

No Mud, no Lotus

THE ART OF TRANSFORMING SUFFERING

Thich Nhat Hanh

We all want to be happy and there are many books and teachers in the world that try to help people be happier. Yet we all continue to suffer.

Therefore, we may think that we're "doing it wrong." Somehow we are "failing at happiness." That isn't true. Being able to enjoy happiness doesn't require that we have zero suffering. In fact, the art of happiness is also the art of suffering well. When we learn to acknowledge, embrace, and understand our suffering, we suffer much less. Not only that, but we're also able to go further and transform our suffering into understanding, compassion, and joy for ourselves and for others.

One of the most difficult things for us to accept is that there is no realm where there's only happiness and there's no suffering. This doesn't mean that we should despair. Suffering can be transformed. As soon as we open our mouth to say "suffering," we know that the opposite of suffering is already there as well. Where there is suffering, there is happiness.

According to the creation story in the biblical book of Genesis, God said, "Let there be light."

I like to imagine that light replied, saying, "God, I have to wait for my twin brother, darkness, to be with me. I can't be there without the darkness."

God asked, "Why do you need to wait? Darkness is there."

Light answered, "In that case, then I am also already there."

If we focus exclusively on pursuing happiness, we may regard suffering as something to be ignored or resisted. We think of it as some-thing that gets in the way of happiness. But the art of happiness is also and at the same time the art of knowing how to suffer well. If we know how to use our suffering, we can transform it and suffer much less. Knowing how to suffer well is essential to realizing true happiness.