

We Are All Linked to Each Other

from “Peace Is Every Step” by Thich Nhat Hanh

Millions of people follow sports. If you love to watch soccer or baseball, you probably root for one team and identify with them. You may watch the games with despair and elation. Perhaps you give a little kick or swing to help the ball along. If you do not take sides, the fun is missing. In wars we also pick sides, usually the side that is being threatened. Peace movements are born of this feeling. We get angry, we shout, but rarely do we rise above this to look at a conflict the way a mother would who is watching her two children fighting. She seeks only their reconciliation.

“In order to fight each other, the chicks born from the same mother hen put colors on their faces.” This is a well-known Vietnamese saying. Putting colors on our own face is to make ourselves a stranger to our own brothers and sisters. We can only shoot others when they are strangers. Real efforts for reconciliation arise when we see with the eyes of compassion, and that ability comes when we see clearly the nature of interbeing and interpenetration of all beings.

In our lives, we may be lucky enough to know someone whose love extends to animals and plants. We may also know people who although they

themselves live in a safe situation, realize that famine, disease, and oppression are destroying millions of people on Earth and look for ways to help those who suffer. They cannot forget the downtrodden, even amidst the pressures of their own lives. At least to some extent, these people have realized the interdependent nature of life. They know that the survival of the underdeveloped countries cannot be separated from the survival of the materially wealthy, technically advanced countries. Poverty and oppression bring war. In our times, every war involves all countries. The fate of each country is linked to the fate of all others.

When will the chicks of the same mother hen remove the colors from their faces and recognize each other as brothers and sisters? The only way to end the danger is for each of us to do so, and to say to others, "I am your brother." "I am your sister." "We are all humankind, and our life is one."