



No Coming, No Going

No Fear, no Death
Thich Nhat Hanh

For many of us, our greatest pain is caused by our notions of coming and going. We think that the person we loved came to us from somewhere and has now gone away somewhere. But our true nature is the nature of no coming, no going. We have not come from anywhere, we shall not go anywhere. When conditions are sufficient, we manifest. When conditions are no longer sufficient, we no longer manifest. It does not mean that we do not exist. Like radio waves without a radio, we do not manifest.

Not only do the notions of coming and going not express reality, neither do the notions of being and non-being. We hear these words in the Prajnaparamita Sutra: “Listen Shariputra, all dharmas [phenomena] are marked by emptiness, they are neither produced nor destroyed, neither increasing nor decreasing.”

The meaning of emptiness here is very important; it means first of all to be empty of a separate self. Nothing has a separate self, and nothing exists by itself. If we examine things carefully we will see that all phenomena, including ourselves, are composites. We are made up of other parts. We are made of our mother and father, our grandmothers and grandfathers, our body, our feelings, our perceptions, our mental formations, the earth, the sun and innumerable non-self elements.

All these parts depend on causes and conditions. We see that all that has existed, exists or will exist is interconnected and interdependent. All that we see has only manifested because it is a part of something else, of other conditions that make it possible to manifest. All phenomena are neither produced nor destroyed, because they are in a constant process of manifesting.

We may be intelligent enough to understand this, but to understand it intellectually is not enough. To really understand this is to be free from fear. It is to become enlightened. It is to live in inter-being. We have to practice looking deeply like this to nourish our awakened understanding of no birth and no death in our daily lives. In this way we can realize the wonderful gift of non-fear.

If we just talk about inter-being as a theory, it will not help us. We should ask: “Piece of paper, where do you come from? Who are you? What did you come here to do? Where are you going to go?” We can ask the flame: “Flame, where do you come from and where will you go?” Listen to the reply closely. The flame, the piece of paper, is replying by its presence. We only have to look deeply and we can hear it reply. The flame is saying: “I do not come from anywhere.”

That would be the answer of the japonica flowers also. They were not the same and not different. They did not come from anywhere and they did not go anywhere. If there is a baby who is lost, we should not be sad. It is because there were not sufficient causes and conditions for it to arrive at that time. It will come again.