



## I want it all

I wrote a poem over 30 years ago, when I was 27 or 28, about a brother who suffered so much he had to drop out of society and go to a meditation center. Since the Buddhist Temple is a place of compassion, they welcomed him . . . . The people in the Temple were compassionate enough to let him come and have a place to cry . . . . Finally he took up refuge in the meditation center and did not want to go back to society . . . . He thought that he had found some peace, but one day I myself came and burned his meditation center, which was only a hut: his last shelter . . . . In this poem, I am the young man, and I am also the person who came and burned down the cottage.

I shall say that I want it all.  
If you ask me how much I want,  
I shall tell you that I want it all . . . .

This morning my brother is back from his long adventure.  
He kneels before the altar and his eyes are filled with tears.  
His soul is looking for a shore to put an anchor,  
My own image of long ago.  
Let him kneel there and weep,  
Let him cry his heart out.  
Let him have his refuge for a thousand years.  
Enough to dry his tears.

Because one of these nights I shall come.  
I have to come and set fire to this small cottage of his on a hill.  
His last shelter.  
My fire will destroy,  
Destroy everything.  
Taking away from him the only life raft he has, after a shipwreck.  
In the utmost anguish of his soul,  
The shell will break.  
The light of the burning hut will witness, gloriously, his deliverance.  
I will wait for him beside the burning cottage,  
Tears will run down my cheeks.  
I shall be there to contemplate his new existence,  
And hold his hand in mine,  
And ask him how much he would want.  
He will smile at me and say that he wants it all.  
Just as I did.

To me, a meditation center is where you get back to yourself . . . . and you prepare for your re-entry into society.

Thich Nhat Hahn, *Being Peace*, 1997 (poem 1954)