

Global Buddhist spiritual leader Thich Nhat Hanh dies at 95

by [Ira Rifkin](#) in the [February 23, 2022](#) issue



(AP Photo)

Thich Nhat Hanh, global Buddhist spiritual leader and longtime Vietnamese political exile, died on January 22. He was 95.

He had been in declining health and returned to Vietnam three years ago, expressing a wish to spend his remaining days at his root temple in Hue.

Thich Nhat Hanh spent 39 years in exile from Vietnam because of pro-peace advocacy that put him in conflict with both the North and South Vietnamese governments during the Vietnam War. He also criticized US involvement in the war.

In exile, Thich Nhat Hanh established the Plum Village network of monastic centers, the largest of which is in southwest France. He spent much of his time there when not traveling the world for public engagements.

Trained in the Vietnamese Thien (Zen) tradition, Thich Nhat Hanh's approach to Buddhism was eclectic. He combined several Mahayana, or North Indian-Tibetan schools of Buddhist thought, with elements of Western psychology, and he is perhaps best known for the now widespread activist movement he named Engaged Buddhism.

Historically, for many Buddhists, the religion has been about gaining personal merit to ensure a favorable reincarnation. Engaged Buddhism, by contrast, seeks to apply meditative insights in ways that reduce social, political, environmental, and economic suffering.

"Meditation is not to escape from society, but to come back to ourselves and see what is going on," Thich Nhat Hanh once said. "Once there is seeing, there must be acting. With mindfulness we know what to do and what not to do to help."

In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. nominated Thich Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize, saying in his nomination that his ideas for peace, if applied, "would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity." However, the Nobel committee did not award a peace prize that year. —Religion News Service