

Living Into the Truth of Interbeing

Excerpt from *Active Peace: A Mindful Path to a Nonviolent World*

By G. Scott Brown

Thich Nhat Hanh coined the word *interbeing* and I love the way it encompasses the spiritual and practical reality of interrelatedness. We arise from the same source—from the Ground of Being—as part of the great unfolding of the universe. We are not separate from anything that has come before—not our ancestors, not any living thing, not any “thing.”

On the most practical levels, we come into the world because of, and in full participation and relationship with, the sun, air, soil, and rain—with all of the elements and processes of the Earth and biosphere. Our being also depends on other beings—on other people and species. Everything from the bacteria in our guts, the decomposers in and of the soil, the insects that provide pollination, the plants and animals we eat, to the phytoplankton, trees, and plants that absorb carbon and create oxygen — we are all in it together, interconnected in a web of relationship and interdependence. Interbeing is a basic truth of our existence.

I have come to appreciate how interbeing includes virtually everything in every moment. Not long ago I was participating in a weeklong training and had several wonderful experiences out in the natural world. One morning, as I stood quietly above a pool in a creek I noticed a large ripple. I looked to see what had caused it and I saw an otter, then two more. I was thrilled to the core and watched them excitedly until they moved out of sight upstream.

One afternoon while at the same training, I saw a hawk fly into a nearby tree and watched until she flew away. I was particularly struck when her wings came into full extension. Later, I felt how the otters and the hawk had become a part of me. I felt the playful, slinky gait of the otters as I walked. I found myself lifting up my arms as I moved about in imitation and reverence of the energy and beauty of the hawk’s soaring. I still

can't make sense of it with my mind, but somehow their movements and essence found a place to dwell in my soul. I carry them with me to this day.

I noticed the same phenomena as I sat with different people during the training. Sitting with one other person, I realized that all the other people in the room were also present in our relational field. The otters, hawk, trees, and creek were there too. Everything was there in an energetic web of interrelatedness and relationship.

Such experiences have expanded the sense of who, or what, I really am. I've come to realize that my path, with its teachings and practices, has ultimately been a way to live into the truth of interbeing. Concepts alone were never going to override my conditioning—my beliefs and habits of separation. I find that this path is, in a certain way, self-perpetuating. The direct experiences of an expanded sense of self have been so beautiful and enlivening that they keep me open and awake to other experiences. The simple intention to soften the boundaries and align with my true nature feels like purpose enough for this life.

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