

Adorned with the Greatest Fortune

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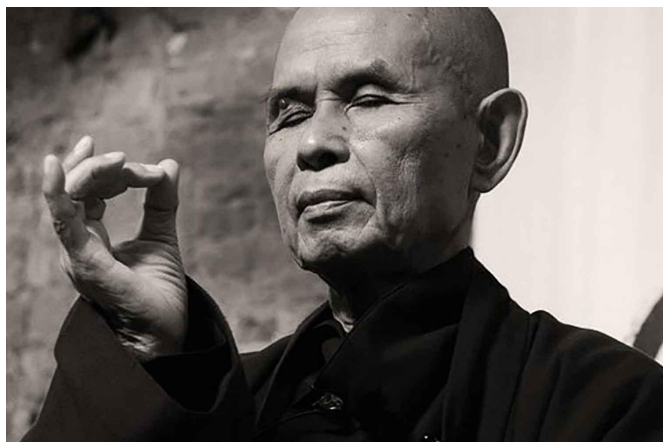
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Abstract

This brief paper is in praise of Thich Nhat Hahn, who had recently died when it was written. It considers how intimately some writers can touch one's being, and how insights and memories last, for me, now, over 33 years and into the arms of my grandson.

Keywords: *Thich Nhat Hahn, integrated curriculum, teaching, learning*



(Unsourced picture from:
<https://forentroll.blogspot.com/2018/11/best-of-thich-nhat-hanh-zitate.html>. All other photos by the author)

It is quite a thing when one of your teachers die, especially one you've never met, but met, of course, met again and again.

And here we go, another meet met only in words and some videos, some English, some translated. Introduced, again and again, in words writ to others. My written work is full, since 1990, of those three fingers and that thumb-finger circle.

The sun is noticeably higher in the sky, but just. In my heart. My bones are noticeably lower. My breath is borne between.

My writing is my grieving. All of it.



Three Suns-Set

Born between.

And in between the echo of these words of his I've eaten up, curled up here, is the curious eyes of my first grandchild just recently. Meeting him again and again, over gardens, crushes and tosses fall leaves. Reading. Laughing. Tears tearing red cheeks.

Nourishments. Small. Like the [there is no] speck between teacher's fingers, felt:

I like to walk alone on country paths, rice plants and wild grasses on both sides, putting each foot down on the earth in mindfulness, knowing that I walk on the wondrous earth. In such moments existence is miraculous and mysterious. People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child. All is a miracle. (Hanh, 1986, p. 12).

Come put your bare foot down. All is a miracle. Memories of the summer of 1989 when I first came across Thich Nhat Hanh's work and how I taught a course at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, for three hours in the mornings and Ted Aoki with the same students in the afternoon.

Ted and I joked that they didn't stand a chance! I found Wendell Berry's work that summer, too. Another older teacher. It is hard to imagine what might have become of me had these writers not happened by on the UVic bookstore shelves. And to the courses of writing and work, with students and teachers in schools, that followed back home. My teacher's peering into a piece of paper and seeing sun and water and earth helped me understand what "integrated curriculum" might mean (Jardine, 1990) – an insight I've been trying to catch up to ever since, like most good teaching.

So, here's to spring coming, a belated love letter to a dead teacher who taught me about gathering last year's seeds for this year's seeds for the new *Lavatera* that my grandson and I will plant soon. Seedlings – him and me.

Just maybe coming 'round again and maybe newborn Georgia O'Keefe daydreams tucking and tunneling sun and air and soil and water together:



Thich Nhat Hanh, a radiant being, has once again stepped out ahead of me in my recent coming and going despairs over age and this old creaky world that keeps trying to distract me, exhaust me:

Unwholesome mental formations are like a tangled ball of string. When we try to untangle it, we only wind it around ourselves until we cannot move. These mental formations are sometimes called afflictions *kleshas*. Sometimes they are called obscurations because they confuse us and make us lose our way. (Hanh 1999, p. 73-4)

He helped me blink that light into an illuminating dark, once again, teacher, just died. 95:

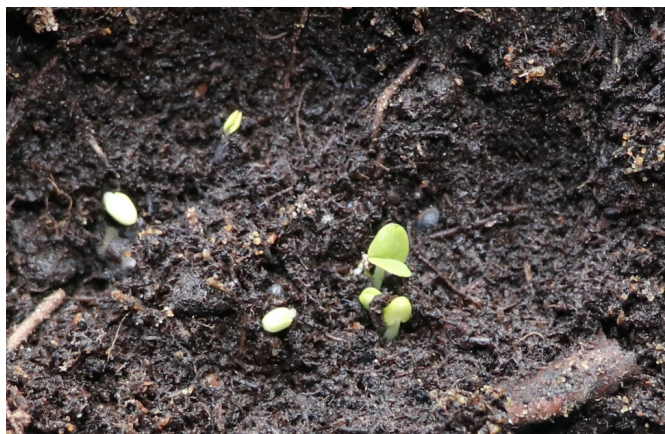
"Everything around us teaches impermanence" (Tsong-kha-pa, 2000, p. 151).

These radiant beings, their bodies shining with light, their voices clear and soft, their minds limpid and free of stain, were as firm and stable as diamonds yet they all passed, and even their teachings have gradually disappeared. The protectors of the world – Brahma, Ishvara, Vishnu, Indra, – fill the world with great beams of light and are brighter than a thousand suns. Their majesty and merit are renowned

through all the heavens and the earth.
They are the lords of all worlds –
subterranean, earthly, and heavenly, --
adorned with the greatest fortune. And yet
for them too, the time will come to die.
(Dorje, 2011, p. 75-6)

We bow over seeds and smell the wet dirt. An old
muse of mine comes up, making sure that I
remember a lamentation. Earth meditations,
death meditations, like these must not become
full of too much giddy hyperventilation. This was
dated March 10, 2022, near the last go-round of
seeds:

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“It’s Happening Again” (photo by the author)

As miraculous as the first time. It’s happening
again. Just plant. Just wait. Don’t even hope.
Dreams of sweet future basil must be held at bay,
for now. It must do what it can. Just be tender. Use
what you’ve dried and stored from last year. Be
still.

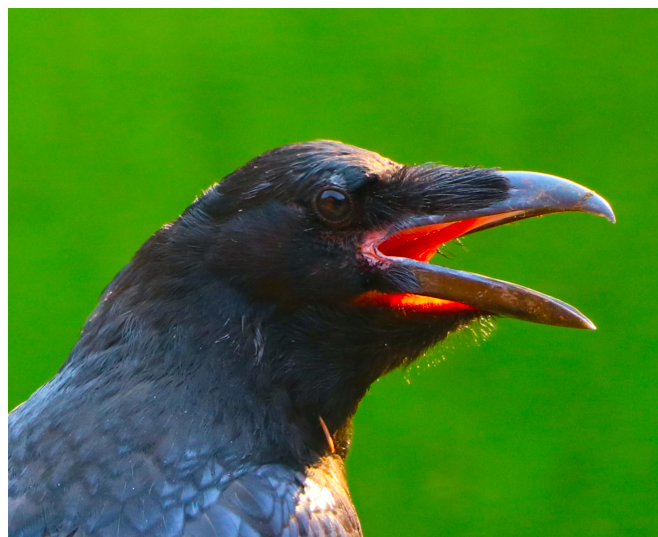
But still
And all
It’s coming on time to plant in Ukraine.
It’s happening again.

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This is the bristle-point. Like teacher tied to
Vietnam and Paris and me tied to that whole

myriad because of the odd happenstance of
happening to buy his book and happening to have
it erupt all over me and make its mark, its mark in
memory. Thich Nhat Hahn’s passing along into
mud *adorns*. That picture is full of radiant mud like
my grandson and I were last summer while
watering the garden. See? Refuges for stilling,
gathering, abound over and over and over again.

I blink. I gradually disappear. Then out of nowhere
arrives a herald, itself, of course, adorned and
adorning. The whole Earth comes to perch, just as
the whole Earth bends over the breaths and the
new seeds, planting. Tidings of great wonder and
joy:



Oh, tidings of wonder and joy. Earth tidings.
Breath tidings. Grandson in arm, us shushing each
other and standing in the light of its adornment.

A video found later. See that thumb-finger circle?
Read this phrase into the echo of empty sky. “Do
not let despair take over” (Hanh in HogganPR,
2011).

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Author Acknowledgement

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