

Synopsis

A Lotus On Fire:

How a Buddhist Monk Ignited the Love In My Heart

By Vickie MacArthur

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Awakening will come, like the wick of a lamp that is lit at the very moment of contact with the flame.

--Thich Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys*

One look from Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh was all it took to spark a spiritual love affair—not with the celibate monk but with the all-encompassing love he embodies. A Lotus On Fire is a spiritual memoir that illuminates the path of awakening to the love we already are, from igniting, nurturing, re-igniting, and fanning the flame of spiritual love. Revealing the intimate details of what I call a “divine love affair,” I show how a mystical heart connection to a fully enlightened teacher leads us to the Love we all are—beyond the boundaries of race and religion.

Thay, as he is known, often invites his students to write to him. My story is rooted in a collection of deeply personal letters I wrote to Thay, when I was trying to understand the kind of life-changing, all-consuming love I was experiencing—the same love that mystics from all spiritual traditions struggle to describe. These letters speak to the nature of a spiritual love affair that is both personal and universal, ordinary and divine, intimate and yet a vast, loving presence. Moving between day-to-day life in Canada and retreats in North America and in Plum Village (France), I blend ordinary lived experience with

mystical moments of mindful attention. The letters trace the classic arc of the spiritual journey, from the spark of awakening in the presence of the teacher, to finally merging with the “Thay in me,” and my own inner teacher.

I see this work as a tribute to Thay’s exceptional life and integrative teachings. Inspired by Thay’s life-long aspiration to inter-faith dialogue, I weave together crucial stories from my own life with the teachings and practices of both Plum Village and my Christian community, to build bridges of shared understanding and practice. I show how these teachings take root in everyday experiences—from generational suffering and grieving a loved one, to reclaiming a more holistic and embodied spirituality. Struggling with the Buddhist philosophy of non-attachment and letting go of desire, I learn to sit with the feelings of intense love and longing I have for God in my heart. Following in the footsteps of saints and mystics the world over, be they Christian or Hindu, I learn that these feelings of love and devotion to God or guru can be a path of skillful means to finally dissolving into the pure heart of love.

In revealing the subtle mystical connection between teacher and disciple, I hope to reclaim the pure essence of love embodied in the traditional teacher/disciple relationship, and the inherent gifts that have been eclipsed, if not irretrievably lost, in the storm of recent scandals and abuse. Ultimately, the true teacher is a mirror reflecting our own pure essence. What I saw in Thay’s eyes is what I want to reflect back. That’s the universal story I want to share.