



INTERBEING

— THICH NHAT HANH —

This text explores the concept of "inter-being" as explained by Thich Nhat Hanh, emphasizing the interdependence between nature and all beings. It reminds us of the impact of our actions on the entire ecosystem and the need to live this relationship with mutual responsibility.

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in [a] sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there can be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here, either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper *inter-are*. "*Interbeing*" is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix *inter-* with the verb *to be*, we have a new verb: *inter-be*.

If we continue to look into the sheet of paper, we can see the sunshine in it. If sunshine is not there, the forest cannot grow. Without the sunshine, nothing can grow, not even us. So we know that the sunshine is also in the sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine *inter-are*. Looking more deeply, we can also see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. We also see the wheat. We know that the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, so the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. The logger's father and mother are in the paper as well. Without all of these other things, there would be no sheet of paper at all.

Looking even more deeply, we can see we are also in the paper. This is not difficult to see, because when we look at a sheet of paper, the sheet of paper becomes the object of our perception. It is becoming more and more clear to neuroscientists that we cannot exactly speak of an objective world outside of our perceptions, nor can we speak of a wholly subjective world in which things exist only in our mind. Everything – time, space, the earth, the

rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat, and even consciousness – is in that sheet of paper. Everything co-exists with it. *To be is to inter-be.* You cannot just be by yourself alone; you have to *inter-be* with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because everything else is.

Suppose we try to return one of the elements to its source. If we returned the sunshine to the sun, would the sheet of paper still be possible? No, without the sunshine the tree cannot be. If we returned the logger to his mother, then we wouldn't have a sheet of paper either. Looking in this way, we see that the sheet of paper is made entirely of "non-paper elements", and if we were to return any one of these non-paper elements to its source, there would be no paper at all. As thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe. So the one contains the all.

- Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Other Shore*



"This paper contains everything in the universe."