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MINDFULNESS TO SAVE HAPPINESS

Thich Nhat Hanh and Engaged Buddhism

The meditation flash mob was organized by Wake Up New York, a group of young adults that get together to practice mindfulness and meditation, inspired by the teachings on Engaged Buddhism of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (Wake Up New York). Jenny Hamp said there were 400 or 500 people that evening, sitting in New York's Union Square, summoned by a Tweet that read, "Wk up New York is hosting a meditation flash mob tonight @6:30pm in Union Square. Monastics will be there to join us!" They would meditate for thirty minutes and then "walk mindfully together," as their invitation described, to an exhibition of Thich Nhat Hanh's calligraphy works. Naturally, as one of the event's organizers, Jenny started to stress as the evening progressed. She anxiously looked at the number of people who had actually shown up; they were supposed to go to a yoga studio for the

next activity, but there was no way they would all fit. She asked one of her brothers, "What do we do now?" He said, "It's OK... If people don't like it being so crowded, they will leave." Jenny couldn't believe how simple and elegant that solution was. She decided that for the rest of the night, she wouldn't worry. As she laid on the floor, enjoying not being in charge, she listened to a guided meditation: "I am a still mountain lake, reflecting all, accepting all exactly as it is." At the end of the night, when one of her brothers asked her, "So what next, Jenny?" she confidently said that she had no idea (Hamp).

Some New Yorkers rushing to someplace "important" may have passed the gathering and wondered, "What are these hippies protesting about?" They may have been baffled to know that those sitting were protesting absolutely nothing. Elina Pen, one of the members of Wake

Up London describes that they simply came “together to celebrate [their] very real capacity to generate peace, already, in the here and now” (Wake Up Community). The development of Wake Up communities was one of the many efforts made by Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh to foster wisdom, compassion, and nonviolence.

One may ask, “How can we generate compassion and nonviolence by sitting down and meditating, without actually taking any action?” In a world where there is so much work to be done, how can sitting down contribute to anything? “Taking action,” however, can have several different meanings. To some, taking action means participating in protests. To others, it means generating policies to end war. To many others, taking action simply means working to make a living and take care of their families. Many people take action in their daily lives to work towards fulfilling their dreams. However, as Thich Nhat Hanh points out, our actions are often stained by impatience and anger. We have thoughts like, “I can’t believe I have to do this,” “I hate doing this,” “I can’t wait for the day to end,” “They don’t understand me,” “When will I finally be happy?” We carry anxieties, past sorrows and anger that become a kind of baggage that makes life heavy, thus triggering these kinds of thoughts and their linked emotions (Nhat Hanh, *How to Sit* 23). Thich Nhat Hanh argues that whenever we lose control of ourselves and let our impatience or anger interfere in our work or actions, then our work is

no longer of any value (Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* 32). Thankfully, according to Thich Nhat Hanh, there is a cure from actions plagued by impatience and anger; hope to become free from our past. He calls it mindfulness, a practice that allows people to gain control of themselves. Mindfulness is defined as, “the energy of being aware and awake to the present moment. It is the continuous practice of touching life deeply in every moment of daily life” (Deer Park Monastery, “How to Be Mindful”). As Thich Nhat Hanh puts it in his book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, “Mindfulness enables us to live” (32).

Through the meditation flash mobs, members of Wake Up are practicing mindfulness through what Thich Nhat Hanh called sitting meditation. Sitting meditation requires one to “sit in such a way that you feel light, relaxed, happy, and free” (Nhat Hanh, *How to Sit* 23). As Thich Nhat Hanh says, sitting meditation is a way to practice letting go of the things we carry needlessly, such as our anxieties and past sorrows. He describes them as nothing but obstacles to our happiness. Furthermore, sitting meditation is an opportunity to dismantle these obstacles, which often reveal themselves in the form of thoughts that constantly, and often uncontrollably, disrupt our peace of mind in our daily lives.

Breath plays a big role in being able to become free from these thoughts that generate unnecessary tensions. It is one of the key components of sitting meditation and mindfulness. As Thich Nhat Hanh points out, “Everyone is breathing, but not everyone is aware

that they’re breathing” (Nhat Hanh, *How to Sit* 23). The purpose of sitting meditation and any sort of mindfulness practice is for one to pay conscious attention to the body, including its breathing. By taking time to pay attention to the kind of breaths that one is taking—long or short, deep or shallow—one is training to “stop mental dispersion and to build up concentration power” (Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* 32). This concentration power is the one that will ultimately allow us to be able to carry out any given task without being distracted by any unnecessary thoughts or having any unnecessary tension; to be able to be completely at ease at all times.

You may be thinking, “I will be at ease after I make enough money. I’m too busy to be sitting and meditating. People who meditate have nothing to do.” However, Thich Nhat Hanh is not suggesting that everyone should resign their daily obligations to become a monk and practice sitting meditation for hours a day. In fact, one of the things he is accredited for is divulging the practice of Engaged Buddhism, which allows the principles of Buddhism to be practiced in people’s everyday lives. Thich Nhat Hanh describes Engaged Buddhism as, “the kind of wisdom that responds to anything that happens in the here and the now” (Nhat Hanh, “Dharma Talk”). This includes everything that happens in the realms of education, economics, politics, work, and family relationships. It includes any situation which we may be facing at any given moment, whether it be eating ice cream, doing an important presentation for work, or being

in the middle of a painful divorce. Engaged Buddhism includes the practice of mindfulness. It requires being aware of what is happening in our body, our emotions, and our environment in every one of these situations (Nhat Hanh, “DharmaTalk”). However, it is easier said than done, especially in today’s society.

Society has taught us that happiness can be found through consumption. All the marketing we see on television and social media shows people smiling and fitting in after they have bought an iPhone, a Levis jacket, a Chanel perfume, or a Cartier ring. As a result, we are in a constant state of wanting more than what we have. We think, “Once I have that iPhone, I will be happy.” Our necessity to consume has come to dominate our instincts even more than we may think. In 2008, a New York Wal-Mart employee got trampled to death during Black Friday after a crowd of 2,000 forced themselves into the store five minutes before it opened (McFadden and Macropoulos). One of the shoppers who witnessed the event, Kimberley Cribbs said, “When they were saying they had to leave, that an employee got killed, people were yelling, ‘I’ve been in line since yesterday morning’ [and] they kept shopping” (qtd. in McFadden and Macropoulos). If online shopping had not taken over, incidents like this would likely continue to occur. However, we probably know from experience that the satisfaction we get from consumption is only temporary, even for those who rashly stepped over a human body. Within days (and sometimes minutes) of get-

ting an iPhone, we realize that we want an iPad. When we get the iPad, we realize we want a computer. Our life becomes a never-ending cycle of trying to fulfill our desires through consumption.

In his article "The Subterranean World of Play [1971]," Jock Young quotes Herbert Marcuse, "The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. [...] Social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced" (153). Since we become identified and see our value reflected in what we consume, our need for consumption becomes a source of suffering. We are convinced that in order to be the best version of ourselves, we need to consume; however, in order to consume, we need money, and in order to get money, we need to work often unpleasant and disappointing jobs. We become accustomed to this suffering and even stop paying attention to it because we are taught to assimilate the concept of working hard to achieve success at a very early age. As Young says, "Children from the age of about five are socialized by school and family to embrace the work ethic" (Young 153). We are told that no matter how much we fail at our jobs, we need to keep going because hard work leads to success, which will allow us to have money to spend on leisure. But as years go by it often turns into the ironic situation where we seek free time from the work that promises our happiness and satisfaction. Even those who have attained society's depiction of success

seek free time; free time from stress, anxieties and worries of what the future may bring. We suffer from our internal division; on one hand we want to relax, but on the other we feel like relaxing is a waste of time and will hinder our possibilities of success, after which we would have plenty of time to relax. What if it were possible to live tension-free at all times, even as we work to fulfill our desires? In a talk Thich Nhat Hanh gave in 2008, he said, "As a politician, a businessman, even an artist, we want to do more and more and more. [...] We don't give our body a chance to relax and to heal. If we know how to live like a Buddha, dwelling in the present moment, allowing the refreshing and healing elements to penetrate, then we will not become victims of stress, tension, and many kinds of disease. You can say that one of the roots of ill-being is our incapacity to live our life deeply in each moment" (Nhat Hanh, "Dharma Talk").

One may ask, "What does it mean to live life deeply in each moment?" As far as we are concerned, we are living in the present moment; our body is waking up, going to school, going to work, and then going to sleep. However, in the practice of Engaged Buddhism, living in the present moment means that "when walking, the practitioner must be conscious that he is walking. When sitting, the practitioner must be conscious that he is sitting. When lying down, the practitioner must be conscious that he is lying down... No matter what position one's body is in, the practitioner must be conscious of that position. Practicing thus, the practitioner lives in

direct and constant mindfulness of the body..." (Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* 25). Often, we go through our days thinking about what just happened or worrying about what is going to happen next. When we are on our way back home, we think about everything we will do before we go to sleep. When we are taking a shower, we think about everything we could have done differently throughout the day. Our mind is disconnected from our body; it is dwelling in the past or future as the lonely body experiences the present. This is why we don't realize that our keys were in our hand the whole time or why we don't remember having eaten the last piece of cake that was on our plate. Thich Nhat Hanh described an experience with his friend eating a tangerine as he spoke about his plans for the future. He said, "He popped a section of tangerine in his mouth and, before he had begun chewing it, had another slice ready to pop into his mouth again. He was hardly aware he was eating a tangerine. It was as if he hadn't been eating the tangerine at all. If he had been eating anything, he was 'eating' his future plans" (Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* 24). Even while eating, our minds often wander off to be preoccupied with future tasks, leaving us unconscious of the present moment. We make a face as a sharp piece of tortilla chip makes its way down our throat. How many times have dentists attended a patient whose tooth got chipped because they didn't pay attention to what they were chewing? We are used to eating in an automatic

manner. However, students of Engaged Buddhism practice taking their time as they eat, "chewing each mouthful at least 30 times, until the food becomes liquified. This aids the digestive process. [...] The food becomes real with [their] mindfulness and [they] are fully aware of its nourishment" (Deer Park Monastery, "How to Be Mindful"). But what if we have an appointment, and we need to eat in 15 minutes? We can't take our time! We have things to do and places to be. Our life becomes about getting things done to be able to do the next productive thing on our list.

One night, Thich Nhat Hanh's friend asked if he could do the dishes. Thich Nhat Hanh said, "Go ahead, but if you wash the dishes, you must know the way to wash them" (Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* 23). Washing the dishes is a straightforward task: use the soapy sponge to scrub the food off of the plate. Once you are done, you can enjoy the rest of your day. Where can one go wrong? According to Thich Nhat Hanh, "There are two ways to wash the dishes. The first is to wash the dishes in order to have clean dishes and the second is to wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes" (Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* 23). If we are, "hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not 'washing the dishes to wash the dishes.' What's more, we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. [...] We are sucked away into the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life" (Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of*

Mindfulness 23). Washing the dishes is one of those never-ending chores; usually, the only reason we do it is because we need clean dishes. However, Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that as we wash the dishes, we must be conscious of what we are doing, and not just thinking about how nice it will be to finally have clean dishes and a clear sink. However, perhaps the example of washing the dishes is slightly dated; many people use the dishwasher nowadays. But that is precisely the point! The reason why dishwashers have become so popular is because we don't want to "waste our time" doing chores. We believed Sears when they marketed their Lady Kenmore dishwasher as "The Freedom Maker, because it gives you freedom to do more important things" (Sears). But today, it seems we define more important things as more *productive* things.

Even our emotions have been tabled for the sake of productivity. We think, "I can't cry... If I cry I'll have to redo my makeup," or, "If I cry, my roommates will want to talk about it, and I don't have time for that." However, it is incredibly important for us to feel our emotions. As counselor Malinda King points out in her article, "Benefits of Experiencing Your Emotions," "Resisting our emotional experience actually increases our suffering. [...] Emotion is energy and without having an outlet, it collects in the body. So the pain which we are resisting is actually increasing our suffering by having the emotional energy being persistently present." However, whenever we feel an emotion like sadness, anxiety or hopelessness,

we usually try to suppress it. We don't want to keep reliving the embarrassing experience that happened at work, so we open Instagram and look at funny videos of kittens instead. Or we want to keep our mind off of the bad grade we got on the test, so we watch Netflix. We aren't taught how to recognize and deal with our emotions by our parents and teachers, therefore we resolve to escape them. Today, it is particularly easy to escape our emotions because there are an abundance of mediums that facilitate it. However, observing and understanding our own emotions is an essential component to finding joy and cultivating compassion, both for ourselves and for others. In his book *No Mud, No Lotus: The Art of Transforming Suffering*, Thich Nhat Hanh explains, "When we learn to acknowledge, embrace, and understand our suffering, we suffer much less. Not only that, but we're also able to go further and transform our suffering into understanding, compassion, and joy for ourselves and others" (30). We are taught that happiness and suffering are opposites; however, Thich Nhat Hanh explains that one can't exist without the other. Despite what we may believe, happiness can't be found by running away from suffering. In fact, if we try to avoid all suffering, we end up constantly worrying and "sacrificing all [our] spontaneity, freedom, and joy. This isn't correct. If [we] can recognize and accept [our] pain without running away from it, [we] will discover that although pain is there, joy can also be there at the same time" (Nhat Hanh, *No Mud, No Lotus* 30).

Furthermore, Engaged Buddhism encourages us, not only to constantly be aware of what our body is doing physically, but also be "conscious of each breath, each movement, every thought and feeling, everything which has any relation to ourselves;" this is what it means to practice true mindfulness (Nhat Hanh, *No Mud, No Lotus* 23).

As a person embarks on their training of mindfulness—observing their body, breath, thoughts and emotions—they begin to understand their emotions and what triggers them; they become more alert. Whenever they feel an emotion coming, they are able to "prepare [themselves] in order to receive it and to handle it. [They] drop anything [they] are doing. [They] sit down or lie down, and wait for it while practicing mindful breathing" (Nhat Hanh, "How to Deal With Strong Emotions"). As they breathe, "the energy of mindfulness, recognizing the [emotion], embraces [it] like a mother, a loving mother holding her baby very gently. And [they] get a relief after a few minutes of practice... So, a good practitioner knows how to make use of... the suffering in her, in order to create something more positive, like understanding, compassion, joy. And it's an art. The art of suffering, the art of happiness" (Nhat Hanh, "How to Deal With Strong Emotions"). It's true that sometimes we don't have time to drop everything and lie down whenever we feel an emotion. We won't drop down to the floor when our boss tells us we are fired from our job. However, little by little, we can practice feeling our emotions wherever and when-

ever we are comfortable. We can start by observing that the emotion is there, feeling where it lives in the body, and trying to relax whatever tension it generates. As we discover that we are able to rise from emotion and find relief, we stop fearing it; we understand that we can transform suffering into happiness. Instead of thinking about ways in which we will protect ourselves from suffering every day, we are able to let go of our worries and be truly present in every moment.

It may be difficult to understand how this practice of transforming suffering through mindfulness can be applied in the context of war, where there is an unfathomable amount of suffering. Thich Nhat Hanh himself was immersed in an environment of suffering and violence as a young adult. During his time at a Zen monastery in Vietnam, there was a catastrophic famine, so he would see the dead bodies of starved people on the street every morning (Plum Village, "Extended Biography"). Additionally, when the French fought to reclaim Vietnam during the First Indochina War (from 1946 to 1954), many of his close friends (unarmed and nonviolent monks) were killed. During the Vietnam War, he founded the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS), which trained young people practical skills and spiritual resilience, and sent them to bombed villages and underdeveloped communities (Plum Village, "Extended Biography"). However, it was very difficult for them to conduct their social work because danger could come from anywhere, at any given moment. Thich Nhat Hanh's friends were arrested, social workers

were threatened, and weapons were always close to hand (Plum Village, "Extended Biography"). In a Q&A session from 2013, Thich Nhat Hanh said that in these circumstances, "if you don't have a spiritual practice, you can't survive. [...] In a situation of utmost suffering like that, we [have to] practice in such a way that we preserve our hope and our compassion" (qtd. in Plum Village, "Extended Biography").

War is the context from which Engaged Buddhism was born. Thich Nhat Hanh said that in this context, "You want to maintain your practice while responding to the suffering. You seek the way to do walking meditation right there, in the place where people are still running under the bombs. And you learn how to practice mindful breathing while helping care for a child who has been wounded by bullets or bombs" (qtd. in Plum Village, "Extended Biography"). Practicing mindfulness and cultivating joy is possible during war. In fact, it is *necessary* in order to find happiness and transform suffering into joy. It is necessary if we want to live in a world of nonviolence.

Up until his recent death on January 22nd, 2022, Thich Nhat Hanh actively engaged in efforts to foster nonviolence. In a press conference in 1966, during a trip he made to the United States to give lectures about the war in Vietnam, he shared a five-point peace proposal to end the conflict. Later that day, he was denounced as a national traitor on Saigon radio, in newspapers, and by the government of South Vietnam (Plum Village, "Extended Biography"). He wasn't able to return to Viet-

nam for 39 years. He continued to call for peace by holding press conferences all over Europe, speaking at universities and churches. In January 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. nominated Thich Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize, saying that "his ideas of peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity" (King).

In his book, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, Thich Nhat Hanh says, "We often think that if powerful countries would reduce their weapon arsenals, we could have peace. But if we look deeply into the weapons, we see our own minds—our own prejudices, fears and ignorance. Even if we transport all the bombs to the moon, the roots of war and the roots of bombs are still there, in our hearts and minds, and sooner or later we will make new bombs. To work for peace is to uproot war from ourselves and from the hearts of men and women" (Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* 12). In *Engaged Buddhism*, students work towards uprooting war from themselves by practicing mindfulness: observing themselves, recognizing their fears, their prejudices, their wrong perceptions, and emerging from them. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Fear, misunderstanding, and wrong perceptions are the foundation of violent acts. In order to remove terrorism, you have to remove wrong perceptions." (Nhat Hanh, "DharmaTalk"). For example, "terrorists think that the other side is trying to destroy them as a religion, as a way of life, as a nation. If we believe that the other person is trying to kill us, then we will seek ways to kill the other person first

in order not to be killed" (Nhat Hanh, "DharmaTalk"). Through the practice of mindfulness, however, Thich Nhat Hanh realized that "only loving speech and compassionate listening can help people correct wrong perceptions. But our leaders are not trained in that discipline and they rely on the armed forces to remove terrorism" (Nhat Hanh, "DharmaTalk"). Furthermore, the practice of mindfulness gives people the opportunity to liberate themselves from their own wrong perceptions—their fear, anger and despair—and become leaders of peace and compassion. After all, "you cannot be an instrument of peace if you have no peace within yourself" (Nhat Hanh, "Peace Between Palestinians and Israelis").

In the 1970's, Thich Nhat Hanh went to Paris, where he would meet up with some of his colleagues at a farmhouse near Foret d'Othe, a forest southeast of Paris, during the weekends. They called their community "Sweet Potatoes." It was during this time that Thich Nhat Hanh was reminded of the "healing potential of exploring the art of mindful living, as a community, close to nature" (Plum Village, "Extended Biography"). This awakening led him to establish a mindfulness practice center in the Dordogne Valley of southwest France: Plum Village. Established in 1982, Plum Village started off as barns that were used as meditation halls and sheep-sheds that were used as dorms. Because there was growing demand to attend retreats with Thich Nhat Hanh, the community opened two other practice centers in the

United States. One of these new practice centers was Deer Park Monastery, which was established in 2000 and located in Escondido, California. Soon, Plum Village grew to become an organization of monasteries with eleven practice centers located in France, Hong Kong, Thailand, Australia, Germany, and the United States. Plum Village became one of the largest Buddhist retreat centers in the West. It receives 4,000 retreatants every summer, and more than 10,000 visitors each year (Plum Village, "Extended Biography"). In addition to Deer Park Monastery, the United States is home to Blue Cliff Monastery in New York and Magnolia Grove Monastery in Mississippi.

People who wish to immerse themselves in the teachings of Engaged Buddhism can attend any of the practice centers located around the world. In the United States, Deer Park Monastery offers one or two week long Seasonal Retreats, as well 3-5 day Special Retreats. For people who are interested in practicing in the monastery for longer, Deer Park Monastery offers a 90-day Rains Retreat and Blue Cliff Monastery offers a three-month Winter Retreat. All retreats are open to both new and seasoned practitioners. Before registering, people are required to agree to the Participation Policy, which states that attendees are expected to participate in the daily retreat schedule, stay within the monastery grounds for the duration of the retreat, and understand that (except in cases of emergency) they will not have access to phones, computers, internet or Wi-Fi; "outside work, school,

and family obligations must be set aside during [their] stay” (Deer Park Monastery, “Registration Page”). Another important component of the policy is the requirement to agree to practice according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings are based on the Five Precepts of Buddhism, which urge practitioners to avoid 1) killing, 2) stealing, 3) sexual misconduct, 4) lying, and 5) intoxication (Sivaraksa 64). Thich Nhat Hanh updated these precepts so that they weren’t “hard and fast rules,” but rather tools to cultivate the practice of mindfulness in every area of life, thus contributing to a healthy and compassionate world (Plum Village, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”). The first of the five trainings is *Reverence For Life*. One commits to protect people, animals, plants, and minerals; not to kill or support the act of killing in the world. Thich Nhat Hanh was certain that violence was a result of people’s attachments to their views (or perspectives). He said, “We must use the sword of understanding to put an end to all views we have about each other; all notions and labels...Views can lead us to fanaticism. They can destroy human beings. They can destroy love” (Plum Village, “Extended Biography”). When people are affixed to their perspectives, there is no way for them to truly understand the other; the other becomes an enemy because they are convinced the other is wrong. Thich Nhat Hanh blames people’s anger, fear, greed, and intolerance (and their resulting harmful actions) on this “discriminative thinking” (Plum Village, “The Five

Mindfulness Trainings”). Furthermore, the first mindfulness training emphasizes that one must be determined to cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views (or perspectives) in order to “transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in [ourselves] and in the world” (Plum Village, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”).

The second mindfulness training is *True Happiness*. One commits to be generous in their thoughts, actions, and speech. One must be determined to share their time, energy, and mental resources with those in need; others’ happiness and suffering is no different from one’s own. The training also calls for people’s awareness that happiness does not depend on external conditions, but rather on an individual’s mental attitude; it is always a possibility to be happy in the present moment. In summary, it states that people must help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth, which includes not contributing to climate change (Plum Village, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”).

The third mindfulness training is *True Love*. It states that one must cultivate the four basic elements of true love: “loving kindness, compassion, joy, and inclusiveness” (Plum Village, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”). Additionally, one must be determined not to engage in sexual relations motivated by craving; sexual desire is not love. Furthermore, sexual relations must be preceded by mutual consent, true love, and a deep, long-term commitment. One must also commit to protect children from sexual abuse and prevent cou-

ples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct (Plum Village, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”).

The fourth mindfulness training is *Loving Speech and Deep Listening*. As indicated by its title, this training encourages the cultivation of loving speech and compassionate listening; they have the power to relieve suffering and promote reconciliation amongst ourselves and others. Furthermore, the training urges practitioners to commit to using speech that inspires confidence, joy, and hope (Plum Village, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”). In order to adhere to the training, one must not speak when anger is manifesting in them; they must breathe and understand that their anger comes from false perceptions and a lack of understanding of the suffering in themselves and in the other person (Plum Village, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”). One must also refrain from spreading news they do not know to be certain and “utter words that can cause division or discord” (Plum Village, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”).

The fifth mindfulness training is *Nourishment and Healing*. It states that one must be committed to cultivating physical and mental health for themselves, their family, and the society by “practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming” (Plum Village, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”). Practitioners must be determined not to, “gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations” (Plum Vil-

lage, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings”). Furthermore, instead of trying to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing themselves in consumption, it requires people to consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in their body and consciousness. The training also encourages people to practice coming back to the present moment; not letting regrets, sorrows, fears, or cravings prevent them from cherishing the present moment.

The purpose of the Five Mindfulness Trainings are to direct practitioners towards becoming more calm and concentrated. However, they require dedicated practice and discipline and take years to master. Therefore, practice centers, retreats, and sanghas play an essential role in one’s progress within Thich Nhat Hanh’s path.

If any of the retreats in the Plum Village practice centers aren’t accessible to you, you can join a local group of Buddhist practitioners or a “Sangha.” There are over 1,000 Sanghas who meet up regularly (both in-person and online) to practice mindfulness. In fact, there is a website called Plumline where anyone who is interested can find an online Sangha. Thich Nhat Hanh used to encourage practitioners to join a Sangha. He emphasized that, “Our practice should be supported by the people around us, and we can learn how to support them in return. [...] We have to help each other in our practice. The practice of meditation is not an individual matter. We have to do it together” (Nhat Hanh, “The Next Buddha May Be a Sangha”). Wake Up New York is one of the many

Sanghas you can join. You can attend their meet-ups on Friday evenings from 7:30pm to 9:30pm EST. Although there isn't a meditation flash mob planned for the near future, you could be like Jenny Hamp and plan one yourself!

Even without a Sangha, you could practice Engaged Buddhism and mindfulness with the guidance of Thich Nhat Hanh's books. Additionally, Plum Village has an app that "has been lovingly created with many volunteered hours of work to allow us all to take Plum Village with us wherever we go" (Plum Village, "Mindfulness Apps"). The app is free for everyone and contains several talks given by Plum Village monastics, as well as a bell of mindfulness that can be programmed to ring throughout the day as a reminder to practice coming back to the present moment. In a society that promises happiness through productivity and consumption, it can be difficult to practice mindfulness. However, through Engaged Buddhism, our work and our practice of mindfulness can coexist. By constantly being aware of our body, our breathing, our thoughts and our feelings, we can benefit from the luxury of living in the present moment; we can give value to our actions. In a world where suffering is unavoidable, both for people in the middle of war as well as for successful businessmen, the practice of mindfulness represents hope for the attainment of happiness. Engaged Buddhism offers tools to transform suffering into joy under any circumstance. As Thich Nhat

Hanh said, "Suffering plays a very important role in creating happiness. It's like the role of the mud in creating the lotus flower. Without mud, you cannot create lotus flowers" (Nhat Hanh, "How to Deal With Strong Emotions"). Sometimes we receive heartbreaking news, but, unless we want to fall into a deep depression with no hope for escape, we have no choice but to transform this suffering. Furthermore, mindfulness gives us the tools to transform life's inevitable suffering into building blocks of joy and happiness. Just like Jenny Hamp transformed her anxiety about the amount of people who actually showed up to the meditation flash mob event into a joyful acceptance of not being in charge, we can transform our emotions by practicing mindfulness.

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by Thich
Nhat Hanh