

## Summary of the Talk on the 12th Tenet of the 40 Tenets of Plum Village: Precepts are Mindfulness

<https://youtu.be/f-pPrFTaaQw?si=ILzr2P8Y2wOGlfwi>

This is a weekly class from Deer Park Monastery on the topic "The 40 Tenets of Plum Village" and it is based on a book called "Plum Village Looks at Vulture's Peak" written by Thich Nhat Hanh. The book describes the essential characteristics of Plum Village practice and teachings. For an English translation of the tenets themselves, follow this link → <http://pvapp.to/40-tenets> In this class Brother Phap Luu discusses the 12th tenet: "Precepts are mindfulness. (Śīla is smṛti). Precepts and mindful manners are concrete expressions of mindfulness."

### 1. Introduction and Context

The discussion took place on June 30, 2021, marking the 12th tenet of the 40 Tenets of Plum Village. It follows the Order of Interbeing retreat, emphasizing mindfulness practice within the monastic and lay communities. The three core trainings of Plum Village practice are mindfulness (smṛti), concentration (samādhi), and insight (prajñā), which arise simultaneously and are symbolized by a triangle analogy. These three trainings embody the essence of the Noble Eightfold Path and are interdependent rather than sequential.

### 2. Mindfulness Trainings and Precepts (sīla, pronounced Shiela here)

Mindfulness is integral to precepts (virtue/morality), not a mere set of *restrictions*. Precepts are practiced with awareness of suffering caused by harmful actions, fostering restraint out of compassion rather than obligation.

Review of last class: The three trainings correspond to:

17:48 We talk about **Sīla**, (Buddhist morality)- including *right action, right livelihood, right speech*

18:05 **Samādhi** (concentration) – including right mindfulness, right concentration

Prajñā (insight), right view, right thought...

In trainings we have *the Eightfold path*.

highlighting

*Mindfulness* (Smṛti in Buddhism, denotes mindfulness or awareness,) and is inseparable from *ethical conduct*, Virtue Precepts (Shiela/ sīla). Practicing the precepts mindfully supports virtuous living and prevents mental "leakage" or craving-driven distractions.

### 3. The Concept of "Leaking" and Non-Leaking Trainings

"Leaking" refers to craving and attachment disturbing mental clarity, exemplified by craving a piece of cake throughout the day. The taintless or non-leaking trainings cultivate mindfulness, concentration, and insight to maintain constant presence without distraction. Mindful breathing exemplifies this integration: being aware of the breath includes mindfulness, concentration on the breath, and insight into its impermanence and nourishing nature. Non-leaking practice brings immediate happiness and prevents mental fragmentation caused by craving or desire. 13:18 The more mindfulness we have the less leaking, we get the "happiness right away." There is mindfulness on the breath, concentration on the breath and insight as I feel my body is alive and nourished and I see the impermanence of my breath.

### 4. Mindfulness Trainings as Appropriate Attention (Yoniso Manaskara)

17:14 With practice we let go of leaks in our everyday life. Mindfulness trainings cultivate appropriate attention, focusing on wholesome objects that nourish lasting happiness, such as kind words and generosity.

19:07 Tenet 12: "Mindfulness trainings are Mindfulness"

Mindfulness Trainings and Fine Manners are concrete expressions of mindfulness. They help us cultivate *Appropriate Attention*. 21:39. We pay attention to things that nourish lasting happiness; giving, being generous, being kind. Nourishing food for eyes, ears, nose. (Sense impressions)

Practical examples include mindful food choices that avoid harm and suffering, reflecting non-violence toward living beings and respect for the environment. This practice continuously evolves, adapting to new social, ecological, and ethical insights, reflecting non-static principles.

Vegan or vegetarian food as object of contemplation: what kind of harmful impact has been done in the production of our food? Reducing transport, packaging is also a mindfulness training (26:23).

### 5. Evolution of Mindfulness Trainings and the Buddha's Spirit

The Buddha's teachings, including precepts, were adapted over time based on the community's needs and emerging situations. Plum Village continues this tradition by evolving mindfulness trainings to address contemporary challenges such as social justice, climate crisis, and economic inequality. The adaptability reflects a living tradition responsive to real suffering and community insights.

26:18 "Mindfulness is a creative energy to change behavior." The trainings grow with the community. The 14 trainings were short in the 1960s- as the order of Interbeing grew Thay listened and brought our collective insights to evolve the mindfulness trainings.

The precepts are not static. We update our precepts as we learn about racism, climate inequity, etc.

30:09 (bell)

## **6. Personal Reflection on Mindfulness Trainings and Happiness**

When Brother Phap Luu started meditation he wanted to learn every technique to become awakened as soon as possible! Early meditation focused on techniques for concentration and awakening, sometimes neglecting precepts.

32:12 After about ten years he felt the 5 and 14 trainings and precepts of Avikshu he has a solid foundation for happiness as he wasn't saying and doing as many hurtful things as before- to himself and others. Over time, practicing mindfulness trainings became foundational for genuine happiness and reducing mental suffering. Mindfulness trainings help to notice harmful speech and actions early, preventing deepening of negative consequences. Mindfulness, concentration, and insight integrate to sustain joyful and ethical living.

33:59 Thay's calligraphy: Joy and Happiness born from Mindfulness.

## **7. The Role of Humility and Community in Practicing Precepts**

Practicing precepts fosters humility and openness, countering pride and arrogance in spiritual practice. The precepts are not just an outer form. The early community just watched the Buddha as the community grew, precepts were born. (36:00)

36:06 An anecdote about a monk who had become a vikshu, was sitting in meditation, and he did not recognize the Buddha when he came to his cave. The Buddha asked him some questions and the monk started to teach the Buddha – and became embarrassed when he realized! 37:54. Buddha says it shows progress to be able to recognize your mistakes. It is a story that illustrates how pride can obstruct insight. "Some of our monks can be like that! I was like that too!" 39:39 Thay embraced a monk who said he didn't need to come to the Dharma talks anymore. In Chinese it is called "The stink of zen!" (40:14) By learning precepts we are never too sure of ourselves.

## **8. Mindfulness in Daily Life and Relationships: On disturbing the ants**

The community's support and feedback help practitioners remain open to correction and deeper learning. Being open to input prevents isolation and fosters ongoing growth in practice.

(41:00) When we are novices we loved to correct each other. Novice brothers can be very annoying to each other! Even after 17 years I am learning. Mindfulness and precepts together is a mirror to our own practice.

(45:33) We have built a fortress around our mind. Input or feedback can be hurtful but there may be a jewel of insight inside it.

(47:11) We went up on "bulldog" mountain and were climbing like kids. We looked down and enjoyed the view. I felt something painful and it was a big ant. It was a bell of mindfulness – we had disturbed the ants. They gave us a dharma talk: please be more mindful and we are taking care of baby ants!

There is dharma in everything- the metaphor of disturbing an ant nest during a mountain climb illustrates the necessity of mindfulness to be careful as we move through the world. Same with human relationships. Just as disturbing ants causes conflict, careless speech or actions can provoke harm in interpersonal interactions. Mindful attention to words, actions, and movement helps prevent unnecessary conflict and fosters harmony. We can trigger the ants nest in others and out come lots of biting ants. Killing the ants is not a solution- we want to live in harmony with them.

(Bell 51:44)

## **9. Formalizing Mindfulness Trainings in a format to include precepts**

In the Plum Village 5 and 14 mindfulness trainings we present the precepts in a clear format:

(53:28) "Aware of the suffering caused by..., I am determined not to..."

This formulation roots precepts in awareness and compassion rather than rigid rules. Trainings are concrete and

experiential, requiring ongoing practice and application.

We can update the Mindfulness trainings with that format.  
The precepts are mindfulness..

### **10. Practice of Mindfulness Regarding Emotions**

I am not mindful 24 hours a day and there are still times I get acroed away by emotions but I have learned to shorten it by bringing awareness to see my emotions for what they are.

(56:09) When anger manifests we can remove ourselves and go outside and take care of our emotion and practice breathing- this is very accepted in our community. The trainings encourage awareness of emotional states such as anger and despair. Rather than acting impulsively on negative emotions, practitioners are supported to temporarily remove themselves, practice mindful breathing and walking, and return with clarity. This avoids causing harm and supports personal healing.

### **11. The Nature of Suffering and Impermanence**

Noone wants to suffer. Understanding that harmful actions cause future suffering motivates transformation. The Buddhist path relies on insight, not belief, recognizing impermanence and the continuation of karmic effects. This insight fosters determination to reduce harm and cultivate mindfulness in all actions. Our actions continue into the future. (58:32) We have been conditioned to do and say things that are hurtful to ourselves, others and the planet and we often realise this and that is why we come to Plum Village; to learn how to understand our mind and changing our behavior. The beauty of our own suffering (the ants) is that it is inviting us to change our behavior. It's a matter of listening to the suffer. Then it is easier to change.

### **12. Final Reflections and Encouragement**

1hr: 41: Mindfulness trainings are accessible, and provide a solid foundation for transformation and happiness. Its not hard to start. While it can be painful and challenging, like ant bites, once the insight into suffering takes root, it becomes easier to change harmful habits. The Buddha and Plum Village tradition emphasize creativity and evolving practice grounded in compassion and awareness.

### **13. Additional Resources and Closing**

Listeners are encouraged to use the Plum Village app for access to the 40 Tenets teachings in a focused environment. The talk concludes with gratitude to the community and encouragement for continued mindful practice. Overall, this talk underscores the unity of mindfulness, ethical conduct, and insight as a living, evolving path toward reducing suffering and cultivating joy and harmony in daily life and spiritual engagement.