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Dedicated to Ven. ZEN-Master

Thich Nhất Hạnh

*on the occasion of his 75th birthday
11th October 2001*

Beyond Dis-Ease & Suffering

Life – Lightness – Liberation – Love

“Where there is no inner peace there is suffering”.
(Buddha)

“The fastest horse towards heaven is suffering”.
(Meister Eckhart)

*“We do not have to wait for our physical death,
we can already now enter the world of eternity”.*

(Bede Griffiths, O.S.B.)

*“Physical force is transitory,
even as the body is transitory.
But the power of the spirit is permanent
even as the spirit is everlasting”.*

(Mahatma Gandhi)

More than ever before we are shaped by words and concepts, we absorb them without reflection, so that they subtly invade the deepest layers of our unconscious. We are incessantly bombarded by flashbulbs of information (newspapers, journals, television, advertising, intercommunication etc.) that transform our bodies with their complex emotions into a battle-ground of an almost unbearable play of forces. The once fearful theatres of war, visible to us all in many parts of the world, have shifted in the main to a more invisible terrain.

New York, September 11, 2001 stands as a horrifying example for that.

The microcosm of humankind, the innermost realm of every individual, is a target for irresponsible dictators in politics, business, the church etc., their purpose to orientate behavior towards authoritarianism and to abuse and curtail spiritual freedom.

Addiction to a consumer society dominates so many of our countries, and luxuries are so available that they deaden all our senses. They are not a sign of prosperity, but rather ***the alarming expression of spiritual poverty*** and a frightening decadence, comparable to the destruction of the ***Roman Empire*** under **Nero** and his successors. ***Quo vadis?*** We must ask where our way leads in our own country, where poets, thinkers, and outstanding scholars have lit beacons to orientate the further development of **homo sapiens**. The magic words at the ***time of quo vadis*** were ***panem et circenses***, bread and play, entertainment instead of creation, the narcosis of consumerism instead of development of consciousness and spiritual freedom; quantity instead of quality. These factors inevitably lead to disease, suffering, guilt and depression as states that have to be furthered and maintained by every possible means to prevent us liberating ourselves from dependence upon the system.

Illusion is praised as reality, consumer goods so tempt and entice us with their availability that we set them on an equal with freedom. ***Disease*** is offered for sale with medical insurance cards in appalling advertisements. And suffering is part of the status symbol of a society that threatens to develop from ***homo sapiens*** to ***"HOMO SIEMENS"*** (the German producer of high technology goods). From being an intellectual, divine species, we have become a collection of puppets manipulated by high performance technique, our original task and destiny hidden behind a mask.

Disease and suffering are disturbances of balance, and reveal themselves physically, psychically or intellectually. Our growing ignorance - information is diametrically opposed to knowledge - makes our approach to the origin of permanent health extremely difficult. On one hand the varied healing and therapeutical systems, orthodox medicine, natural healing, and eastern and spiritual methods aim to restore our total health, whereas on the other hand, a ***restitutio ad integrum*** is as good as impossible as long as we do not fix our gaze first and foremost on a higher order.

We live in a world of seemingly irreconcilable opposites that constantly distance us from the experience of absolute reality.

Disease and health are no more opposites than life and death.

For centuries our world, shaped by the ***occident*** and with a regrettably fatal linear thinking and feeling structure, has perceived ***death as the opposite of life***. In our use of language we speak of ***life and death***, but at the same time we aim and fix our path through life upon death and what we imagine it to be like. Full of illusions and speculations we move along a false path, bearing ***the heavy burden of past and future projections***, unable to shake it off our backs. Clever maintainers of power in politics, business, the church and other areas of influence - and increasingly esoteric marketers - take advantage of ***the illusory realm of our ignorance*** (Sanskrit: ***Maya = illusion, Avidya = ignorance***) so that although we are created in the image of God, we are prevented from entering the ***Heavenly Paradise*** that can be found here on earth.

Re-thinking and a change in attitude are the necessary prerequisites for a final escape from the jungle of temptations and illusions.

Birth and Death are the polaric pair of opposites around which our life revolves.

We find ourselves in an endless state of tension between dying and being re-born at every moment of our lives. The process is eternal,

without beginning, without end.

We call this wondrous process eternal life, and it is not limited by birth or death.

All speculation and hopes of life after death mean that either consciously or out of ignorance, we refuse to seize hold of life, here and now, beyond the past, beyond the future.

If the traditions of wisdom in our great religions are not truly proclaimed and made available to us as a basis for life, in which the world of experience is essentially concerned with *carpe diem, hic et nunc*, the *here and now*, man, yearning for Paradise, falls into the vortex of dangerous dependence structures whose nature is demonic.

Life always embraces both birth and death at the same time; and life itself is virtually the third essential dimension that transcends the duality, overcomes the world of the opposites, and makes it possible for us to realize heaven on earth, transforming fear and hopelessness into blissful experience.

That is why what is *necessary*, that is, the way and direction changed by *necessity*, means that we have to continue moving through life by developing consciousness and the greatest attention. Life runs cyclically, and not in a linearly selective or final way, and can only be experienced in all its fullness in the present moment (see: **John 10, 10**).

Although the **Divine Light**, this Paradise surrounding us, is constantly at our disposal, disease, war, destruction, sorrow, pain and guilt are our daily companions along the way. The *Prologue to John's Gospel* (John 1, 5) expresses our situation, thus distanced from GOD:

"The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it".

But if we put a match to the smallest of candles in the greatest darkness and gloaming surrounding us, we suddenly have light. We cannot complain that a room with dirty windows is dark. Cleaning the windows means that the light, that is always there, can enter our room again.

Each one of us is called upon to act and to reflect, and this means that we have to change direction. *Disease* and *suffering* are signs upon our way that can *orientate* us towards *a life of spiritual freedom* and blessed contentment. *Orientation* means looking eastward where the sun rises, from where the light comes. (*Ex oriente lux*). But we live in an *occidentalized Western*

World, where for many, sunset seems to be more significant than sunrise. It is time we re-read **Oswald Spengler's** visionary book "**The Decline of the Western World**".

We so often use the word **orientation** and it would be well to reflect upon its deeper meaning as it is the same in so many languages.

In English there are three words for **disease**:

illness, sickness, disease

The latter is most frequently used today. The word "**sick**" is etymologically related to the German "**Seuche**" (**pestilence** or **contagious disease**). In Norwegian we find the word "**sykehus**" (German: **Seuchenhaus** = **house of contagious diseases**). Words of this nature have a profound effect on the unconscious.

In present day German the emphasis is laid upon **illness** (Krankheit, Krankenanstalt, Krankenhaus) in describing illness or buildings where health is restored; and unfortunately too little upon **Hospital** = **hospitable accommodation** (Latin: **hospes** = **host**). All the words like **hotel, hospital, hospice** derive from this root, which is warm and loving.

When taken literally, the English word "**dis-ease**" means **non-ease** or **ease-less**, "**Nicht-Leichtigkeit**" in German, that is, **heavy**. Being sick is being **diseasy**. It is our task to come out of the state of painful heaviness into the light that all holy scriptures speak about; and to become light. Interestingly enough, English uses the same word "**light**" for **Licht** (**light**) and **leicht** (**easy**).

Paradoxically, our education and school system is built up on **grades of difficulty**, so that the way to perfection leads up a **ladder of difficulties** and **heaviness**, to the distress of the person involved. It is the path to an imaginary plane of the highest order, where neither light nor ease are found. We have raped and abused the beauty and profundity of our languages so that we have become prisoners in the **Tower of Babel**, where the significance of GOD`s word and its manifold forms of expression are no longer familiar.

In the end the state of disease (non-ease) is delusion and ignorance.

Naturally this opens the way to big business; many large concerns and business groups profit from it.

Here we have to raise the time-honored question of the element of fate in disease, suffering and unhappiness. According to some pseudo-intellectual healers, disease or unhappiness can be self-determined, but this is too easy and superficial a view, and it has seldom been substantiated.

Disease, unhappiness and suffering cannot be explained away by exchanging or substituting their polaric manifestation into their opposites; otherwise we would be held fast in duality and contrast. They can only be explained by overcoming bipolarity; and this is the ***Path to Paradise***, where GOD's presence is effective and beyond the opposites of subject and object, right and wrong, good and evil, positive and negative.

Life is fulfilled in its entirety and beneficiality in undivided being.

Personally, for this reason I reject the tendency towards the ***Positive***; the trap of illusion hidden in this attitude is so great that it has brought about the downfall of many people. A battery can only function through the inter-action of negative and positive poles, and by overcoming these opposites, it creates

ENERGY = LIFE.

Jesus Christ, for many the ***model of spiritual healing***, often healed the sick indirectly, in that he healed the next of kin and their environment. The person affected by disease, suffering or unhappiness is not always alone, but there is no place here to represent the guilt of others. Disease, unhappiness and world pollution are always both an individual as well as a collective phenomenon. Today we live in an ever-tightening web of relationships with all humankind on this planet. **John's Gospel** (17,21), says categorically...."***that they may all be one***". This heartfelt wish refers to all human beings, all races and all religions without exception. It is not confined or reserved only for Christians.

In order to free ourselves from the prison of these diverse diseases, therapy (which means accompanying along the path) is of prime importance.

Leicht & Lichtigkeit - light - lead to life, to a lasting state of well-being. We must give words back their original meaning so that we can live meaningfully. ***Slogans***, the current words used in a supposedly modern culture of communication, ***kill***. In fact they are dangerous, and often merely arouse fear. We just have to think of the word ***CANCER***. In a tragic way, the addictive accumulation of information, facts and dates bars us from deep wisdom and the actual mystery of life.

Wisdom is the expression of greatest joy in the senses and taste (Lat. ***sapere = to taste; sapientia = good taste, wisdom***; Greek: ***sophia***) and it has been nauseatingly manipulated in a culturally deprived ***Coco-Cola & MacDonald Society***.

People should not allow themselves to be played with like undignified marionettes by multinationals whose only interest is profit. They have built a big gambling casino and they permit their reduction to an animal niveau.

Liberation and change (Greek: *metanoia*) are the way home to Paradise. But here we have need of conscious and responsible therapists who can be trusted to lead and accompany those who suffer because they themselves have been through an acute experience.

The healthy, sane person must come to the foreground of our consciousness - and this is a long and burdensome process of transformation. Our economic and social system in this industrial society, marked by affluence and the terror of materialism, offers no chance of survival. Sick and suffering people in the so-called "**Third World**" smile a lot, and are often happier in themselves than our compatriots, whose daily lives are so driven and led astray by their desires and fantasies that they have missed what is essential in their divine destiny. Disease, however tragic it may seem, also means being separated from **Divine Paradise**. But where the spirit is alive, bodily or psychic dysfunctions can have no effect upon the feeling of heavenly bliss. But because we place the duality of body and soul so much in the foreground of our various methods of treatment, spiritual unfolding has been granted little room and significance.

Instead of *physio* - (Greek: *physis* = *nature*) and *psycho* (Gr: *psyche* = *soul*) in the future I want to use the term *pneuma therapists* (Greek: *pneuma* = *spirit, wind, the breath of God*).

The **Trinity of Body, Soul and Spirit** (the whole cosmos is a trinitarian network of relationships: in Sanskrit: **Sat-Chit-Ananda** = **Being, Consciousness, Bliss; Birth, Death and Life**) will become the field of activity in health research and therapy. Until now treatment has been psychosomatic (treatment of body and soul), but it has been superseded by a growing knowledge of the concept of the Trinity.

Health is a reason for joy and thankfulness.

In English, a language we have referred to already, the German word *gesund* has two meanings - **healthy** and **sound**. The English for "**eine gesunde Natur**" is "**a sound nature**". Sound also means **Klang** and **Ton (sound and tone)**. So being healthy develops into a sound or tone phenomenon, and this also means to swing, vibrate, radiate. **Tone** becomes **Tonus = tension** or **pitch, mood or tuning**. Just as a musical instrument needs to be well tuned and constantly regulated, so our bodies require tuning and regulation. False tension leads to a lack of equilibrium, an unhealthy imbalance in body or soul.

High blood pressure (**hypertonia** = too much tension) is just as unbeneficial as **hypotonia**, low blood pressure. These extreme conditions of mood or

tension (depression or euphoria; “*up one minute and down the next*”) are expressions of *dis-equilibrium*, of a feeling of imbalance, and prevent a state of ease.

The permanently good mood (*eutonia* = *well tuned, equal tension*) is the area of life where harmony, concord, and finally health, are at home. *Tension* or *mood balance* is a dynamic equilibrium that is fundamentally influenced by our breathing, and this is a spiritual activity.

We ourselves tune our divine instrument, our body.

Breathing is a spiritual process, necessary for sustaining life; taking air in is simply a physiological process, subordinate to the divine act of breathing. Lack of knowledge makes most people confuse *breathing = inspiration*, with *breathing in = inhalation*. The German word *Atem* (*breath*) has its roots in the *Indian Sanskrit* word *Atma* = *spirit*. We have all heard of **Mahatma Gandhi**; *Maha Atma* means *Great Spirit*.

And so breathing is living spirituality, the eternal link with the spirit of the universe.

We have left the cleaning of our windows, the restoring of our bodies' health to others, and are surprised how heteronomous (subject to external law) we have become - in a tragic way. The human body is now a rewarding object to be repaired, with a fascinating “*ersatz*”-potential. Human medicine has given way to a monstrous techno-medicine. Man has been robbed of his divine god-like dignity, and abandons himself unconditionally and helplessly to the influential play of power in industry; highly technical medicine, pharmaceutical multibillion-dollar and foodstuffs manufactured by tycoons. And these have to keep their eyes focused on and cultivate the continued existence and growth of disease. Paradoxically, a flourishing economy is dependent on an increasingly sick or latently unstable population - until we can take a radical step towards change.

We do not find the worst cases of ***pathological schizophrenia*** in psychiatric clinics - they sit around the cabinet tables of our politicians. If the ***Minister of Health*** wants to start campaigns against alcohol and nicotine - and it is right that he should do so - he needs the support of the ***Minister of Finance***. But the latter is dependant on high tax gained from spirits and tobacco, and relies on drinkers and smokers so that he can support the Minister of Health in his battle against the Minister of Finance's own faithful entourage. This sort of ***mega-schizophrenia*** is found in many areas of our society, which has fallen unconsciously into a soporific state, brought about by the vast number of consumer goods at its disposal - mouth-watering foodstuffs that no longer

nourish, the media's flood, dubious religious groups and sects with their misleading promises of healing.

In order to crawl out of this deluded and nauseating maze, we need "**connaissance**" (in French this means **knowledge** or **recognition**). Yet again we have come across a fascinating concept and must try to think of it in its original meaning. Literally it means "**birth in common, to be born together**". The process of transformation, which is emerging everywhere, becomes a **re-birth of humankind**; we shall all grow together and become one. If the senseless accumulation of information in science and knowledge could be trans-formed, if the duality of birth and death could be overcome by a secure experience of eternal life, if the painful separation from the **Divine Paradise** is not put off until tomorrow, the day after tomorrow or even later, disease would lose its socially relevant status, and all of us would be able to scale the **ladder of light** on our way through life.

So all humankind would become "**Connoisseurs**"; those who know, who recognize, who are united and reconciled in a collective birth to the original basis of nature.

And we are all called to use more our **hearts** than our **brains**.

HEART

HEARt - hEARt - HeART

Learning by Heart - The Art of Listening

The word **heart** contains three remarkable words: **to hear**, **ear** and **art**. It is fascinating to discover that **to learn** also contains the word **ear**. In this world of misleading images, of television, of projections too many people have lost the art of hearing, of using their ears. We are exposed to brain trainings, computer-like storages of data rather than learning by heart, memorizing essential things of life in our inmost center.

In order to communicate at a deeper level with others we need a common, a global shift in directing our lives towards the ground of being. This would be a **substantial conversion**, which is not a change from **Christianity** to **Buddhism** or something alike but a concerted action of everyone focusing on the same goal. Conversion stems from Latin: **convertere** = turning to something in common.

The world must realize that the hearts of all sentient beings are to be healed; **a process of healing into wholeness and holiness**.

All the sacred scriptures emphasize the importance of listening.

If we undergo the necessary conversion process our hearts will be healed by a profound and deep listening.