

*Even as they / strike you down / with a mountain of hatred and violence; even as they
step on you and crush you / like a worm, even as they dismember and disembowel
you, remember, brother, remember: / man is not our enemy.*

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (excerpt from the poem [Recommendation](#))

October 13th, 2023

Dear Friends of the International Plum Village Community,

Our hearts are breaking as we witness the horrific violence that is being unleashed in many parts of the world and most recently in the Middle East: in Israel and in Gaza. We know that both Palestinians and Israelis are our siblings—our brothers, sisters, children, our family—who are being killed, and who are driven to kill. In an atmosphere of violence, accusation, and retaliation, we have a tendency to dehumanize the other. Once anger, fear, and suspicion take over, it seems like there is nothing to do besides kill or be killed.

Today we shed tears as we witness our Israeli and Palestinian siblings dying, sustaining severe injuries—both psychological and physical—and losing loved ones in the hate-fueled attacks of the very few. Violence can only lead to more violence and diminish any possibility of dialogue and reconciliation—unless we go deeply within ourselves to see that *human beings are not our enemy*. We need a coalition of wise and courageous people—in Gaza, West Bank, Israel and in the international community—who refuse to give in to this hate: a non-violent army. It is time for violence in all its many forms to end in the Holy Land.

With compassion, love, and wisdom in our hearts we can make ourselves available to listen deeply to the cries of those now in Gaza and Israel [and elsewhere in the world](#)—the cries of those undergoing the deep mental crisis of being trapped in a conflict zone, who are looking to keep their love strong in the midst of this horror. We need to lend them our strength. We all need to go beyond the delusive and destructive idea that we are separate from each other.

Let us create islands of non-violence and peace in our hearts, in our homes and beyond, via email, phone and video. Let us live every moment seeing those we think of as the enemy as not separate from ourselves—as our own blood, skin, and bones—and let us not allow hatred to take over. Let us come back and take care of our feelings with calm and clarity, holding our sadness, fear, anger, and despair and resist the temptation to blame, punish, and have to choose a side.

This meditation may be challenging at this moment, but it is what we as a collective need now to awaken from the madness and destruction. Revenge and punishment cannot be the answer. Join us to generate this imperturbable compassion in your own heart and radiate it out in every direction to our siblings experiencing great loss, fear, and pain in this moment. The war is complex and difficult to stop, but it is also impermanent. Its cessation now depends on our capacity, as human beings, to listen deeply, resist polarization and discrimination, and take concrete steps towards lasting reconciliation with love in our hearts. Love, compassion, and courage need to have a place in politics.

With love for all beings suffering in the hell of war,
The Plum Village Community of America

[this text was read during the [Prayer for Peace Ceremony](#) in the Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall of Deer Park Monastery on October 13, 2023, with the chanting and support of over 140 monastics from the three Plum Village Monasteries in the USA.]