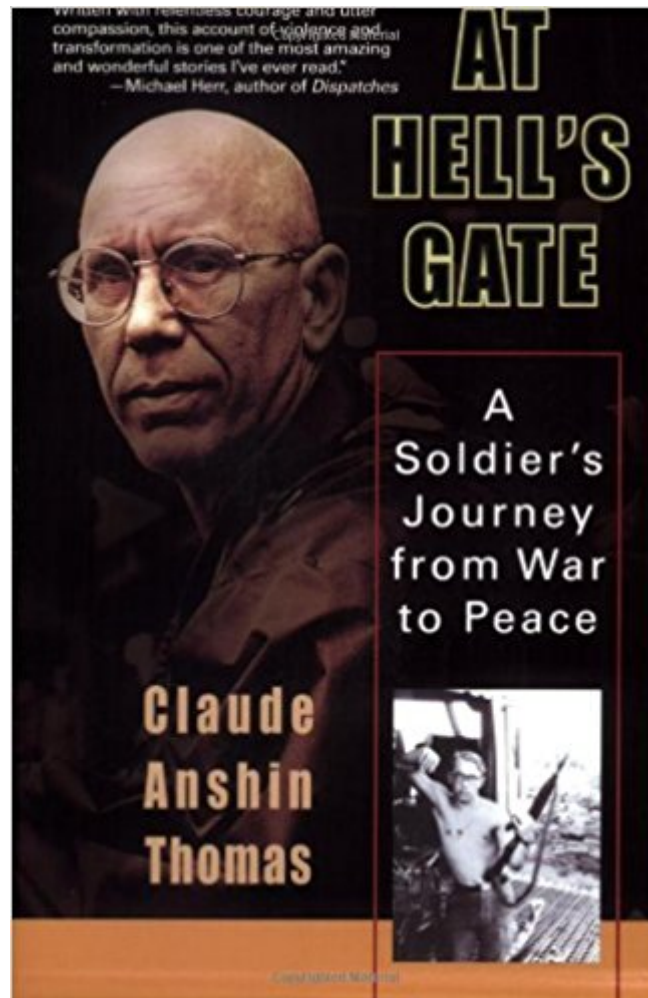




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At Hell's Gate: A Soldier's Journey From War To Peace



Synopsis

In this raw and moving memoir, Claude Thomas describes his service in Vietnam, his subsequent emotional collapse, and his remarkable journey toward healing. *At Hell's Gate* is not only a gripping coming-of-age story but a spiritual travelogue from the horrors of combat to the discovery of inner peace—a journey that inspired Thomas to become a Zen monk and peace activist who travels to war-scarred regions around the world. "Everyone has their Vietnam," Thomas writes. "Everyone has their own experience of violence, calamity, or trauma." With simplicity and power, this book offers timeless teachings on how we can all find healing, and it presents practical guidance on how mindfulness and compassion can transform our lives. This expanded paperback edition features:

- Discussion questions for reading groups
- A new afterword by the author reflecting on how the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are affecting soldiers—and offering advice on how to help returning soldiers to cope with their combat experiences

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Thomas's presentation of this difficult experience is searingly honest."—Shambhala Sun

"This gripping spiritual memoir bears witness to the transforming meditation and mindfulness in the life of a Vietnam Veteran."—Spirituality and Health

"Let me start by simply recommending that you buy, read, and think about Claude Anshin Thomas's book, *At Hell's Gate*. It was a long time coming but worth the wait, especially in this time of war and rampant violence."—Turning

Wheel "What gives Thomas's perspective so much weight is that it carries the rare and undeniable authority of one who has seen firsthand the extremes of both good and evil that lie in the human soul." — •What Is Enlightenment? "This is a book of great power. Thomas's story has the power to heal, to inspire, to teach." — •John Laurence, former CBS News correspondent and author of *The Cat from Huân: A Vietnam War Story* "A powerful, wise, and genuinely profound spiritual odyssey from the insanity of violence (in the world, within ourselves, and in the assumptions of American culture) to the peace and compassion of mindfulness practice. Thomas beautifully models Zen teachings in his daily life, and by doing so he enlightens and liberates us all." — •Charles Johnson, winner of the National Book Award for *Middle Passage* "Claude Anshin Thomas has been an inspiration to me. Our world urgently needs to listen to him tell of his life in war and then in peace." — •Maxine Hong Kingston, author of *The Woman Warrior* "In these strange times, when fear and aggression often seem to be the only responses we can imagine to a perceived threat, this powerful book provides an honest, open-hearted, and very moving testimony to the power of Buddhist practice to break this cycle. Thomas is a hero in the truest sense of the word: having undergone an epic trial, he has generously come back to help others in need." — •George Saunders, author of *Pastoralia* and *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* "Thomas's journey from the killing fields of Vietnam to the path of peace and pilgrimage testifies to his — •and our — •powerful urge to awaken. At the same time, this is not a pretty story. Anshin Thomas has lived in hell, knows its smell and taste, and continues to confront it every day of his life. Yet he remains undeterred in his work to make peace in himself and the world at large." — •Bernie Glassman, author of *Instructions to the Cook and Bearing Witness*

Claude Anshin Thomas went to Vietnam at the age of eighteen, where he received numerous awards and decorations, including twenty-seven Air Medals, a Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Purple Heart. Today he is a monk in the Soto Zen tradition and an active speaker and Zen teacher in the United States and Europe. He is also the founder of the Zaltho Foundation, a nonprofit organization that promotes peace and nonviolence (www.zaltho.org). This is his first book.

A lot's been written about the emergence of a new 'western buddhism' in recent years. (See, "How the Swans Came to the Lake," "The New Buddhism," "One Dharma," the last part of "Buddhism, A Concise Introduction," "Buddhism Without Beliefs," "The Accidental Buddhist," among other books). What often gets overlooked are the struggles of those who reconcile the Buddha's ethical mandates (the five precepts, the eightfold path) and the moral compromises of life in the developed, secular

West. Many of the more popular writers, argue for putting aside rituals that have become part of practice in Asian countries, putting aside a literal belief in the idea of reincarnation, and an emphasis on compassion and meditative practices. They argue these accommodations are both promising, and are inevitable, anyway. Then there are those who brook no compromise whatsoever. Claude Thomas Anshin's, autobiographical, "At Hell's Gate," is a daunting, challenging, and ultimately inspiring look at a man who, through a sincere, if severe, dedication to the dharma, overcame drug addiction, PTSD, and a deep personal history of violence, to live as 'pure' a buddhist life as is possible in our life and times. Fascinating reading for those wrestling with the issues of adapting the practice to life in the West. Check out one of his dharma talks' on youtube: Claude AnShin Thomas, FAU Talk Boca Raton March 2013, to get an idea of what I'm talking about ...

Very real, harrowing, painstaking in the way we need it to be. This honest account of a man's relentless search for meaning in a deeply troubled life paints a picture of a man in the midst of healing. Though he is not out of the woods yet, so to speak, he has found the ox in the woods and can see him clearly. This is an account of how one is to deal with a life that seems there is no escape from. Medicine for the soul of the suffering, and a veil lifter for those of us who have never seen this flavor of turmoil in our own lives. Sometimes, all we can do is to fix on something and go.

An interesting and compelling read regarding mindfulness and compassion. The author's life and story is well storied without reading like a novel. It rather focuses on the need for compassion, both for self and others, in a way that could help the world move to the next level towards global harmony and true peace. Aside from the loftiness of that difficult but worthy ambition, the book is helpful from a personal sense in terms of helping us as individuals ponder the need to be mindful and in the present balancing the past with the unknowns of the future. The book is a good, easy and quick read that could be valuable to everyone.

I read this book for a Bachelors class that I am taking called Pathways to Peace. I doubt that I would have selected it on my own but, I am so glad that it was a required read. Some parts do repeat but, if you can look beyond that and see what is intended, I believe each reader will gain some huge insight to not only the author but to their own self. Each one of us plays a part in the conflicts that go on in the world, whether we are on the actual battlefield or the ones in our own lives. In some way we are all responsible for the wars of the world and for the unfortunate wars we create in our own lives. Here there and everywhere. It's time we really listen what's being said. A great book for

everyone to read. From an 90 year old to a young teen. Some may say it is a bit graphic but if everyone has an early chance to reflect on their actions, they may have a better outcome in their lives and a chance at change.

"At Hell's Gate: A Soldier's Journey from War to Peace", by Claude Anshin Thomas, is a tale of one Vietnam Veteran's transformation from violence and rage to peace and compassion. It's about addressing the roots of war and violence, which are contained within our individual selves, in our society, and in our culture. When Thomas and his fellow vets returned home from the war, our society and culture attempted to wash its hands of its responsibility in that war by marginalizing those who had served, which reminds me of this quote by David Foster Wallace: "It's in the democratic citizen's nature to be like a leaf that doesn't believe in the tree it's part of." The excessive violence and trauma he experienced in Vietnam was exacerbated by the public's distrust of the veterans, so he isolated from other people and sought relief in drugs. Thomas recovered from his addictions in 1983 and went on to be ordained as a Zen Buddhist monk and took the vows of a mendicant: to not own property, to not live in a monastery or reside with any permanence indoors, to not be gainfully employed and to commit to wander as a spiritual practice. To accept the inevitable suffering of life, he says we must practice mindfulness, which he defines as: "a state of existence that arises as we become more aware of our habitual impulses, our conditioned nature, our patterns of thought and behavior, and begin to stop allowing the habits to dictate how we respond to the world." The gist of "Hell's Gate" is that suffering is not something to run from. It's to be embraced, because without suffering, there can be no joy. David Allan Reeves Author of "Running Away From Me"

Outstanding! I cannot say enough about this book! The first thing I need to say is that you do not have to be a buddhist to relate to this book. Its incredible and makes so much sense. I could read this book over and over and over and probably each time take something new from it. Thank you so much Ashin for taking the time to write such a marvelous book. I have recommended this book to so many people already.

Excellent book to help with understanding those suffering with PTSD and how some deal with it. Many of the actions and behavior of my grandson who suffers from having served two tours in Iraq now make more sense and are easier to cope with. I gave him a copy and he was very favorably impressed with the book saying that it was "right on target." I am embarrassed for our country and

the way many of our people treated the returning Viet Nam veterans. Shame on us

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