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The Five Mindfulness Trainings

The Five Mindfulness Trainings represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and a global ethic. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love, which leads to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world. To practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of interbeing. This is Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair. If we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are already on the path of a bodhisattva. Knowing we are on that path, we are not lost in confusion about our life in the present, in preoccupation with the past, or in fears about the future.

When we practice the mindfulness trainings, we make a commitment to refrain from behaviors that harm ourselves and others. We commit to not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not speaking falsely, and to abstaining from intoxicants. The first training is to protect life, to decrease violence in oneself, in the family, and in society. The second training is to practice social justice, generosity, not stealing, and not exploiting other living beings. The third training is the practice of responsible sexual behavior in order to protect individuals, couples, families, and children. The fourth training is the practice of deep listening and loving speech in order to restore communication and bring reconciliation. The fifth training is to practice mindful consumption, not bringing toxins into our bodies and minds, not consuming TV programs, magazines, films, and so on that may contain poisons such as violence, craving, and hatred. The practice of mindful consumption is the practice of protecting ourselves, our families, our society, and our communities.

These trainings have come from our understanding of the Noble Eightfold Path. For example, the root of suffering is not only that people kill. The killing happens because we have a wrong perception, a wrong view. If we have wrong views, we may be ready to kill. But if we see clearly and have Right View, we have neither the ability nor the desire to kill. With Right View, we see clearly that whatever we want to kill is part of us; it is like our own family member, and we lose our ability to harm it.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings are offered without dogma or religion. Everybody can use them as an ethics for their life without becoming Buddhist or becoming part of any tradition or faith. You are just yourself, but you try to make a beautiful life by following these guidelines.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings are not commandments; they don't come from an external god. They come from our own wisdom and insight. The insight they contain is the outcome of our practice of mindfulness and concentration. The trainings can be a joy, not something we *have* to

do. It's like when we refrain from polluting the planet or we refrain from eating too much meat, we don't feel that we're suffering because of it. In fact we feel that we're very lucky to be able to consume and to live in such a way that makes a future for the planet a real possibility. If, with your practice of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you feel that your understanding, loving kindness, and compassion have increased, then you can share your practice with others and in that way we can make the world better.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings

1. Reverence for Life

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and 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 support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, nondiscrimination, and nonattachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.

2. True Happiness

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after wealth, fame, power, and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming.

3. True Love

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. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. 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. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy, and inclusiveness—which are the four basic elements of true love—for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

4. Loving Speech and Deep Listening

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

5. Nourishment and Healing

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriment, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products that contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing, and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society, and the Earth.

THE FIVE MINDFULNESS TRAININGS COME FROM OUR PRACTICE

When we study and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are aware that the five trainings are the fruit of our meditation. They are born from our mindfulness and concentration. They represent our insight. We need to practice them daily with a lot of openness and joy.

We know that killing has been going on in many places in the world due to fanaticism, narrow-mindedness, and wrong thinking. If we just say that killing is not good, that is not very helpful. But if we know how to help the person who has the desire to kill, and we can help him get the insight of interbeing, remove fanaticism and narrowness, then naturally that person will not have that same desire to harm anymore.

INTERBEING AND THE FIRST MINDFULNESS TRAINING

People are killing each other, and it's because they don't have the insight of interbeing. They don't see that the person they're killing is themselves. If we just advise people not to kill, that may not be enough. We have to inspire them. We have to help them to understand that killing someone is killing yourself. If you're inhabited by the insight of interbeing, you *know* that killing someone is killing yourself. The first mindfulness training, not to kill, always to protect life, should not be just a commandment, someone telling you that it's a good thing to do. But you have to understand *why* you should not kill. If you can touch the insight of interbeing, and you are free from double grasping—the illusion that subject and object are separate from each other—then you see very clearly that killing the other is to kill yourself.

A person who is free from all views, a person who is capable of seeing the interbeing nature of everything, will never have the desire to kill. The practice of the First Mindfulness Training nourishes our compassion. Compassion benefits us and makes us happy. Without compassion we cannot relate to the world and to other living beings; communication is impossible. That's why cultivating compassion is crucial. It will bring well-being to us and to the world. It is a training; we need to train ourselves to be able to help compassion grow day by day.

There were moments during the Vietnam War when we were very close to despair. The war was dragging on and we did not see any sign that it would end. Every day, every night, people died, and the country was being destroyed by bombs and chemicals. The young people came to me and asked, "Thay, is there any hope that the war will end soon?" At that moment, we did not see any hope. We were very close to despair, because the war went on and on for a long time. So when people ask you a question like that, you need to breathe in and out several times. After having breathed in and out several times, I told the young people, "The Buddha told us that things are impermanent. The war is also impermanent. It has to end some time."

But the problem is: Are we doing anything to help end the war? If we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the feeling of despair or anger, we can't help. We can even fuel the war and make it intensify or last longer. So the question is whether we can do something for peace, whether we can be something for peace.

When you produce a thought of compassion, of loving kindness, of understanding, that is peace. When you do something to help the victims of war, the children and adults, to suffer, less, and when you bring food for refugee children, these are the kinds of action that can help relieve a situation of suffering. So in a difficult situation, it's crucial for you to find a way to practice peace. Even if you can only do it in a very restricted manner, it will help you survive. It will help you nourish hope. So I think it's very important not to allow ourselves to be carried away by the

feeling of despair. We should learn how to bring peace into our bodies and our minds, so we're able to give rise to thoughts of compassion, words of compassion, and acts of compassion in our daily lives. That will inspire many people, and it will help them not to be drowned in the ocean of despair. Our thinking and acting show that the First Mindfulness Training is possible. If we have some peace within ourselves, in our way of thinking, speaking, and acting, we'll be able to influence people and inspire them to go in the same direction. Little by little, we can improve the situation.

GENEROSITY AND THE SECOND MINDFULNESS TRAINING

The second mindfulness training is about generosity, not stealing, not harming the environment, not being greedy, and the ability to be happy with a minimum of conditions. This is very important. With the second mindfulness training, we have to think of true happiness. When people practice wrong diligence it's because they have too much desire. And having too much desire, you don't have time to live your life, to love, and to experience healing and transformation. You burn yourself with the fire of desire. This should be a bell of mindfulness for business leaders who work too hard. There are many such people in our world. They may be powerful. They may be very successful in their enterprises. But they suffer; they don't really live their lives. They don't have the time to practice the four aspects of true diligence, because they are caught in wrong diligence and they are consumed by their work.

Don't think that if you're poor you're helpless. I know of many rich and powerful people who suffer very deeply from loneliness, and many of them have committed suicide. They suffer, and they deserve our compassion. But in order to have compassion to offer to others, we have to offer it to ourselves first. We cultivate compassion by looking deeply to understand the suffering inside us and around us. You don't have to be rich to help people. In fact if you're too wealthy you can't help people. People who are rich want to continue being rich, so they invest all their time and energy in maintaining their wealth; they don't even have time to take care of themselves and their families, so how can they help other people? Being wealthy is not a good condition for spiritual life. To live simply and to be happy is something that is possible. When you transform yourself into a bodhisattva, you have a lot of power—the power associated with fame and money, but the power that helps you be free and enables you to help and bring relief to many people.

LOVE AND THE THIRD MINDFULNESS TRAINING

If we really love others, we will try to protect ourselves and protect others from sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct usually comes from violence, fear, and anger. It is not about sex or love. If true love and understanding are there, anger and violence decrease, and we do not act out of fear.

We have many kinds of energies in us, including the energies of anger, violence, and craving. But compassion is also a very strong energy. If you allow the energy of compassion to take over, you can spend all your twenty-four hours a day doing things that will benefit people.

We all have sexual energy. The ways we eat, play, and spend our time are big factors in how we handle our sexual energy. The way we serve, the way we spend our leisure time, and the way we pass our time when we're with others has a lot to do with it. This is an art. We shouldn't suppress any kind of energy in us, including sexual energy. But we're trying to be intelligent in the way we handle this energy. There are good kinds of energy, and there are energies that can disturb us. Mindfulness, concentration, and the time we spend together with other practitioners can help us tremendously. We should smile to our own energies and know that we have the capacity to handle them. "My dear energy, I know you are there. I am here for you. I will learn how to help and to take care of you. Together we can be in peace. And you can help me also. You are energy, and it's possible to transform one energy into another, like the wind can be transformed into electricity." So sexual energy can be transformed into the energy of compassion and acts of compassion. We only have to learn how to transform it. With a community, a Sangha, it's possible to learn. The way we eat, drink, and manage our leisure time; the way we work together; and the way we serve, will determine our success.

TRANSFORMING SUFFERING AND ABUSE

If you have experienced sexual abuse, the best way for you to get rid of your pain is to become a bodhisattva. You make a vow to protect individuals, couples, families, and children from sexual abuse. You try your best to protect people. When the energy of a bodhisattva is in you, the suffering of being a victim of sexual abuse will begin to dissolve.

There was a U.S. soldier whose whole platoon was killed during the Vietnam War. He blamed the villagers, and in revenge he put explosives in sandwiches and left them at the entrance to the village for the villagers to find and eat. But it was the village children who discovered the sandwiches and ate them. Soon they were screaming, moaning, holding their stomachs, and writhing on the ground. The parents came running to help. But the soldier knew there was nothing that could save the children. For decades after the war he was unable to tolerate being in the same room with children. If a child entered the room he was in, he would have to run out. He came to Plum Village to attend a Veterans' Retreat. It took many days before he was willing to tell his story. I said to him, "Yes, you have killed five children. But there are many children who are suffering and dying in this very moment, because they lack nutrition or medicine. You could save countless numbers of children right now." He made a deep vow to work to save children, and from that moment his guilt complex and his suffering began to dissolve.

As a victim of sexual abuse, you don't have to bear the suffering of your abuse forever. If you make the strong vow to be a bodhisattva, you find ways to protect children and others by any means possible. The energy of your vow will dissolve the suffering in you, and you will be free. Vow and aspiration are very important. They give you a lot of energy that is healing and transformative.

THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION AND THE FOURTH MINDFULNESS TRAINING

During Plum Village retreats for Palestinians and Israelis, the two groups are initially suspicious of each other and have trouble looking at each other. Both groups have suffered a lot, and each group believes that their suffering was caused by the other. We give each side plenty of time

apart from each other to practice and a lot of support in using the practices of deep listening and loving speech.

When the two groups finally come together as one group to share their pain and suffering, one side uses loving speech, and one side uses compassionate listening, without interrupting. The outcome is wonderful. While listening, you recognize that those on the other side have suffered almost exactly the same way as you have. Before that, you may have thought that only your side suffered in that way. But now you see the other side has suffered exactly the same things— fear, anger, suspicion, and pain. So you begin to see them as human beings like you. When you begin to see them as human beings who also suffer, the intention to punish is no longer there, and you begin to look at them with the eyes of compassion. You may even be motivated by the desire to help relieve their suffering. That is the transformation you experience during the time you practice compassionate listening.

When you look at them now, you suffer much less, because you've been able to see the suffering in them and you see them as human beings like you. When they see your eyes, they feel that you are looking at them with love and not with suspicion, fear, or anger anymore. So transformation takes place on both sides. You will also have a chance to speak out, maybe next week. And you will tell them about your suffering, and they will listen. This practice of compassionate listening and loving speech is very important to liberate us from our fear, anger, and hatred. It has the power to restore communication.

In the beginning we may notice that others have many wrong perceptions. It's because they have suffered so much. That's why in their way of speaking there's still some bitterness and accusation. But because we're practicing mindfulness of compassion, we don't interrupt them, and we allow them to speak out so they suffer less. The outcome is that we recognize them as living beings who have a lot of suffering. We no longer have the intention to punish them. We have the intention to help. It's not our intention to make them suffer. On our side there is also fear and suspicion that makes us difficult for them. If we have a difficult relationship with our partner, or with our parents and family members, or even with someone from a group we think has hurt us and our family, it's always possible to restore communication and to reconcile by practicing compassionate listening and loving speech.

THE ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF THE FIFTH MINDFULNESS TRAINING

Suppose you practice the fifth training and you've stopped drinking alcohol or using drugs. But you're suffering because you still have the desire to drink alcohol or use drugs. You're following the guideline, the precept, but you don't really see the value of it. You don't see that it's come from insight and it has a spiritual dimension. You refrain, because you know that it's good for your health to do so, but you suffer. However, if you understand the deep meaning of the training and the benefits it will bring you, you will be happy to stop taking in toxins.

It's like being a vegetarian. When you experience how wonderful it makes you feel to not harm animals or the environment, you're happy to eat vegetarian food. You don't suffer because you're not eating meat. Instead, you feel lucky to be able to eat in such a way that you don't cause suffering to other living beings. There is joy; there is insight; and there is compassion and spirituality in your eating. Eating becomes a very spiritual thing.

There is no barrier dividing the ethical and the spiritual – they are one. This is the reason we focus on happiness and well-being as the key to a global ethic. We practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings because we see that they increase our well-being. The insight of the Four Noble Truths eases out suffering. And there is no distinction between our own suffering and the suffering of the world. We act ethically because we're motivated by the insight we have into interbeing and nondiscrimination. Our insight causes our thoughts, speech, and physical actions to manifest in a way that brings well being to the world and to ourselves. We act this way not because we think we have to or are told to, but as a result of our own insight. Our actions only bring about more well being to ourselves and to the world.