



Mindfulness for Youth: A Case Study of Peaceful Samanera Project, Thailand

Ven. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hansa Dhammaso

Assistant to the Rector for Academic Affairs
Director of International Buddhist Studies College
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University
Bangkok, Thailand



Abstract

This research is a deep and penetrative observation into the youth in the modern era. With all the advancement in technology and the distractions in the world that are impeding the correct mental development of the lives of many youth, Buddhism needs to find new innovated and inspiring ways of teaching the youth. The researcher takes us through some of the challenges facing today's youth and some of the techniques we can employ from the researchers personal experience and wisdom in the subject which is so close to his heart.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Peace, Samanera Project.

A Definition of Youth

The definition of “youth” according to The Royal Institute Dictionary 2525 (B.E.) defines it as a person who is between 14-18 years old. According to unesco.org “Youth” is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. The United Nations defines “youth” as young people between the ages of 15-25. This includes adolescents who are between 12-18, as well as young adults up to 25. Those who are in the transitional stage from childhood to adult typically have more identity issues than others.

In Buddhist thinking, “youth” originated from “Yu-Wa” which means “immature”. Therefore, its meaning implies a stage of non-maturity both in mundane language and mundane matters and in dhamma language and dhamma matters.

1. Mundane language refers to immature in physical aspect because the Pali word of “Yu-Wa” literally means “mixture”, the mixed characteristics that occur on the transition from childhood to adult; also being beyond the childhood stage but not fully adult. With this stage, therefore they have soft physical parts of body such as muscles, bones, and organs which are not strong enough to support or bear hard work.

2. Dhamma language refers to the language of a group of people who have not strong intellectual ability and who lack wisdom gained through the practice of critical thinking. These people must learn to identify whether things are appropriate and suitable or not, good or bad, right or wrong. They must learn how to cultivate and enhance wisdom when it is weak. For these reasons, youth declines into inauthentic ways of thinking and acting which bring about negative effects for themselves, community, and society.

Changes in the World Context Changes the Minds of the Youth

The Digital world is an aspect of globalization which nowadays manifests itself in rapid communication in order to promote material growth, moving goods and service beyond national boundaries. Rapidly developing desires and their responses are timely and sustain the consumer’s need. So “fast and rapid” coincides with the human mind itself which is stimulated and molded and supported by defilements, such as greed, hatred and delusion. Production connects with consumer behavior in digital society in the use of cell phones, high-speed internet, fast trains, and high speed express ways.

However, some social critics have raised questions about how much those fast and rapid actions actually meet human needs besides just making everything faster. Then some people turn back to spend “Slow Life “ and perceive that at the end fast and rapid is not the best answer to problems of society. On the other hand, if there is no happiness, no matter how fast and rapid take actions they are not able to be the sustainable solution for humankind.

In present day modern society it is interesting that “fast and rapid” not only has an impact on society as a whole, but also on today’s youths. It is known that youth who are interested in high technology have low mindfulness and may not be able to keep pace with technology he is using and also lacks of consideration. Fast and rapid accelerates the habit energy of impatience, quick and careless mind, not thinking of consequences , being impatient with someone or something, and becoming restlessness and sluggish.

Besides, many youths get involved with drugs as well, and are stimulated to incubate disease of violence by many different media such as TV, books, Facebook, google, You Tube, cell phone and so on. The demonstration of violence which directly occurs within family, community and direct abuse by surrounding people make many youths consider these issues as normal. These can bring criminal and harm others by using direct and indirect violence.

The conclusion is that youths in the digital world are confronted with many different crises that cause them to lack of mindfulness and concentration. They display their aggressive and violent behavior, mindless material consumption, and substance abuse whenever they have had some problems. In view of these matters, setting up project and activities called “Novices for Peace” seems to be part of the solution. This implies having a peace study process to be a framework in youth development upon 4 dimensions: development of body, behavior, spirit, and wisdom in order to cultivate resistance to negative cultural influences, a tranquil mind, capacity for service to others, and a mind of loving kindness to be peacefully together in community.

Novices for Peace : What and How?

The Buddha taught “ dhunto settho manussesu” means “ amongst all humans, the one who has well trained mind is the most supreme one”. Hence youth will transform to be a peace novice because of effective training. Moreover, being a peace novice, he is needed to have cleanliness in body, behavior, spiritual and wisdom. Therefore, a conceptual framework to be a curriculum for developing peace novices consists of 4 dimensions; body development, behavior development, spiritual development and wisdom development.

If there is a question about what is the main goal of learning outcome from peace novices development, the answer should be “it is necessary to have peace novices”. Therefore, novices for peace according to the curriculum should have confidence in honesty, free from all unwholesome activities, cleanness in body, behavior, spiritual and wisdom including with service mind, determine in the path of peace and undertake the sufficient economic philosophy to lead their way of living.



After novices have been trained, communities and societies will have a new generation of youth from which are molded to eliminate defilements of hate and fear. They will spend their lives within a culture of honesty, producing an adequate economic philosophy as well as preparing to help others in community and society in the way of peace. Hence the cleanliness of community and society has started with these peace novices as the important power in the transformation communities in more than 70,000 villages all over the country.

Mindfulness tightening: a tool for abstaining absent mind, shivered body, shaken scoop



Minds of youths are weak in concentration. They typically have a very short span of attention. As an antidote, meditation trains youth to comprehend with body, feeling, mind and mind. This is very complicated for youth. Therefore, the proper tools and external factors should be implemented in order to stimulate young minds to keep on the same track with the present phenomena until one gains proper special skill in contemplation with body, feeling, mind and mind object more effectively.

“Mindfulness tightening” originates from the mentioned conditions which literally means a little scoop that a student carry along within trekking or dhamma-yatra (dhamma walking trip) to different places. Carrying the scoop with oneself is compared with a tool to keep the mind within and lead to constantly strong concentration.



From mindfulness tightening up to concentration strengthening which is suitable for youth who has an unstable mind that always boost up body to move so often. The result of shaking hand makes a scoop trembling which reflects upon a metaphor of moving mind. Therefore, if we would like to have a scoop filled with still water, we have to tranquil our mind stage beforehand and then the atmosphere of calmness will bring back an immovable body following with stillness water in a scoop.

Which is mindfulness, that is concentration Which is concentration, that is wisdom

Mindfulness and concentration together with concentration and wisdom are supportive and conditioned each other. Consider the simile of a coin which always has head and tail, head is mindfulness and tail is concentration; on the other hand if concentration is head, then wisdom is tail. These two things have never been apart, always have depended upon the other one. Depending on mindfulness in contemplating with mind phenomena, concentrated mind gives rise and develops upon the stage of momentary concentration, assessment concentration and further upon with the stage of attainment concentration. At that stage insight wisdom gives rise to contemplate sharply with things as they really are and interrelate with others by their

own causes and conditions. To see clearly in nature of the Three Characteristics until really understand what is dukkha, the cause of dukkha, the cessation of dukkha and the way lead to the cessation of dukkha.

Mindfulness of youth is a starting point of world peace

One who has practiced meditation continually will create self-resistance toward oneself. Thai children nowadays have been confronted with shortage of concentration problems which become habits of haphazard, powerless and lack of patient and endurance. Furthermore, enmeshed in materialism which leading to be rather consumerism than challenging innovative creation. With this reason, the empowerment of a strong concentration will lead youths who completed the program to go against the main streams of materialism and violence in this digital world as well as bring the happiness along with their ways of living in future.

Pilgrimage walk rally: a tool for patient and endurance training

“Master, do your feet hot?” a novice asked me while we were walking along a heartfelt hot rubber paved road . “And what do you feel, my son” I asked back. “It is very hot, Master:” so I said “son, how hot do your feet feel is the same as mine feel. Then the novice told me immediately “ Fighting, Master”. As a position of being teacher who has duty in training and developing small novices, this should rather be my responsibility to tell them “sons, fighting”.



But when comes to consider and reflect deeply I have found that since I started the project “The bundles of cleanness and cooling smiles novices” in the last 3 years that a teacher trains but students teach. During the journey of pilgrimage, young novices from the ages from 7 up to 18 became teachers who give profound dhamma to me.

Those of good parental upbringing, with their smooth pairs of feet, have walked across the heavy storm and strong wind. The little feet stepped into muddy ground encountered with chilly weather. They strolled upon earth, pebbles, concrete and hot paved road with determined eyes and faces full of patience and endurance, no matter how heavily the wind blew and the rain poured down; and sunny burns infected them until they are so called “ 3 seasons novices” in which there are rainy, cold and summer times all in one.

Peace novices are the teachers who taught us to perceive the value of dhamma shown out through patience, endurance, mindfulness, concentration and so on. These values cannot be borne out from any classroom by remembering and reciting what the morality teachers insisted to learn, have examinations, get certificates, or good grades. Instead, they all originate from self-training and developing themselves through real dhamma happening in real life’s situation underneath the novices feet and beyond that hearts filled with determination and endurance.





From a petrol barrel in the desert a technique comes to heartfully empower a walk - rally pilgrimage

Brian Tracy told about the technic of a petrol barrel in desert in his book *Eat That Frog*. He drove a car across Sahara desert which is the widest desert in the world with the distance of 800 kilometers. The difficulty of driving across is the endless deserted land, with no shops, no petrol station, no water and no food. There is only sand and sand everywhere and about 1300 people who have got lost while drove on this way and their bodies could not be found even now.

To solve this problem, French Army who used to seize this land at certain times put 55 gallons size of petrol barrels on the way to mark locations. Each barrel is located 5 kilometers far from the other one. That is quite far but not too far to for the eyesight to be hidden by the curve line of the world. At any time, Tracy would only see 2 barrels which are the one he drove by and the other one next to him but it was enough to lead him the way out of the desert safely.

The technique of putting each barre every 5 kilometers along the way reflects the concept of “walk in one step, eat with one gulp and do only one thing” because whenever we walk ahead we will see with hope, whenever we look back we will see with pride in things

we already passed. This is not matters how much problems, obstacles, difficulties waiting for us but only being the approval to ourselves. From the purpose in helping travelers cross over the endless hot deserted land, there is no difference in the way with the group of immature pilgrims lacks of any experiences in long walking. Especially the bundles of cleanness novices with ages from 7-18 years old under conditions of tiredness, weakness, with both physically and mentally immatures they are easily to draw back from long walking through all kinds of obstacles every 5-7 kilometers during each day.

The beginning of technique of putting patrol barrels in the aspect of Buddhist Thai eastern folk ritual based on faith towards the way of pilgrimage walk rally. Villagers will spring the dilution of some scented powder and perfume with fresh water upon novices' feet when they march along passing their villages one by one. This can be understood that the such kind of folk tradition has already originated within this north eastern part for hundreds year ago. Therefore, whenever the peace novices walk rally appears in a village, the scene of a long line of villagers sitting on the ground and springing the scented water to novices' feet will be seen. This incident can inspire walking novices to have good morale and endurance in going on their road with determination.

With this kind of demonstration regarded as an important morale and heart power for these peace novices after a long walk from a village to another village which is about 5-10 kilometers far distance. So, whenever the exhausted and thirsty pilgrims walk down into a village they will see and hear a gathered group of laypeople bringing to them drinking water, encouraging nice words as well as springing some scented water to them which making them regain more morale and heart power again.

The future of peace novices is the future of Buddhism

If Buddhism fails to inspire the youth, it will become only the tomb of the elderly. So with joy in our hearts let us cultivate the strong little ones who need our guidance from the heart. Giving novices a path with heart as they walk the path toward world peace is the future of Buddhism