

Daily Meditation 01/23/2022

Thich Nhat Hanh: A Pioneer in Deep Ecumenism

Good morning.

We're celebrating today the wonderful life, teaching, of Thich Nhat Hanh, a real saint in our time. He has so much to teach us.

And then, drawing from his writings that I share in my chapter on Thich Nhat Hanh and Meister Eckhart in my book *Meister Eckhart: A Mystic Warrior for Our Times*, Thich Nhat Hhan is truly a mystic warrior as well.

Thich Nhat Hanh talks about the Buddha nature this way. He says, "The Buddha is not really another person, the Buddha is within us. Because assumptions that make up a Buddha is the energy of mindfulness, of understanding, and compassion. You have the Buddha nature within you. If Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, has Buddhahood, you yourself have your own Buddhahood. That is why one can say I take refuge in the Buddha within myself. You have the Buddha nature in you and you take refuge in that nature within you."

This is so, so parallel to Meister Eckhart's teaching.

And he's not alone. The teaching of the Cosmic Christ, that is between Jesus as a historical person, the historical Jesus, and the Cosmic Christ who is present in all of us. And Thich Nhat Hanh understood that. You see, when I say Thich Nhat Hanh was a champion of deep ecumenism, I mean that he got into the deep guts of the Christian tradition. And he understood Christ like we can understand the Buddha.

So, he says that "You're invited to reflect on the word 'only' when you say 'Jesus is the only son of God,' because we're all sons and daughters of God."

That's what Jesus taught. And it's what Meister Eckhart teaches.

"You're also," he says, "a daughter or a son of God. You are Jesus. All of us are Jesus."

Now, let's just stop there for a second. This is a Buddhist monk, who remained a monk and a Buddhist his whole life, but he can say, "You are Jesus. All of us are Jesus." That is very good Christian theology. He gets it. He gets it much better than a lot of so-called Christians.

He goes on, "Every wave is born from water. Every wave has water as substance. In Buddhism, and especially in the northern school of Buddhism, every one of us has Buddha nature. And every one of us is a Buddha-to-be."

Well Eckhart said something very, very parallel when he said at a Christmas Mass, "What good is it to me if Mary gives birth to the Son of God, and I don't give birth to the Son of God?" And my own person, in my own time and culture?

Thich Nhat Hanh agrees. He says, "We practice in such a way that Buddha is born every moment of our daily life."

Notice Buddha is born. That is the Christmas story, also. That Jesus Christ is born every moment of our daily life. That is Buddha talking, though it sounds like Meister Eckhart, and it could be.

"Not only on Christmas Day, because every day is Christmas day, every minute is a Christmas minute. The child within us is waiting each minute for us to be born again. And again."

That is Thich Nhat Hanh.

Now here is Meister Eckhart:

"The seed of God is in us. Now the seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree, a hazel seed into a hazel tree, the seed of God into God. But we do need a good, wise, and industrious cultivator," Eckhart said, "to grow into God."

So, there are so many parallels between Thich Nhat Hanh's understanding and practice of Buddhism and Meister Eckhart and the Creation Spirituality tradition practice of Christianity. Thich Nhat Hanh says, "The seed of mindfulness is the presence of the Buddha in us, called Buddha nature, the nature of enlightenment. The Holy Spirit can be described as being always present in our hearts in the form of a seed. The kingdom of God is in us as a seed, a mustard seed."

Now that is a Buddhist monk talking. Thich Nhat Hanh. "Everything and everyone," he says, "is dwelling in Nirvana, in the kingdom of God."

So, it's a beautiful thing to see the deep awareness that Thich Nhat Hanh carried with him as a Buddhist but that he was eager to uncover in the Christian tradition as well. And Meister Eckhart many, many times, sounds absolutely parallel to Thich Nhat Hahn in their views of the spiritual life, of "The Ground of Our Being," as Meister Eckhart puts it.

And as Thich Nhat Hanh says, it's his favorite name for God: "The Ground of Our Being."

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.