

# The five trainings in mindfulness: my personal views



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## **Darkness to Enlightenment**

### **My Personal Journey Through the Five Mindfulness Trainings**

I absolutely love enjoying a big, juicy cheeseburger accompanied by a chocolate milk shake and I usually consume these heavenly goodies while I'm watching a re-run of a Law and Order episode. I gossip and speak poorly of others on a daily basis while at work and sometimes at home. Few things make me feel better than verbally tearing apart a rude bank customer with fellow tellers after I "help" them. After a rough week at work and school there is nothing better than getting absolutely hammered over the entire weekend and completely abusing the body that has managed to keep working after just a couple hours of sleep per night. As I listen to myself I realize that I am not only living a generally unfulfilling and unhealthy life but I realize that there is no way that I could be a Buddhist. Or could I? After our study of Buddhism and particularly Thich Nhat Hanh, as well classroom discussions I decided to take on the challenge of living a Buddhist lifestyle. My initial desire to go through this journey was simply to see if I could, with my unhealthy lifestyle, adhere to the seemingly strict principles of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. I wanted to see if I was strong enough mentally, physically, and spiritually to adhere to tasks that seem fairly easy to follow on paper but difficult in practice.

My journey was based on the Five Mindfulness Trainings supported by Thich Nhat Hanh that can be found at the end of this piece. The first step in my Buddhist transformation was writing down and connecting with each of the five principles which I then posted in all rooms of my house so that I could

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always keep them in mind. Rather than taking the more sensible and perhaps realistic approach of applying each training slowly and individually, I decided to dive into the Mindfulness Trainings in their entirety all at once. On my first morning I woke up, read the list of the Trainings that I had posted next to my desk and went on with my day. Because I had these strict guidelines to follow I began acting extremely cautious in my every movement and even felt like a stranger in my own skin. Every little move and decision was carefully analyzed and assessed as I tried to adhere to this new lifestyle. Even with how strange I felt, I had no idea what a mind-blowing journey I was headed on as I started analyzing the starting step in my transformation, the First Mindfulness Training.

The First Mindfulness Training, in summary, promotes the awareness of the countless suffering that is occurring in myself and the world as a result of the killing of people, animals, plants, and even minerals. This first principle asks not only for a personal end to killing but also for not condoning any killing in which others are partaking. As mentioned above, I love eating meat and when I told my Eastern-European parents about my strict new vegan diet they asked me if I was feeling okay. As I drove to work on this first day I realized that my traditional breakfast routine was not going to suffice. Everywhere I looked all I saw were advertisements for foods containing some kind of animal product and the thought of eating breakfast soon escaped my mind. During my lunch break I was able to head to the store and pick up lots of fruits, vegetables, and grains but the confusion that I felt in the morning lingered with me all day. Animal products were literally everywhere. How could we, as a society, be so incredibly addicted to consuming animal

products that we must eat them at every meal? As I thought about it and did further research I realized that animals were being born for the sole purpose of dying and being consumed by people just like me. When paying for a cheeseburger at a local fast food place I was really paying for the systematic slaughter of innocent animals that were never offered the basic opportunities that animals are supposed to have. If anything else with a heartbeat, say a human perhaps, were born just to be used and then tossed away we would be absolutely outraged yet we encourage this behavior when it comes to the live creatures with no voices. I learned that I must be the voice for these creatures. Although I cannot convince every person on the planet to stop consuming so much animal product I can spend my money wisely and refuse to support organizations that knowingly take away life. Even with this new realization regarding the consumption of animal products I still found myself struggling with this first precept. Sure I gave up eating animal products but I had to eat something else in order to survive and that happened to be fruits and vegetables. As Hanh outlines we must also not allow the killing of plants. Okay, I can learn to give up animal products, but what else am I supposed to eat besides plants? After all, we have a biological necessity for nutrients and will die if we do not receive adequate nutrition. This brought me into an extremely pessimistic and angry mood (breaking another precept) because after all of my efforts, I was still killing life and therefore not following this precept completely. Of course Hanh is human just like the rest of us and he must kill to live so I came to the personal conclusion that the killing of plants and minerals is only acceptable when absolutely necessary and with the appropriate repentance afterward, such as meditation. Although I missed my tasty cheeseburgers I realized that there was no value to food except for that <https://assignbuster.com/the-five-trainings-in-mindfulness-my-personal-views/>

which society instilled inside of me. After about a week on this strict diet I realized that I rarely found myself hungry and I didn't even miss the old foods that I loved. This was an incredibly freeing and exhilarating feeling because I realized that everything society told me about food was actually harming my body and suppressing my mind which is something that I am battling to this day.

Slightly easier than the first principle is the Second Mindfulness Training that brings awareness and requires action in areas where exploitation, stealing, social injustice, and oppression are present. From the time when I was a young girl I never had the desire to steal and always viewed stealing as the greatest sin of all time. As an adult I have maintained this personal belief and found support in it with the idea that if the universe gives someone else something, then there is a reason it belongs to them and therefore no reason for me to desire it. Although this aspect came easily, the other components of this principle were more difficult. I am both cognizant of and emotional regarding the social injustice that is occurring not only in my community but in the entire world. I have a deep, burning desire to change the world and make it a happy place for all of its inhabitants but I know that at this point in my life that is not a possibility for a variety of reasons. After the realization that I cannot change the entire world and cease all exploitation, social injustice, and oppression I realized that there were quite a few things that I could do. Although my close circle of friends and acquaintances are very open-minded and non-judgmental, the people that I spend most of my days with - customers at the bank, are not. Not a single day goes by that I don't have at least one customer complaining about how the fact that we play

Spanish music is “ un-American” or that there are so many “ faggots parading around”. In the last year that I have worked at the bank I have never said anything to a customer when they made such remarks in order to maintain customer service. This all changed once I started realizing the importance of this precept and grasped the fact that my silence was perpetuating the oppression of two communities that were very close to my heart. After this realization I stopped staying silent when customers would say such hurtful things and I began responding with “ I’m going to have to disagree with your opinion on that one”. This was not only a way for me to show that I would not acknowledge their offensive behavior as appropriate but also a way to maintain the customer service that I had been worried about previously. Recently I have noticed that more tellers and bankers are following my example and ceasing their silence and I am very proud of the environment that we have started to foster.

For the purpose of this analysis I will not focus on my personal reactions to the Third Mindfulness Training but rather the principle that one should do everything in their power to protect children and the vulnerable from sexual abuse and not condone sexual misconduct. From the time that I was little my mother always said, “ what people decide to do with their sex lives is okay with me - as long as they are not hurting children”. The majority of human beings are sensitive to the vulnerable and precious fragility of a childhood and it is absolutely intolerable when an adult violates this. Due to my lack of close personal ties with a child suffering this abuse I decided to get more educated about sexual violation of children and women around the world. Furthermore, I found organizations that were working to protect that rights of

women and children around the world and I found my niche in this Mindfulness Training through providing all of my friends and family with these resources. This made me feel like I was contributing as much as I could at this point to prevent sexual misconduct because I was sharing the knowledge that would initiate the first step if anything were to occur to a child. This precept was also interesting to me because it mentions the importance of “protecting the integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society”. This caught my attention because it made me wonder whether the integrity of an individual and a society could ever be protected simultaneously. Particularly I wondered about the idea of abortion and how this could be addressed to protect both the individual and society because the two can have differing opinions on what is just. On an individual level it is just to let a woman choose to have an abortion because having an outside force control what she does with her body would strip her of any integrity. Yet how would an entire society’s happiness and integrity be effected by the differing viewpoints and actions associated with such an issue?

The Fourth Mindfulness Training, promoting positive speech and deep listening, was the precept that I found to be most powerful. As we all are, especially females, I was accustomed to speaking negatively about other people and spreading negativity through my harsh words about myself and others. At work and school I would gossip about other people’s lives, speak negatively about my accomplishments and downfalls, and criticize others for their actions or beliefs. Following this training proved to be extremely difficult as I literally had to consciously keep my mouth shut and physically restrain myself when I wanted to bring up a negative topic. I often times

found myself completely silent because there was nothing positive that I could say due to the fact that my mind was on a constant, non ceasing negative spiral of thoughts and speech. After the initial strain of holding my negativity back lessened I was once again able to cultivate positive speech as I had often done in my past. Through this I found myself seeing the positivity in others and radiating this beautiful energy myself. This was incredibly powerful because I was visibly able to change the moods and feelings of those around me. After following this precept I found that the people who would gossip with me in the past and perpetuate a negative cycle with me were now cultivating positivity and spreading light through their words and actions.

The fifth and final Mindfulness Training is one that deals with issues that I have struggled with my entire life and will battle for the foreseeable future; preventing negative consumption by promoting good physical and mental health. As a college student the culture of drinking and drug abuse is always around me. Whether it was for release, relaxation, social conformity, or boredom I would partake in the typical college behavior of abusing my body with negative substances. The fact that the nickname of this type of gathering is called " getting wasted" speaks volumes about this type of lifestyle. There was absolutely nothing positive happening in my life when I was under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol and this Mindfulness Training reiterated the fact that this was not an acceptable lifestyle. What is so wrong with my precious life that I must abuse my mind and body with psychologically altering substances? Our lives are so far from worthless yet this is how we treat them when we participate in harmful activities. Is this



why we do it? Do we get “wasted” every weekend because we see our lives as not worthy of staying clean? It was absolutely terrifying for me to be at a party without a drink and not using any type of drugs. I felt uncomfortable, out of place, and through the actions of others I was able to see how pointless my previous participation in the environment truly was. The other aspect of this Mindfulness Training that I really connected with was loving and respecting my body. After living with eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder for 12 years of my life, Hanh’s words spoke to my soul because I finally had the quick ability to see what it was like to love my body. As I stood on the scale in our bathroom and started my nightly ritual of going over everything that was wrong with my body, my eyes froze on my left arm. Staring at my left arm I broke down into tears and felt bewildered by the beauty that was my arm. But it was the fact that it was not really my arm that made me feel so overwhelmed. As Hanh mentions, our bodies are not only a representation of ourselves but also of our ancestors and our children. As I stood in amazement I realized that my body contained the souls of my ancestors that I never got to meet but that I will carry with me forever. Without my great, great grandfather or grandmother on my mom’s side I would never exist and I learned that I should honor my body and, in turn, honor my ancestors.

When I started this journey I figured that it would be just a little lent-like challenge that would prove my perseverance and strength. I had no idea that this would be a journey that would completely change my life. I thought that the “completion” of this transformation would result in me being able to become a Buddhist but I have come to understand that this small

assignment is the first step in the reclamation of my life and realization of my true potential. In these past few weeks I was able to finally meet myself and address my demons, coming clean and starting a new life in the process. This is of course going to require small steps and continuous changes. Although I am no longer eating meat, I still consume animal products and even with a new, positive frame of mind I am still extremely self-critical. I am neither embarrassed nor ashamed by either of these statements because I have learned that all it takes for a life altering realization and true mindfulness is a small dose of honesty and awareness.

## **The Five Mindfulness Trainings according to Thich Nhat Hanh**

### **The First Mindfulness Training**

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

### **The Second Mindfulness Training**

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I will practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others,

but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

### **The Third Mindfulness Training**

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

### **The Fourth Mindfulness Training**

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

### **The Fifth Mindfulness Training**

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and <https://assignbuster.com/the-five-trainings-in-mindfulness-my-personal-views/>

my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.