

Love Is Liberation
Five Contemplations for Daily Ethical Living
Valerie Brown and Marisela B. Gomez

Parallax Press
Berkeley, California

Contemplations on the Five Mindfulness Trainings

Preamble to the Contemplations on the Five Mindfulness Trainings:

Let us open to another way of understanding the Five Mindfulness Trainings, guiding principles for mindful and ethical living, which call us toward individual and collective awakening, compassion, and peace. We are interconnected. What happens in Dubai affects people in New York City. What happens to the Black body affects all bodies. *We are called forward.*

Global pandemics, climate crisis, social and economic oppression and upheaval, are gateways to suffering worldwide, disproportionately impacting Black, indigenous, and people of color, disabled people, people currently and historically subject to poverty, war, and genocide, LGBTQIA+ people, those facing health inequities and pre-mature death, people facing generational displacement, and people with historically socially marginalized identities, including those facing oppression because of their gender or their immigration status. They, we are not alone. Our lives and livelihoods are interconnected. *We are called forward.*

We cannot exist independent of, for example, low wage workers, health care workers, un-housed people, single mothers, undocumented people, the unemployed and underemployed and similarly situated people. If one such person lives on the knife edge of racial, ethnic, social, structural, and systemic oppression and discrimination we are all affected. *We are called forward.*

The practitioner dwells in the now, recognizing the dualistic nature of equanimity and instability, discrimination and non-discrimination, ill-being and well-being, practicing Right View and compassionate action, moving toward Right Insight. Aware of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life, we courageously turn to practice wholeheartedly. *We are called forward.*

Lighting a stick of incense, listening to the sutras, sitting upright and solid, palms joined, the practitioner looks within and in concentration the path and fruit of skillful action is revealed. *We are called forward.*

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Speak aloud these words with the sangha voice, a true river of understanding.

Contemplation of the First Mindfulness Training: Acknowledging Beauty as Reverence for Life

Aware of the suffering caused by oppression and generational harm based on racial, cultural, social, and ethnic inferiority and superiority, I acknowledge the beauty and violence inherent in life. I vow to resist being complicit in systems and structures that continue to perpetuate injustice, violence, hatred, and delusion instead of reverence of life for marginalized groups and others. I recognize that each person contributes to my individual and our collective awakening, and to the co-creation of a world that celebrates and affirms differences and similarities. All living beings can teach me something, when I remember to pause, breathe, listen deeply with a calm and open mind and heart, and ask myself: 'is there more' or 'what else is here with me'?' I honor and respect all life guided by Right View and Right Effort.

Contemplation of the Second Mindfulness Training: Belonging and Connecting as True Happiness

Aware of the suffering caused by ignorance and aversion of my own and other's racial, ethnic, cultural, and social history, its legacy and how this affects me, I am committed to learning and connecting to these histories. Aware that there is no genetic or biological difference among racial and ethnic groups, and that these identities were socially constructed by one group to establish dominance over others, I will turn toward all forms of othering with a transformative heart and mind. I know that this history has led to fragmentation inside and outside the body and mind and brought much suffering to all beings. I will notice when emotions of belonging and othering arise and I will ask myself 'why'? Whatever feelings, perceptions, or mental formations arise, I will embrace and engage with love in action. I am committed to practicing Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood so I can help relieve this legacy of racial and

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social suffering. I will practice looking deeply to see that true happiness is not possible without true connection leading to belonging and understanding.

Contemplation of the Third Mindfulness Training: Cherishment as True Love

Aware of the suffering caused by discrimination and oppression, I vow to transform these seeds in myself, my sangha, and society. I recognize the ways in which I have benefitted or not-benefitted explicitly or implicitly from systems and structures of injustice. I am aware of the legacy of violence, including unlawful police violence, perpetrated against people of various gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations, Black people, indigenous people, people of color, disabled people, and others who are marginalized. I am committed to looking tenderly at my suffering, knowing that I am not separate from others and that the seeds of suffering contain the seeds of joy. I am aware that narrow interpretations of intimate relationships constrain how we cherish each other in our expression of love, leaving many isolated and alienated. I am not afraid of bold love that fosters compassion, justice, and peace and tender love that seeks understanding. I cherish this breath, body, mind, and moment as an act of healing for myself and for others. I cherish the liberation of all beings guided by the wisdom and the solidity of the sangha as my path of true love.

Contemplation of the Fourth Mindfulness Training: Vulnerability as Deep Listening and Loving Speech

Aware that vulnerability is the essence of our true nature, our humanness, I vow to risk listening for understanding rather than disagreement. I am committed to generous and courageous listening that bridges differences and supports others who may be different from me. When I am not able to understand others, I vow to come back to my breath and my body, and to offer myself gentle patience. I am aware that loving communication rests on honesty, compassion, and openness that align with my highest aspiration to alleviate suffering. When I've hurt others through my unskillful listening or speech, I vow to practice making a good apology that

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acknowledges what I have done, the harm caused, accepts responsibility and accountability for my behavior, and offers sincere regret, knowing that this supports the other person and me. Through my practices of vulnerability, forgiveness, and deeply listening, I know that my speech will be guided by love and understanding. Practicing in this way supports Right Speech and Right Action and guides me to Right Insight.

Contemplation of the Fifth Mindfulness Training: Welcoming as True Nourishing and Healing

Aware of the suffering caused by the consumption of an inadequate history of racial and ethnic forms of social segregation, I am committed to healing myself and the world. I am aware that my thoughts, perceptions, feelings, words, and actions may have been influenced by this history. I vow to understand how I have been influenced by embracing and denying this racial, social, and ethnic history of inferiority, superiority, and equality. I will cultivate joy to nourish me in this aspiration. I will practice mindfulness of the Four Kinds of Nutriment to become aware of how edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness are all influenced by this history. Practicing with Right Energy and Right Resolve, my conscious consumption will be guided by Right Action that welcomes differences without discrimination. This Right Insight offers true welcoming on this path to nourish and heal myself, my ancestors, my descendants, my sangha, and society.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings keeps us centered in life's storms and joys and reminds us that life is a precious gift. The Trainings are a path to liberation and transformation. Practicing these Trainings supports us toward racial and ethnic reconciliation and social change and heals deep suffering. The Five Mindfulness Trainings helps us cross this shore of suffering and brings us to the side of true awakening and love. The *Contemplations* on the Five Mindfulness Trainings are a commentary to these foundational teachings and are meant to offer another way of understanding Thay's teachings to live an ethical life.

We are called forward.