, Hanh is able to demonstrate the need to forgive in order to find one's own inner peace without needing to blame anyone, leaving the text accessible to all individuals. This accessibility is furthered by the use of the poignant story of the young man and the father.

Hanh combines the use of story with symbolism in "Nourishing Healthy Seeds." First, by using an analogy of antibodies and a virus, Hanh is able to symbolize the effects of positive emotions on negative feelings. Then, through the story of Hanh's own loss of a friend, and his resulting efforts to regain a sense of peace, Hanh is able to add a personal touch to his teachings, allowing readers to feel compassion. This compassion, brought about by a story concerning a common emotion, again shows the point of the lesson without strict adherence to traditional teaching methods. Even further, by explaining his own use of visualization to plant the seeds of positive emotion, and then by expanding this point by offering solutions for those unable to visualize a positive "seed," Hanh offers readers an opportunity to learn visualization through practice, furthering their understanding of the concept.



Hanh uses gentle guidance to lead readers into self-exploration in "What's Not Wrong?" By stating his belief that many problems stem from within oneself, and by offering suggestions on avoiding focus on negative aspects of life, Hanh teaches readers to find peace and joy in each moment, again illustrating mindful living. Finally, in "Blaming Never Helps," Hanh again uses symbolism to illustrate his point. In using the analogy of the lettuce failing to grow, Hanh provides readers with a visual image of the principle of the lesson, as well as offers a common scenario, that of failure to grow a vegetable, for readers to identify with. This identification allows readers to understand the point, that blame does not solve any issues, without any real effort on the part of the author.



Part 2, Chapters 42-50

Part 2, Chapters 42-50 Summary

In "Understanding," Hanh discusses the link between love, compassion, and understanding. According to him, one must look at other individuals with compassion, and in doing so, will understand other's behaviors. In understanding, one will not find anger, but instead will love, which can be used to help suffering in the world. Hanh uses the example of a young boy who awakens his sister nicely. She yells at him, and he is originally angry. However, on reflection, he realizes she was awake, coughing all evening, and thus, must be sick. This understanding dissolves his anger. Hanh continues the discussion of feelings toward others in "True Love." Hanh believes that one must completely understand another person in order to love him or her. He explains that by asking questions of the other person, such as "Am I making you suffer?" one can learn the aspirations, sufferings, and needs of him or her, and in doing so, can truly love.

In the next article, Hanh explains how to meditate on compassion. In "Meditation on Compassion," Hanh begins by explaining that compassion is the ability to remove suffering from another person. To love and understand another, Hanh notes that one must be able to recognize the suffering in the other individual, and must be able to become one with the suffering individual. In order to meditate on compassion, Hanh recommends beginning with a meditation focus of one who is obviously suffering, such as the sick or the injured. When one meditates, and when one is in contact with the observation point, one must observe carefully and deeply in order to see the true nature of the suffering. In doing so, one can find compassion. When one then spends time with the individual, this compassion allows for acceptance and kind deeds, even when the individual is not kind. This unconditional love is the result of compassion.

Hanh also recommends meditating on those who have caused the reader suffering. In doing so, one is able to find compassion for that person, and can then let go of the pain felt by his or her actions that caused suffering. In "Meditation on Love," Hanh explains that the same issues are true when meditating on love. He recommends using mindful observation to ensure the focus of one's love is a true source of energy. In practicing love each day, with each contact, one can ensure the source of love within oneself is genuine.

In "Hugging Meditation," Hanh focuses on the power of hugging when combined with mindful breathing. Hanh recognizes the Western tradition of hugging as a wonderful custom, and believes that by blending it with conscious breathing, one can benefit even further from the act. He points out that if one hugs another person while distracted, the hug will not be as enjoyable as were it the only focus of one's mind. To achieve this, Hanh recommends using conscious breathing during the hug. Hanh uses the example of a child and father. If the father is preoccupied when the child appears, he may not



fully appreciate the child. By using conscious breathing, the father is able to return to the present, focus on only the child, and hug her with complete love and understanding.

Hanh expands the concept of love in "Investing in Friends." He notes that even the wealthiest can die of suffering, and thus, the best investment one can make is in the relationship with a friend. By building a support community, one can both help the community grow stronger by providing support and can help oneself by accepting the support of others.

Hanh discusses one source of joy and happiness in "It is a Great Joy to Hold Your Grandchild." He begins by lamenting that those in Western cultures no longer honor the elderly, and often live far away from their parents. Hanh continues by noting that, in Vietnam, the elderly live with their children, and are thus able to hold their grandchildren, which provides great joy. Hanh believes all cultures should find ways to allow the elderly to spend time with their grandchildren.

In "Community of Mindful Living," Hanh criticizes the move away from large family units in today's culture. He believes that these large family units, which included parents, children, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, provided a safe place for children whose parents were suffering. This, according to Hanh, helped the children to avoid suffering themselves. Hanh suggests that, to replace the large unit, communities set up centers where people can gather to learn mindful living. The center should be built where each feature, such as bells, buildings, and landscapes, are designed to promote inner peace. Hanh also suggests a family life that includes mindful living, such as meditation sessions, meditation rooms, and dinners eaten in mindfulness.

Hanh reminds readers that mindfulness is a tool that must be used in "Mindfulness Must be Engaged." According to Hanh, mindful living is not enough if such a life blinds one from seeing the real problems of the world. Hanh believes that one should not only live in mindfulness, but also engage that mindfulness to act on the suffering of others, as he and his monastic fellows did in Vietnam. By conscious breathing, mindful living, smiling, and awareness, the world can benefit from one's own mindful life.

Part 2, Chapters 42-50 Analysis

In "Understanding," Hanh again uses an example to explain his point, assisting readers in gaining the knowledge Hanh is attempting to give. Hanh also introduces the themes of understanding and compassion, which are vital to the process of anger management, and in finding inner peace. In "True Love," Hanh gives advice regarding relationships, maintaining that one must show understanding and compassion toward loved ones in order to truly love him or her. In using the theme of compassion and understanding to extend his teachings of love, Hanh assists readers in building their skills for the fullest possible relationships.

Hanh continues this "building block" method of teaching in "Meditation on Compassion." In this article, Hanh explains to readers how to focus their meditations on those in



obvious suffering to learn how to meditate appropriately. Once readers can learn this, they can apply the knowledge to those in silent suffering. In "Meditation on Love," Hanh uses the same method, by teaching readers to focus their meditation.

Hanh uses a slightly different, yet effective, method in "Hugging Meditation." Showing his appeal for the Western tradition of hugging, Hanh teaches readers to focus their hugging activities as he taught in prior articles. By combining previous teachings with the focus method, Hanh again teaches readers to build their skills, allowing for inner peace and full relationships with others. "Investing in Friends" further shows readers the benefit of complete relationships with others, as Hanh stresses the importance of community living and supportive relationships, which is another theme used later in the book.

While "It's a Great Joy to Hold Your Grandchild," appears to drastically change the focus of the section by discussing the joy of holding children, Hanh uses this to show another important point, that of the joy found in family relationships. This theme, stressed later in the novel, is vital to the concept of mindful living, in that without proper familial and friend support, mindful living is difficult. By allowing grandparents the privilege of being with family, one can increase their joy and as a result, their inner peace.

These themes of community and active mindfulness are revisited in "Community of Mindful Living." Hanh combines his methods taught throughout the book, including the concepts of community strength, love, compassion, understanding, conscious breathing, and mindful living to stress the need for community centers promoting such concepts. Additionally, Hanh revisits the theme of the importance of large families by noting the benefit of such centers for those with small family units. Hanh continues this point through his statements on the importance of family meditation, regardless of family size.

In "Mindfulness Must Be Engaged," Hanh sums his points from the previous articles to stress the need for active mindfulness. Hanh uses his own life examples to add validation to the point that to truly walk in mindfulness, one must use that mindful living to help others find peace. By acting mindfully, even in difficult situations, people are able to help others, and in doing so, can further their own peace.



Part 3, Chapters 51-58

Part 3, Chapters 51-58 Summary

Hanh begins this section by discussing the Buddhist concept of "interbeing." In this chapter, Hanh states that all things in the universe are interrelated, in that without one element, others cannot exist. To illustrate, Hanh uses the example of a piece of paper in the book. He notes that without sunshine, the tree cannot grow; without food, the logger could not chop the tree; without the parents of the logger, the logger would not exist, and so forth. Hanh continues this thought in "Flowers and Garbage" by pointing out that a rose, beautiful when first cut, eventually becomes garbage, and conversely, garbage, which smells horrible and is disgusting when in garbage form, can be used as compost and can turn into a beautiful rose. Hanh notes this is the concept of interbeing. Hanh also uses the example of the young prostitutes of Manila, who feel vile and disgusting, but have no options for livelihood. Conversely, in Manila, the children of the wealthy are looked on with admiration. Hanh believes without one set of wealthy individuals, the poor prostitutes would not exist, and vice versa. To have wealth, poverty is also required.

In "Waging Peace," Hanh discusses the need for active mindfulness and mindful living in terms of helping the suffering of the world. Hanh notes the Earth is damaged by war, poverty, pollution, and political strife. To fix this suffering, individuals fighting such issues must first obtain inner peace through mindful living. Hanh also discusses the need for true comprehension in compassion in "Not Two," introducing the Buddhist phrase "non-duality." According to Hanh, to understand something, one must become one with the situation. He tells a story of his work in Vietnam with orphans seeking sponsors in France. To translate the applications, Hanh first looked at a photo of the child, became one with their suffering, and then did the translation. In doing so, Hanh believes the translations were heartfelt and sincere, since his actions allowed him to understand the child completely in each case.

Hanh uses these concepts in the article "Healing the Wounds of War." According to Hanh, individuals experiencing war know more than anyone about the concept of interbeing, since the pains of the war live within those individuals throughout their lives. He discusses a retreat in the United States for Vietnam veterans, and mentions their inability to find inner peace, due to their activities in the war. One man killed children, another lost hundreds of men in a single battle, and another never felt safe. Following the retreat, many of the veterans regained some of their peace through mindful living, and through the realization that all things were interconnected. Hanh believes the veterans of war have much to teach others about interbeing.

In "The Sun My Heart," Hanh further expands the concept of interbeing by noting the importance of the sun in the lives of all creatures and things on the Earth. The sun, Hanh believes, is a human's second heart, since its light gives plants life, which gives oxygen for animals to breathe and provides food. Hanh notes that humans are affected



by all events on Earth, including the atmosphere, pebbles, and the movement of the moon. Without each, life on Earth would perish, again illustrating interbeing.

In "Looking Deeply," Hanh laments on the state of the rivers in the world, telling a story of his own experiences. In the story, Hanh visits the US and rinses his face in the Charles River, only to find his hosts in shock because the river is so polluted. Hanh believes that to enjoy the Earth, one must become the Earth, and experience the "fears and hopes" of the rivers, mountains, forests, and other natural areas. He notes that only by becoming the Earth can one think of the larger self, rather than the small self, and in doing so, can help heal the planet.

"The Art of Mindful Living" presents the same lesson, as Hanh notes the importance of mindful living in terms of saving the environment. He states that if one lives mindfully, one will know what items to avoid using, such as plastic containers and diapers, and will know what items can be reused by the Earth, such as banana peels and organic materials. In practicing mindful living, one can avoid using products that harm the planet.

Part 3, Chapters 51-58 Analysis

"Interbeing" reiterates a theme discussed in "Look Into Your Hand," as Hanh explains the link between humans and everything else in the universe. Hanh is able to illustrate the point effectively by using the paper as an example of the "interbeing" of all things, and in doing so, assists the reader in understanding the point. This interrelatedness of everything is vital to the concept of mindful living. His extension of the point in "Flowers and Garbage" uses a heartfelt example of a poor prostitute in Manila, forcing the reader to feel compassion for the young woman in the story who feels shame and guilt when looking at a wealthy young woman. Hanh expertly weaves the example to show readers the link between these individuals, and thus, explains interbeing effectively.

"Waging Peace" re-examines the theme of "active mindfulness" discussed in "Mindfulness Must Be Engaged," as Hanh uses examples of war and pollution to show how one needs to live mindfully to assist with suffering. In "Not Two," Hanh reintroduces the concept of understanding and compassion to explain the term "non-duality." In his own personal experience, Hanh allows readers to see the use of non-dualism in action, as his own ability to become one with the small orphan children of Vietnam allows him to assist in finding sponsors for the children. In using this example, Hanh shows readers the value of non-dualism in realistic terms. This method of instruction is also used in "Healing the Wounds of War," as Hanh uses his own experience at a Vietnam retreat to illustrate the usefulness of mindful living in seeing the value of interbeing. The veterans described by Hanh are clearly suffering, but are helped by mindful living and conscious breathing, which are methods Hanh has previously taught readers. By using this example, Hanh is able to combine the concepts of mindfulness, conscious breathing, non-duality, and interbeing effectively. He does the same in "The Sun My Heart" by explaining to readers the importance of every piece of the universe in the life of

humankind. By following the importance of the sun to various objects on Earth, Hanh is able to illustrate interbeing in a way that is simple for readers to understand.

Hanh shows his own ability to practice interbeing in "Looking Deeply," adding a sense of sincerity to his writing. By explaining his experiences at the Charles River, and with pollution, Hanh is able to convey his own sadness at the state of the rivers and streams in the world. This allows readers to understand the need to save the ecological system of the planet, as Hanh's words detail a world that is less beautiful, less thriving, and dangerous as a result of non-mindful living and pollution. Finally, in "The Art of Mindful Living," Hanh again returns to the idea of active mindfulness to show readers how mindful living can help save the environment. By using examples of everyday life, such as the use of banana peels and diapers, Hanh effectively explains the consequences of non-mindful living and conversely, the benefits to all humanity of mindful living.



Part 3, Chapters 59-71

Part 3, Chapters 59-71 Summary

In "Nourishing Awareness," Hanh stresses the importance of strengthening awareness. Hanh believes that by focusing on those who suffer from hunger before one eats a meal, for example, one can strengthen his or her awareness of the blessing of food. Through this mindfulness and awareness, one is able to enjoy food and companionship, and will eventually see how to help those in need.

Hanh continues his discussion of how to help others in "A Love Letter to Your Congressman." Many individuals write letters to politicians, but Hanh stresses the importance of wording those letters in such a way as to spread peace while still stating the point. By wording the letter with compassion and peace, one can ensure the intended recipient will read the letter, rather than simply throwing it away. Hanh believes that peace is only possible through peaceful movements.

This concept of peace in politics is also discussed in "Citizenship." In this article, Hanh points out citizens of the world have a responsibility to change themselves in such a way as to allow policy makers to make decisions that encourage peace. Through mindful living, awareness of consumption and suffering, and through living responsibly, one can encourage government to stop pollution, spread worldwide peace, and aim for unity. Additionally, by giving speeches and writing articles expressing these wishes, one can live a life of active mindfulness, and can thus spread enlightenment.

In "Ecology of Mind," Hanh stresses the importance of nature in life, and the need for respect of all things, both living and non-living. In order to preserve health and peace, one must free the world of pollution in terms of both nature and the mind. By avoiding harmful television, promoting non-violence, and preventing anxiety, one can purge the mind of pollution.

Hanh continues the theme of politics in "The Roots of War." He begins by telling a story of a visit to the United States during the Vietnam conflict. During a peace rally, a young American told Hanh he needed to go back to Vietnam and "defeat the American aggressors." Hanh explained to the man that to do so would be against peace, since he himself did not want either country's soldiers to perish. Hanh states that to understand the suffering of war, one must look at the root of war, and see that both sides are to blame. It is only through communication and understanding that war can be ended.

In "Like a Leaf, We Have Many Stems," Hanh returns to the theme of nature. He explains that just as a tree is mother to a leaf, the leaf too is a mother to the tree, since it provides nourishment through the stem. Hanh continues by noting the "stem" between mother and unborn child, that of the umbilical cord. The Earth is also linked to humans, according to Hanh, in that without clouds, there would be no rain, which provides



nourishing water, and without sun, there would be no light for plants for humans to eat. All things, according to Hanh, are linked in this way.

In "We Are All Linked to Each Other," Hanh extends this view that all things in the universe are linked, by noting that all human beings are also linked. Hanh laments that, in times of war, people often see one another as not linked, allowing one to kill another. Hanh states that, just as some individuals are able to see the suffering, famine, and disease in others, each person must see all others as brothers in order for war to end.

Hanh talks about how to make peace with others in the article "Reconciliation." He advises, if one has made an enemy, to first apologize to the individual. Next, one should attempt to bring out the positive aspects of oneself, in an effort to demonstrate the sorrow towards the other individual. When there is an opportunity, one should then approach the other person, allowing them to see the changes within oneself. By not taking sides, and by feeling true compassion for the other individual, one can reconcile relationships.

In "Call Me by My True Names," Hanh begins by telling readers of the numerous letters received by the monks of Plum Village each week from refugees, and the difficulty in reading those letters. Hanh laments that half the boat people die in the ocean, and that sea pirates rape many of the young women. He tells a story of one young woman who, following a rape, commits suicide. Upon reflection, Hanh realizes that if he were brought up in the same village as the pirate, with the same morals, he too could become the pirate. Hanh writes a poem to reflect his feelings that all individuals are connected, and capable of becoming the other in different circumstances.

"Suffering Nourishes Compassion" discusses Hanh's belief that in being in touch with suffering, one is able to feel compassion. Hanh tells of his experiences dealing with refugees, and recalls much suffering. Hanh notes that in helping another deal with suffering, one can feel great compassion, and can feel joy, even when life is difficult. Hanh also criticizes those in the western world and in developed countries for not seeing suffering in other areas, stating that when one sees that suffering, he or she realizes the suffering in developed countries is far less intense. He advises that individuals use meditation as a point of contact with the suffering, thereby becoming aware of the suffering, and feeling compassion and understanding.

"Love in Action" presents several principles used by the individuals of Plum Village to make choices in mindfulness. The principles are known as the fourteen precepts of the Order of Interbeing. Firstly, one must realize that "all systems of thought are guiding means," and are not absolute truth. Secondly, one must avoid narrow-mindedness, and learn that life teaches truth, and that conceptual knowledge is not true knowledge. Thirdly, one must not force others to adopt one's own viewpoint, but should help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness. Fourthly, one must recognize and act on the suffering of others, and thereby awaken oneself. Fifthly, one should not aim to accumulate wealth, but should aim to share time and energy with those less fortunate.



The sixth principle is that one must not maintain anger or hatred, but should instead transform those feelings. Seventh, one must live in the present, rather than in the past. Eighth, one should make an effort to reconcile and resolve conflict. Ninth, one should not lie, slander, or gossip, but should speak out against injustice. Tenth, one should not use the religious community for personal gain, but instead, should use it to stand against injustice and aggression. Eleventh, one should not choose a vocation that harms others, but should choose to help others. Twelfth, one should not kill. Thirteenth, one should not steal from others, and should stop others from benefiting from human suffering. Finally, one should take care of one's body.

In the article, "The River," Hanh tells the story of a river who begins as a joyful stream, aiming to reach the ocean. One day, the river sees clouds within herself, and begins to chase them. Unable to catch them, she becomes angry and depressed. As the wind blew, the clouds blow away, and the river wants to die. However, that night, the river comes back to herself, and realizes the clouds already live within her, and the next day, she notices the blue sky, and sees its stability. She knows she has attained inner peace in finding this stability. Hanh ends the story by noting that when one realizes that all he or she needs is within him or herself, and that one does not need to chase dreams, he or she can find peace.

Hanh ends the book with the article "Entering the Twenty-First Century." Hanh promotes the creation of a policy for dealing with suffering in the world. Hanh notes that in the twenty first century, there have been two world wars, concentration camps, millions of refugees, and more suffering. Hanh suggests using the suffering of the past to nurture the future, by using the lessons learned to live in mindfulness. One can then learn compassion, tolerance, and cultural diversity. By practicing the methods presented throughout the book, Hanh states that individuals can find peace in every step.

Part 3, Chapters 59-71 Analysis

Hanh returns to the concept of food and mindfulness in "Nourishing Awareness." Readers, having learned meditation, mindfulness, and awareness by this point in the novel, can easily understand Hanh's method of encouraging awareness, thereby encouraging appreciation. By appreciating the food presented, one can clearly learn to show others how to appreciate their own blessings, and can feel compassion for those who are without such blessings.

Hanh introduces a slightly new concept in "A Love Letter to Your Congressman" by focusing on using words that encourage peace, rather than those that are vengeful or angry. Hanh's point that harmful words will not achieve the goal intended is well worded, in that he notes the need for positive concepts in an effort to focus attention, not on criticism, but on encouragement. His stress on using peace to attain peace is rational, showing again Hanh's skills as an instructor.

Hanh returns to the idea of community responsibility in "Citizenship." Again, Hanh uses the methods of meditation, mindful living, and understanding to show how one can



change the world through positive measures. In using these methods, Hanh assures one can help stop pollution and spread world peace. Hanh does not suggest that individuals can do this alone, but through the community mindfulness. The stress on enlightenment is a typical Buddhist theme, showing Hanh's roots in Zen Buddhism.

In "Ecology of Mind," Hanh returns to the theme of nature and the importance of nature in life. The stress in this article on the need for respect of all things, both living and non-living, reminds readers to practice interbeing. Further, the focus on pollution of the mind reminds readers to be mindful not only of external influences, but also of the spirit.

Hanh's use of a personal story in "The Roots of War" helps illustrate his point on the roots of war effectively. By discussing his view that one should not choose sides, Hanh is able to show readers the danger in vengeance and a want for revenge, and the benefits of communication and understanding. While readers can identify with the American soldier in the story, readers, having learned understanding through Hanh's teachings, can also now understand Hanh's position, allowing them to practice Hanh's advice.

In "Like a Leaf, We Have Many Stems," Hanh returns to the theme of nature. His use of the story concerning the leaf and the tree are used to effectively show readers the link between nature and human beings. This concept again returns readers to the idea of interbeing and mindful awareness of the link between all things in the universe. This is extended in "We Are All Linked to Each Other." Hanh builds further on the theme of interbeing to show readers the link between human beings, and uses this link to show why humans should avoid murder, even in times of conflict. In doing so, Hanh uses his methods to show readers how to help end war.

In "Reconciliation," Hanh walks readers through the steps needed to reconcile relationships with others. In presenting his information in a systematic manner, Hanh ensures that one is able to follow precisely, assisting their understanding of the process. Further, by focusing on the methods presented earlier in the book, Hanh again uses his building block method of instruction, furthering this understanding.

Hanh's use of the suffering of refugees in "Call Me by My True Names" serves a number of purposes. First, Hanh demonstrates how the suffering of others can be transformed into a positive energy used for healing. By showing readers true suffering, Hanh both reminds them of suffering, and gently guides them into mindful awareness. In using the story of the young girl who commits suicide, Hanh forces readers to see true suffering, thereby allowing them to open their minds to compassion and understanding. Further, by admitting that he himself could have become a pirate under the same circumstances, Hanh adds a sense of honesty to the book, and allows readers to understand why a lack of judgment against others is important.

"Suffering Nourishes Compassion" returns readers to the concept that by noticing, meditating on, and being aware of suffering, one can increase one's capacity for compassion. By telling of his experiences with the suffering of refugees, Hanh adds reality to his statements, allowing readers to understand how helping refugees



increased Hanh's own ability to feel compassion. Further, by stressing the joy and inner peace felt when helping those who suffer, Hanh gives readers a personal reason to extend themselves to others.

The Fourteen Precepts of the Order of Interbeing introduced in "Love in Action" present readers with even more methods to ensure mindful living. Again, this method of building on learned skills to enhance the overall level of mindful awareness in readers is effective, and shows Hanh's determination to assist readers in their journey for inner peace. By stressing the importance of an open mind, engaged mindfulness, altruism, internal transformation, reconciliation, and interbeing, Hanh returns readers one final time to each principle presented within the novel, showing how each is intertwined in actual living. By doing so, Hanh provides a sense of honesty, reliability, and genuine usefulness to the concepts of the book, in addition to providing readers with even more methods of attaining mindfulness.

With "The River," Hanh returns readers a final time to the theme of mindful awareness and nature. The river, symbolizing an individual, begins by enjoying life, and knowing themselves completely. However, by chasing "clouds," used symbolically to represent material possessions, the "river," or individual, finds herself angry and depressed when she cannot attain them. When she opens herself to the sky, symbolically representing one's return to mindfulness, she finds stability and harmony. She is again able to see beauty and love in the world, and knows that the items she sought previously exist within herself. Through Hanh's use of symbolism in this article, Hanh leads readers to understand the principle of living mindfully.

Hanh's ending to the book sums his principle themes effectively. In "Entering the Twenty-First Century," Hanh reminds readers of the suffering in this century, leading them to compassion. His stress on the guilt feelings of the children in Germany reminds readers of their learned ability to transform these negative emotions into positive energy for compassion, tolerance, and cultural diversity. Hanh also encourages community and family meditation and nature by reminding readers to take their children outside to meditate on clouds and grass. By practicing the methods presented throughout the book, Hanh reminds readers that peace education is possible, which leads to mindful living and peace in every step.



Characters

Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh, the author of the book, was born in Vietnam in 1926. He spent his entire life as a Buddhist monk and helped the world heal inner and external wounds through the Zen Buddhist perspective. His teachings of mindful living, conscious breathing, smiling, and active mindfulness are, according to Hanh, the central components of inner peace, and world peace. Having co-founded numerous schools of Buddhist thought, schools and retreats, Hanh is a world-known expert on passive resistance, ecology, environmental issues, and the search for peace. Thrown out of Vietnam in 1969, Hanh's passive rebellion against war, poverty, and a loss of tradition have led millions to follow his teachings, and allowed his work to spread throughout both hemispheres. Throughout the book, Hanh uses analogy, personal examples, Buddhist concepts, and symbolism to teach readers the methods of conscious breathing and mindful living. Readers are then shown how to use these principles to better the lives of those individuals and the world as a whole.

Buddha

The "father" of the Buddhist faith, Buddha is used in numerous stories presented throughout the book to illustrate Hanh's points. In "Flower Insights" for example, Hanh uses the story of Buddha holding a flower before a congregation of monks as an example of the need to smile in mindfulness. Further, the many teachings of Buddha, from the search for inner peace to the usefulness of conscious breathing and meditation, assist readers in comprehending the vast amount of information presented by Hanh within the book.

Mother Earth

Presented throughout the book, the character of "Mother Earth" or "Nature" is vital to numerous techniques presented within the novel. For example, Hanh stresses the importance of nature in meditation, the need to save the environment, the need to repair the vast damage done to the planet, the need for mindful living in an effort to spare further damage to the Earth, and the immense power of the sun, plants, animals, rivers, and trees that exist on the planet. Hanh's stress of nature in all his teachings cannot be understated, since nature forms a vital part of the Buddhist faith.

Arnold Kotler

As the editor of the book, Kotler is the first author of the book, and introduces the author, Hanh. In his introduction, Kotler details the life of Hanh, explaining his origins as a Buddhist monk, his life as an activist, a teacher, a meditation expert, and an altruistic



spirit. This introduction is vital for readers, since it provides a vast knowledge of Hanh's life prior to reading Hanh's own work. This knowledge assists readers in understanding Hanh's teachings and his methods. It provides a sense of sincerity, honesty, and truth to the novel which would otherwise be lacking.

M.M. the Dalai Lama

As the reigning Dalai Lama at the time of publishing, M.M. the Dalai Lama's introduction to the book provides readers a basic starting point for their journey to self exploration, inner peace, and activism. The Dalai Lama, in his introduction, recognizes the difficulty in attaining world peace through internal transformation, but also stresses the usefulness of the tactic. This alone helps readers to begin their journey with the knowledge that the teachings of the book can help them understand how to spread peace throughout their world. Further, the Dalai Lama's praise of Hanh allows readers to know, prior to learning from Hanh's methods, that he is a highly respected figure in the Buddhist world, and a master of teaching others to heal themselves, and the world.

Jesus

Only discussed briefly in the book, Jesus is nonetheless an important character in the novel, for the simple reason that Hanh uses Christianity to show the blending of religious faiths to form a strong talent in mindful living. Hanh explains, in "The Eucharist," that Jesus was, in the original Christian story, asking his followers to eat in mindfulness. For Christian readers, this small passage of the book may help to allow a convergence of religious viewpoints that is vital to teaching Christians the art of mindful living. However, in "Hope as an Obstacle," Hanh again uses Christ and Christianity to explain a belief; but in this case, the use has negative connotations. Hanh laments on the danger in using hope as a crutch for the future, and mentions the Christian religion's reliance on hope as a basis for faith. In both cases, however, Hanh uses Jesus and Christianity to further his points.

Mahakashyapa

The character of Mahakashyapa is used in "Flower Insights" to show a number of basic principles. First, when Mahakashyapa smiles at Buddha holding a flower, he is doing so first as a natural mindful response to a beautiful flower. Further, he is able to share with Buddha the smile, allowing Buddha himself to smile also. By not over-thinking the meaning of the flower, Mahakashyapa is able to see the intended meaning, that of beauty. Mahakashyapa thus symbolizes the peace found when one lives mindfully.

Little Bamboo

Introduced in "Nourishing Healthy Seeds," Little Bamboo symbolizes the "healthy seed," or positive thought. Hanh loses a close friend, and finds it difficult to sleep. After



meditating and using conscious breathing, Hanh calls an image to his consciousness of Little Bamboo, a young two year old who resides in Plum Village. The little girl is a favorite among residents, and often brings happiness. In calling her image to mind, Hanh is able to breath and smile with her image in mind, and soon relaxes enough to sleep. By representing good, happy, relaxing, and pleasant thoughts, Little Bamboo is Hanh's "healthy seed."

"The River"

"The River," the primary focus of the article with the same name, symbolizes humankind. In the story, the river is young and vibrant, filled with love, peace, and energy. As it winds downward, however, it notices the clouds, and ceases all activity but the chasing of those clouds. The river wants desperately to possess a cloud, but finds only anger and frustration at the inability to obtain one. After the wind blows away the clouds, she finds herself looking a blue sky, and realizes her search was for something that was within herself, and she began to again enjoy her self and the world around her. This story symbolizes the search by man to succeed in life, and the anger and frustration felt when forgetting to live in the present, and forgetting to live mindfully.

"The Twelve Year Old Girl"

Introduced in "Call Me By My True Names," the twelve-year-old girl refers to a young refugee woman who was traveling by small boat across the ocean to Southeast Asia. During the journey, the woman was raped by Thai sea pirates, and as a result, jumped into the ocean and drowned herself. Hanh finds himself angry when he reads the letter of the young woman, but after deep meditation, finds himself realizing that he, like anyone, could turn into the same pirate, if he were brought up in the same circumstances. The twelve-year-old girl in the story symbolizes the suffering millions of the world.



Objects/Places

Vietnam

The birthplace of Hanh, Vietnam is a war torn country in Asia that forms the basis of many of Hanh's personal stories throughout the book. Although Hanh was exiled from the country, it is clear through his stories that his love for his homeland will never be extinguished. He often compares Western tradition to those of Vietnamese custom, even though he has not lived in country for nearly thirty-five years.

United States

Another location often used in Hanh's stories, the United States holds both fascination and disappointment for Hanh. On one hand, Hanh clearly admires the work of those within the United States in terms of teaching en Buddhism, but on the other hand, he is also clearly displeased by the lack of respect, love, honor, peace, and harmony within the country. In addition, Hanh often notes his displeasure at traditional Western religion and customs.

Plum Village

Established by Hanh and his followers in 1982, Plum Village is a retreat center located near Bordeaux France. The retreat is surrounded by fields of wheat, vineyards, and sunflowers, and is home to hundreds of Buddhist followers and refugees. Many of Hanh's lessons use situations encountered at Plum Village as examples.

Buddhism

Hanh's religious faith, Buddhism, is founded on principles of meditation, inner peace, and enlightenment. These aspects of each person, when tapped, can be used to spread peace and harmony throughout the world. Hanh's particular form of Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, focuses more on the spiritual enlightenment of individuals in the present than traditional forms of Buddhism, which focus on ending the cycle of life and rebirth.

Conscious breathing

Used by Zen Buddhists, the process of conscious breathing focuses on one's ability to enjoy breathing as a method of relaxation. By focusing one's breathing in time with specific mantras, designed to relax the soul and enlighten the spirit, conscious breathing is a primary component of mindful living.



Mindful living

The primary point of the book, mindful living is a way of life that focuses on enjoying every moment of the present. Hanh's teachings explain how to use conscious breathing to free the spirit, thus opening the mind and soul for mindful living. With mindful living, one takes the time to appreciate surroundings and simple aspects of life, such as nature, other individuals, foods and inner peace. By practicing mindful living, Hanh believes individuals can increase their compassion, understanding, love and positive emotions to gain inner peace.

Meditation

A focused method of relaxation, meditation is a primary component of mindful living. By using conscious breathing in combination with mantras designed for specific situations, meditation can open the mind to allow for inner peace.

Aimlessness

A word translated from a Buddhist term, aimlessness refers to the idea that one should not pursue something endlessly, since everything needed in life is within oneself from birth. Hanh explains that in the West, many are goal oriented, and as such, often forget to enjoy life. Aimlessness focuses on enjoying the journey of life rather than the end result of actions.

Internal Formations

Another translated Buddhist term, internal foundations refers to "knots" of emotional torment that are formed following unpleasant experiences. These knots, or formations, then often become tighter and more difficult to deal with as time goes on, resulting in a pattern of behavior that is unhealthy for individuals. These knots cause individuals to react to situations unpleasantly to avoid suffering. The practice of mindful living allows one to untie these emotional knots.

Suchness

Still another Buddhist term, suchness refers to one's essence or true nature. According to Hanh's teachings, understanding the suchness of another person is vital to forming a relationship with that person. By understanding one's suchness, a person can form a loving, complete relationship based on the true nature of an individual, rather than perceived characteristics that may be misleading or false.



Interbeing

Interbeing, a term derived from the prefix "inter" and the verb "to be," is used in the book to refer to the concept that all things, living, and non-living, in the universe are linked together and dependant upon one another for survival. This interbeing is vital to mindful living, in that by recognizing the link between all things, one is able to find compassion and understanding in every situation, and is able to see the relationship between each aspect of life.

"Non-duality"

Non-duality, or "not two," refers to the Buddhist concept of "comprehend," stemming from the Latin terms "cum," or with, and "prehendere," meaning to grasp or pick up. Combined, the term refers to the idea that to fully understand something, an individual must become one with the focus of the needed comprehension. Unless an individual can become one with something, he or she will be unable to fully comprehend it.

"Engaged Buddhism"

This term refers to the idea that in order to live mindfully, one must also act in mindfulness. Simply seeing the world in understanding and compassion is not enough, according to Hanh. One must not only see the world in mindfulness, but must also act to help others and live in a mindful way. By engaging mindfulness, individuals cannot only find inner peace, but can also spread peace through others.



Themes

Mindful Living

Mindful living is the primary theme within the novel. Hanh, the author, uses a building block teaching method to instruct readers on attaining inner peace through mindful living. The process begins with conscious breathing: a focused method of breathing that times each inhale and exhale with specific mantras used to focus the mind and body. Once focused, the reader is taught to deal with negative emotions through compassion, understanding, and love. Without these negative emotions, or "knots," readers are able to learn the art of mindful living. In mindful living, one focuses on the present time, and expends energy on learning to enjoy each moment of each day. Through smiling, conscious breathing, and focused meditation, readers learn to enjoy even mundane acts such as dish washing and walking. Once the individual is living in mindfulness, he or she is able to spread a sense of peace and harmony to others, allowing for the spread of compassion and understanding.

Although this theme relies on many Buddhist philosophies and terms, the language is generally explained in depth, allowing even those with only a passing knowledge of the Buddhist faith to follow the lessons. However, for those with only Christian backgrounds, a Buddhist primer may allow for a deeper understanding of the methods presented.

Dealing with Anger

Another primary focus of the novel is learning to deal with anger and suffering on an individual basis. Hanh believes that those who harbor inner suffering, or "knots," are unable to attain the inner peace necessary to practice mindful living. By dealing with negative emotions through a five-step transformation process, the reader is taught to use negative experiences to attain positive energy. First, one must recognize the negative emotion through mindful observation. Second, an individual must become one with the feeling, or "own" the feeling. This is achieved through a stance of non-duality, or the perception of the emotion and the self-being one entity. Third, one must calm the negative emotion through meditation, conscious breathing, and smiling. Fourth, one must let go of the negative emotion, which is possible since the emotion is calmed. Finally, one must use mindfulness to discover the origin of the feeling, in order to deal with the problem at the root, and avoid the issue in the future. By following this five-step method, one is able to release negative emotions, enabling one to experience inner peace.

Interbeing

Another theme of the novel is the concept of interbeing. Described by Hanh as a combination of the prefix "inter" and the verb "to be," interbeing refers to the idea that all things are interrelated. According to Hanh, nothing in the universe can exist without



everything else in the universe. For example, a page of the book relies on the tree, sun, soil, water, animals to spread nourishment and fertilizer, logger to cut the tree, grain, and animals to feed the logger, the parents of the logger, and so forth. Without all elements, the page of the book could not exist. Hanh believes that a vital part of mindful living is realizing the interbeing of all things, and finding compassion and understanding through this realization. Interbeing, according to Hanh, can only be found through living in the present, and focusing on enjoying each aspect of life. Further, each aspect of life must be cared for and nurtured in order to attain inner peace.

Community Living

Another main focus of the novel is the concept of community living. According to Hanh in several articles, there is a strong link between family, social support and inner peace. Strong, large families are often much more in tune with nature and mindful living than the smaller families of Western cultures; and families who practice conscious breathing, mindful living, and meditation together can grow much closer. Many of Hanh's stories stem from his life in the community village he helped create, that of Plum Village. This close knit community of monks and other individuals help one another remember to live in mindful harmony with nature, and with all living and non-living beings. By practicing community living, individuals can spread peace and harmony.

Active Mindfulness

Throughout the novel, the theme of active mindfulness, or active Buddhism, is presented. Hanh notes in several passages that while mindful living is important, it is nothing without acting on that mindfulness. In other words, while one can see suffering through mindful living, one cannot alter that suffering without action. Hanh suggests peaceful letters to congress, attempts to practice mindfulness with others, and acting in love, understanding, and compassion. Through positions of non-duality, interbeing, and complete understanding, individuals can learn to transform negative emotions, allowing themselves to find peace and harmony in each moment. This peace, when acted on and through, spreads peace to others; and through actions aimed at an end to suffering, the world can be improved.



Style

Point of View

Thich Nhat Hanh, the author of the book, narrates the novel from the first person point of view. As both narrator and author, Hanh is a reliable, honest, and compassionate voice throughout the novel. This method is vital to the book, since the information presented is primarily the teachings of Hanh. By using a first person point of view, Hanh is able to teach his method of mindful living through analogy and examples seen throughout his own personal life. These first person examples provide, not only necessary understanding of the concepts, but also a sense of honesty and reliability. Further, this point of view allows the focus of the book to remain on the teachings of Hanh, and the primary themes of the novel.

Setting

This book, as a self-help book and instructional manual for mindful living, does not have a particular setting. However, many of the stories within the teachings focus on areas of Vietnam following the war, where the landscape and people of the area were traumatized by bombings and death. This setting allows the reader to understand Hanh's roots and the atmosphere in which Hanh's teachings were developed. Plum Village in France also provides the setting for several stories, which is a retreat built by Hanh, surrounded by vineyards and wheat fields. The setting assists the reader in focusing on nature and present life in the process of mindful living. Finally, the United States is used in other stories, often in a negative context. While the use of this setting in such a light is difficult for Western readers, the concepts presented require a developed country for comparison against underdeveloped countries. Hanh's experiences in the United States provide such a comparison easily, and allow the reader to see the vast differences in lifestyles and goals between the two areas.

Language and Meaning

The novel uses fairly simple and easy to follow English, making the text easy to read for nearly all audiences. While the novel does use strict adherence to grammatical concepts, the strict structure does not detract from the concepts presented. The stories are told in past tense, while the lessons are given in present tense, allowing for easily distinguishable breaks. Further, while the novel does use advanced English, most terms are explained using less advanced English, allowing a less scholarly audience to comprehend the meanings. However, the novel also uses numerous references to Buddhist philosophy and psychology, and assumes at least a passing familiarity with such concepts. While many terms are explained in detail, readers with less experience in Buddhist concepts may find a primer assists in understanding the deeper meaning of the lessons presented by Hanh.

Structure

The 134-page novel is broken into three sections and seventy-three articles of unequal length, many of which are less than one page. The articles are arranged to teach readers the art of mindful living in sequence, allowing the author, Hanh, to build on lessons throughout the novel. Beginning with lessons on conscious breathing and meditation, the author then uses these concepts to explain to readers the methods of dealing with negative emotions. Finally, Hanh uses the art of mindful living to explain how such practices can lead to world peace. This building method of instruction allows readers to focus on learning each step independently, and then on using each step to attain a higher level of understanding.



Quotes

"Peace must first be developed within an individual. And I believe that love, compassion, and altruism are the fundamental basis for peace. Once these qualities are developed within an individual, he or she is then able to create an atmosphere of peace and harmony. This atmosphere can be expanded and extended from the individual to his family, from the family to the community and eventually to the whole world." (*Foreward*, H.H. The Dalai Lama, page v.)

"Although Thich Nhat Hanh cannot visit his homeland, handwritten copies of his books continue to circulate illegally in Vietnam. His presence is also felt through his students and colleagues throughout the world who work full time trying to relieve suffering of the desperately poor people of Vietnam, clandestinely supporting hungry families and campaigning on behalf of writers, artists, monks, and nuns who have been imprisoned for their beliefs and their art." (*Editor's Introduction*, Arnold Kotler, page *xiii*.)

"Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves and in everything we do and see. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it. We don't have to travel far away to enjoy the blue sky. We don't have to leave our city or even our neighborhood to enjoy the eyes of a beautiful child. Even the air we breathe can be a source of joy." (*Twenty-Four Brand New Hours*, Hanh, page 5.)

"We need to practice meditation gently, but steadily, throughout daily life, not wasting a single opportunity or event to see deeply into the true nature of life, including our everyday problems. Practicing in this way, we dwell in profound communion with life." (*Sitting Meditation*, Hanh, page 18.)

"Sometimes we don't really need to use the car, but because we want to get away from ourselves, we go for a drive. We feel that there is a vacuum in us and we don't want to confront it. We don't like being so busy, but every time we have a spare moment, we are afraid of being alone with ourselves. We want to escape." (*Driving Meditation*, Hanh, page 32.)

"That is the problem of life. If we are not fully ourselves, truly in the present moment, we miss everything." (*Flower Insights*, Hanh, page 41.)

"If we face our unpleasant feelings with care, affection, and nonviolence, we can transform them into the kind of energy that is healthy and has the capacity to nourish us. By the work of mindful observation, our unpleasant feelings can illuminate so much for us, offering us insight and understanding into ourselves and society." (*The River of Feelings*, Hanh, page 52.)

"We often ask, 'What's wrong?' Doing so, we invite painful seeds of sorrow to come up and manifest. We feel suffering, anger, and depression, and produce more such seeds. We would be much happier if we tried to stay in touch with the healthy, joyful seeds



inside of us and around us. We should learn to ask, "What's not wrong?" and be in touch with that." (*What's Not Wrong*, Hanh, page 77.)

"Even if we have a lot of money in the bank, we can die very easily from our suffering. So, investing in a friend, making a friend into a real friend, building a community of friends, is a much better source of security. We will have someone to lean on, to come to, during our difficult moments." (*Investing in Friends*, Hanh, page 87.)

"Our body is not limited to what is inside the boundary of our skin. It is much more immense. It includes even the layer of air around the Earth; for if the atmosphere were to disappear for even an instant, our life would end. There is no phenomenon in the universe that does not intimately concern us, from a pebble resting at the bottom of the ocean, to the movement of a galaxy millions of light years away." (*The Sun My Heart*, Hanh, page 104.)

"There are many young girls, boat people, who are raped by sea pirates. Even though the United Nations and many countries try to help the government of Thailand prevent that kind of piracy, sea pirates continue to inflict much suffering on the refugees. One day we received a letter telling us about a young girl on a small boat who was raped by a Thai pirate. She was only twelve, and she jumped into the ocean and drowned herself. When you first learn of something like that, you get angry at the pirate. You naturally take the side of the little girl. As you look more deeply, you will see it differently. If you take the side of the little girl, then it is easy. You only have to take a gun and shoot the pirate. But we cannot do that. In my meditation I saw that if I had been born in the village of the pirate and raised in the same conditions as he was, there is a great likelihood that I would become a pirate." (*Call Me By My True Names*, Hanh, page 122.)

"The flower of tolerance to see and appreciate cultural diversity is one flower we can cultivate for the children of the twenty-first century. Another flower is the truth of suffering - there has been so much unnecessary suffering in our century. If we are willing to work together and learn together, we can all benefit from the mistakes of our time, and, seeing with the eyes of compassion and understanding, we can offer the next century a beautiful garden and a clear path." (*Entering the Twenty-First Century*, Hanh, page 134.)



Topics for Discussion

Throughout the novel, Hanh stresses the importance of community living and supportive groups. Using examples from the text, explain how such a community is beneficial to the process of mindful living.

Hanh states, in "The Dandelion Has My Smile" that "When I see someone smile, I know immediately that he or she is dwelling in awareness." Do you agree with Hanh that smiling indicates awareness? Why or why not?

In "Hope as an Obstacle," Hanh states "Hope becomes a kind of obstacle. If you can refrain from hoping, you can bring yourself entirely into the present moment and discover the joy that is already here." Do you think hope should be abandoned in an effort to live in the present, or do you believe hope is important in daily life? Explain your answer.

Hanh uses several personal stories to illustrate his points throughout the novel. Do you feel these stories achieve the goal of furthering your understanding? If so, how do they accomplish this? If not, why not?

Hanh gives five steps to transform one's negative feelings into healthy and nourishing energy in "Transforming Feelings." Please list each step and explain, in your own words, how each step helps one to transform these negative feelings.

In "Interbeing," Hanh stresses the link between everything in the universe. Using your own example, explain how a specific item, such as a tree or a pencil is related to at least ten other items in the universe.

Hanh states, in "Call Me By My True Names," that he understands how the sea pirate came to be such a man that he raped small children refugees. After reading his explanation of this understanding on page 122, do you agree with Hanh? Why or why not?