

# MINDFULNESS FOR SELF-TRANSFORMATION ANDBECOMINGANINSPIRATIONFORSOCIETY

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by Ven. P. R. Tongchangya \*

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## ABSTRACT

*In this era, self-transformation for youths is more essential than ever before because of advanced technology it leads to more temptation, distraction and busy lifestyle. Self-transformation through mindfulness is beneficial for personal understanding. This self-transformation shows in the Sedaka Sutta, 'Through protecting after oneself, you protect after others. When protecting after others, you protect after yourself (Samyutta Nikāya v 169)'. Despite the popularity of mindfulness, society, in general, is not convinced of how it can transform one's personality. Through mindfulness practices, one will be able to become self-controlled and self-transformed. Consequently, a person will be able to cultivate integrity, compassion, gratitude, loving-kindness, and generosity. Possessing these qualities may lead him or her to become interested in social work and awareness campaigns. Thus, he acts as he speaks (Dīgha Nikāya iii 135). In other words, one will become accountable for the apparent discrepancy between theory and practice. Having developed those wholesome qualities, she or he will set up a moral norm in the society to inspire others. Even if she or he does not become involved in charity work, she or he will restrain from harming others. People should learn the practical ideals in both practice and teaching. Therefore, by practicing mindfulness daily, one may develop self-awareness and engage in social work.*

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\*. M.Phil. Student, Postgraduate, Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

*This article aims at showing how practicing mindfulness is conducive for becoming self-transformed with the positive attitudes of compassion, kindness and integrity which is essential in daily life. In the discussion of mindfulness, this paper will illustrate on how to apply mindful breathing (ānāpānassati) and the cultivation of loving-kindness (mettābhāvanā) through the foundation of mindfulness. Through the proper application of mindfulness, one may not only become self-transformed but also an active inspirer in society. This paper will be based on Suttapiṭaka.*

## 1. MINDFULNESS AS BARE AWARENESS

This paper focuses mindfulness as a tool with regard to personal transformation will define and examine. At first, it will define mindfulness with regard to personal transformation. Mindfulness signifies the present state of mind, attentiveness to the present. It has the characteristic of not floating away from the object.<sup>(1)</sup> It is the intuitive awareness within one's mind and surrounding area. In other words, it is the awakened or a vigilant state of mind. It is non-judgmental from its functional perspectives. It does not justify from being liked and disliked. It is just aware of the object with attention and total engagement. Mindfulness is the essential element for constituting meditative practices.

Transformation of personality is not an instant work; it is a gradual and regular process of mindfulness practise. Even for ten minutes regular practises of mindfulness in the morning and evening will show a great change of personality over a period of time.

Firstly, practising breathing mindfulness in the morning and evening will be conducive to having a wonderful day with which includes a stable and composed mind. Simply keeping attention on the in and out breath will suffice for the breathing practise. Indeed, this can be extended to the contemplation of bodily awareness, feelings, emotions, and thoughts as it was shown in the previous explanation of mindfulness practises.

Secondly cultivating loving-kindness towards oneself and others will empower with all the positive qualities of a compassionate

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1. Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2006. *A comprehensive manual of Abhidhamma: the Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Acariya Anuruddha* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society), 86.

human being (not only loving to oneself but also showing love towards others bodily, verbally and mentally.) This will be shown in the later part in this paper. The regular practise of mindfulness will boost our emotional balance to help our mind cope with external environments effectively.

## 2. SELF-TRANSFORMATION

Self-transformation is the change of one's behaviour and thought pattern through the practice of mindfulness. It is the maintenance of internal stability in the mind and self-introspection of mind with the practice of mindfulness because without being mindful one does not know what is happening in the mental continuum. With the application of mindfulness, a person could bring one's mind under the control of external objects. Otherwise, without mindfulness one is swayed away by the objects, as a result one rather than the other controls accordingly, the process of the thinking mind gets carried away. In the Dhammapada verse- 160, 'One truly is the protector of oneself; who else could the protector be? With oneself fully controlled, one gains a mastery that is hard to gain.' It is the most efficient way to control oneself, so that one could always have one's mind towards the performance of good deeds. Here, the word self-transformation is intended for an emotionally healthy and balanced person. One who has deep understanding on self-awareness about one's mind and experiences.

Moreover, it will further discuss how the application of mindfulness can become self-transformative. Generally, it is not recognized in society as mentally unsteady people when one could not control one's mind. However, according to the Roga Sutta, no one is free from the mental sickness even for a moment except the completely destroyer of cankers.<sup>(2)</sup> Mental sicknesses are worry, fear, desire, anger and rudeness which are in constant conflict within us and our surroundings. If one can think deeply, she/he will understand the meaning of mental sickness through personal experiences beginning with pain to the dissatisfaction of life.

Mentally unbalanced attitudes in our life could be reduced

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2. *Aṅguttara Nikāya* ii 143.

through the practice of mindfulness. For instance, a person worries due to the past experience of committing unwholesome deeds and not committing wholesome deeds. The Paṭhamagilāna Sutta says through the practice of morality one can dispel one's worry.<sup>(3)</sup> In fact, worry can be freed from the mind through the practice of mindfulness. If one is not mindful of one's thought, one will indulge in thinking of past painful experiences which is not beneficial. If one continues to think without awareness of the present on to the object, one cannot stop one's worries. Since one's worry is taking the past object whereas the present awareness is taking the present object in the body or mind.

One should remain calm at any situation for becoming self-transformed. It is not the case as long as a situation goes well, a person will not become annoyed or get distracted. This has led to the disruption of emotions due to external conditions. This will be clear to those who practice mindfulness; the disruption of our emotions is due to the absence of self-awareness. However, it is easy for a practitioner of mindfulness to manage emotions skilfully during any disruptive situation. It is not skilful to be overjoyed during pleasant times and overly upset in times of doom. The reality of life is ups and downs so one should be neither overjoyed nor feel upset but understanding the circumstance as it occurs. Thus, only through mindfulness one could understand properly the reality of ups and downs of life.

Generally, everybody likes praise but not dispraise. But the reality is that no one is free from it. Even the Gotama Buddha also was blamed by other heretics. The Brahmajāla Sutta shows the Buddha advises his disciples that if someone blames and/or praises the triple gem one should neither get upset nor happy but acknowledge what is a fact as a fact, saying: 'For such and such a reason this is a fact, this is true, there is such a thing in us, this is found among us.'<sup>(4)</sup> The statement suggests that applying mindfulness enables one to analyze the praise and blame of others accordingly. Similarly, one will not groundlessly become angry for being blamed and instead will become equanimous through the application of mindfulness.

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3. *Saṃyutta Nikāya* iv 48.

4. Bodhi, Bhikkhu, 2007. *The discourse on the all-embracing net of views the Brahmajāla Sutta and its commentaries* (Kandy: Buddhist Publ. Society) 53.

The Dutiyāppiya Sutta<sup>(5)</sup> shows some qualities to become a self-transformed person in society. Some characteristics are related to oneself whereas others are concerned with others. However, generally they are relevant for personal transformation: the way one thinks, behaves, and interacts by oneself and socialises with others.

- i. One has no expectation of gain
- ii. One has no expectation of honour
- iii. One has no intention of despising others
- iv. One knows the right time
- v. One knows moderation
- vi. One is honest
- vii. One is not talkative
- viii. One is not critical

If a person can apply any of these qualities, one will win others' hearts easily. These qualities reflect the genuine characters towards others. Having a genuine and humble attitude will allow others to listen easily. Consequently, a person will inspire others to become a good and reliable person in society.

### 3. REGULATING EMOTIONS

Having discussed the idea of self-transformation, it will focus on regulating one's emotions according to different situations. Neuroscience has realized that rather than having a high intelligent quotient (IQ) one who is skilful in regulating one's emotions (EQ) according to the situation may become more successful not only in personal life but also in social life and in the workplace. In fact, it is no surprise from a Buddhist perspective because maintaining one's emotions skilfully through mindfulness, one could improve and change one's attitude and behaviours. This is a life-skill for everyone to pursue for a healthy and prosperous life. It will provide some appropriate applicable methods where the early discourses have manifested. They are the negative emotions of anger, suffering, selfishness, and ingratitude to control with their respective positive

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5. *Aṅguttara Nikāya* iv 156.

emotional factors of loving-kindness, kindness, generosity and gratitude through the application of mindfulness.

#### 4. OVERCOMING ANGER WITH LOVING-KINDNESS

Anger should count as the most harmful emotion be it annoyance, irritation and discomfort with the situation and surroundings. According to the Aggi Sutta, anger is recognized as fire<sup>(6)</sup> because the mind becomes tumultuous and tries to disrupt others as well. Feeling angry due to external factors also plays an important role like getting caught in traffic jam, easily irritating and annoying. For instance, when one becomes angry: his face looks red due to the biochemical reaction of an angry mind. One might hit other cars due to uncontrolled anger. Consequently, one will be imposed a fine because of the accident. In that situation, it is wise to stay calm through careful investigation of the situation as it occurs (*yathābhūta*). It is recommended in the Kakacūpama Sutta<sup>(7)</sup> not to change one's mind to discharge evil words instead one should live with compassion and loving-kindness and not harbour anger. Dealing with angry people or even with one's own anger, anger should be dispelled through the cultivation of loving-kindness according to the Rāga Sutta.<sup>(8)</sup> Anger and loving-kindness could not coexist together, therefore when loving-kindness is cultivated, anger, irritation and annoyance could not flicker.

#### 5. ERADICATING SUFFERING THROUGH COMPASSION

In order to eradicate suffering, one should cultivate compassion. Venerable Walpola Rahula interprets compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side.<sup>(9)</sup> In a broader sense 'suffering is not limited to painful experience but refers to the unsatisfactory nature and the general insecurity of all conditioned phenomena.'<sup>(10)</sup> Through mindful

6. *Itivuttaka* 93.

7. *Majjhima Nikāya* i 127.

8. *Aṅguttara Nikāya* iii 446.

9. Rāhula, Walpola. 2006. *What the Buddha Taught* (Nedimala, Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Centre), 46.

10. Nyānatiloka, and Nyanaponika Thera. 2011 *Buddhist Dictionary: A Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society), 64.

observation one will realize the suffering of others which is essential to cultivating compassion. The Buddha taught his teaching out of compassion towards all living beings (*sabbabhūtānukampino*)<sup>(11)</sup> to relieve them from suffering. Through the cultivation of compassion along with mindfulness, one could help others to reduce their suffering, particularly emotional sufferings. According to the Paṭhamaāghātapavīnaya Sutta, one should develop compassion for a person that has resentment.<sup>(12)</sup> Hence, the more one practices mindfulness one will nurture compassion as a result, one will not torture others as the Dhammapada states, 'All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill.'<sup>(13)</sup> Being mindful one will show that compassion is not just with thought but also through actions. It is essential to show compassion for those who are suffering from mental depression and anxiety. It should be noted that compassion could only be cultivated by abandoning cruelty along with enhancing mindfulness. Hence, one could not be compassionate who is cruel towards animals or living beings.

## 6. SUBDUING SELFISHNESS THROUGH GENEROSITY

Selfishness will examine to overcome through generosity. Selfishness is a mental sickness that shrinks the mind when sharing possessions, wealth, and knowledge with others. With the selfish mind whether it may be possessions, wealth and ideas, all constitute as selfishness. This is a selfish mindset. This should be taken measure through self-awareness of mindfulness. The Macchariyappahāna Sutta shows selfishness should be dispelled for leading a peaceful and noble life.<sup>(14)</sup> However, with the practice of mindfulness, it cannot arise in our mind. It is to be dispelled with the practice of generosity according to Dhammapada verse-223. The reciprocal contingent good attitude is easily transferable to selfish people. While dealing with selfishness, it is recommended to treat them generously. Consequently, they will transform their mind by being self-aware.

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11. *Saṃyutta Nikāya* i 25.

12. *Ānguttara Nikāya* ii 186.

13. *Dhammapada* 19.

14. *Ānguttara Nikāya* iii 273.

## 7. A SENSE OF GRATITUDE THROUGH DISPELLING INGRATITUDE

Gratitude is also another quality to cultivate for self-transformation. The word gratitude in Pāli is *kataññuta* which could interpret as 'to know what other has done for us. Recollection of other good deeds towards one is a gratitude. Being grateful requires reviewing the good deeds that have been done by others. Moreover, recognizing gratitude requires a calm and quiet mind. If one is mindful one could recollect easily all of the good actions. Having recollected the lessons, one learnt from others is an invaluable source of inspiration. Thus, through the practice of mindfulness it is easy to recognise and nurture gratitude towards others. The practice of gratitude will help us assist others and not feel annoyance or discomfort towards them.

Through regulating the emotions, a person not only become self-transformed but also eradicated the negative emotions. Thus, he is a balanced person in society.

## 8. INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

An effective interpersonal skill requires to adopt positive attitudes. The positive attitudes should be prevailed through the practise of mindfulness. In general, with mindful practice everybody wants to help others out of compassion. This attitude is called empathy in psychology. It is 'the capacity to understand and enter into another person's feelings and emotions or to experience something from the other person's point of view.'<sup>(15)</sup> By observing the Buddha's interactions in the early discourses, this paper has drawn effective approaches for comprehensive interpersonal skills. In dealing with interpersonal skills, one should possess of the attitudes of integrity, honesty, humble, modest, and interactive listening.

Integrity is a human attribute for interpersonal skills. The Oxford Advance Learner Dictionary (OALD) defines integrity is 'the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles.' Knowing one's own experiences and feelings is similar to being honest to oneself. Sometimes although a person wishes to be consistent, due

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15. Andrew M Colman, 2001, *A Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 241.



to not being aware they are likely to forget. However, through the practice of mindfulness, a person will not only be mindful of all thoughts and actions but also have the attitude of honesty. Honesty and mindfulness infallibly arise together. Similarly, one should be honest not only to oneself but also with others. Honesty is also a generic of integrity. The OALD defines honest means always telling the truth, and never stealing or cheating. But in fact, one should also have purified mind to become an honest person. A person is not honest because of not being aware of his emotions of desire, anger and ignorance. According to the Parābhava Sutta<sup>(16)</sup> one who deceives others through false speech is subject to ruin. Consequently, one will understand through deceiving others no one will rely and believe in him. When one is observing one's mind with mindfulness, there will not be betrayal to others but only good mindsets of honesty and honourableness<sup>(17)</sup> that lead to promote the welfare of oneself and others. While dealing with liars (a sort of betraying), the Dhammapada states to dispel wrong speech with true speech which is conducive to oneself and others. In dealing with impolite people, one should behave through gentle behaviour and speech. Hence, one will be able to help them realize their rude behaviours. Through teaching the benefits of honesty one could skilfully teach others to be a truthful and a reliable person. Therefore, the Brahmajāla Sutta recommends having abandoned false speech, the recluse Gotama abstains from falsehood. He speaks only the truth, he lives devoted to truth; trustworthy and reliable, he does not deceive anyone in the world.<sup>(18)</sup> Thus, Dhammapada strongly suggests one should treat dishonest persons with honesty and liars with truthful speech. It should be understood that the meaning of integrity is endowed with not only with right speech but also with vigilant mind.

Practice of mindfulness is vital to become humble and modest. Some people may not appreciate being modest but generally this quality will be appreciated by wise people. Being modest is not degrading of one's capability but rather understanding better

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16. *Suttanipāta* 19.

17. *Suttanipāta* 25.

18. *Dīgha Nikāya* i 4.

of oneself without annoying others through mindfulness. One will understand better for the vanity of boastfulness through the attention of mindfulness. The Mangala Sutta<sup>(19)</sup> states that it is a great blessing of being modest (*nivāto*). Through regular and consistent application of mindfulness one will become humble and modest.

This era is overwhelmed with the extravagant life of sensual gratifications. It is the tendency to consider material possessions are more important than spiritual well-being. This leads to transcend the boundary of simplicity and sustainability for physical and mental well-being. Consequently, it leads consumers to a slavery life towards seeking after delight and comfort without any limitation. However, by understanding the vulnerability of a sensual gratification, one should lead a simple life. Through living a mindful life, one will understand the value of living with moderation of requisites (*bhojane mattaññutā*)<sup>(20)</sup> in our life such as food, cloth, medicine and shelter which are conducive for a healthy body and mind. Leading a simple life is sustainable and easily supportive which should be dispelling the uncontrollable desire of sensual comfort through the cultivation of tranquility and insight practise.<sup>(21)</sup> According to the Santuṭṭhitā Sutta discontentment should be abandoned through the cultivation of contentment.<sup>(22)</sup> This attitude will enable a person to become more concentrated on work and duties. This will not only improve mental well-being but also success at work with a composed mind. Consequently, this noble attitude of contentment will encourage others as well. Whatever else may opine us, living a simple life is the most sustainable living which is beneficial for oneself and others particularly for the wise usage of resources on Earth.

In the extravagant life of sensual gratification, using a smartphone is another problem which can be observed during modern time. This phenomenon has made mindfulness more essential than ever before. Although its utility is undeniable, the use of smartphones has exceeded the limits on the current decade. Sometimes

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19. *Suttanipāta* 45.

20. *Anguttara Nikāya* iii 330.

21. *Anguttara Nikāya* i 99.

22. *Anguttara Nikāya* iii 449.

smartphones do not drop from our hands despite engaging with eating, discussion, relaxation and studying. This disrupts our work from being totally engaged on a single task. Thus, this also leads to not having close relationships within the family. It could even cause problems while cooking (the curry may burn, and someone may stumble while walking). All these daily problems are due not being self-aware. If one engages with mindfulness, one will know how to use a smartphone with moderation.

One should get rid of from stubbornness by being obedient and listening on others (*suvaco*). Stubbornness may come because one's pride and conceit towards one's success and good performance. One day a person may be successful, prosperous and beautiful; however, through the nature of change one's all good things and prosperity could vanish without delay. Thus, with the application of mindfulness, one becomes an obedient person (*suvaco*) by not having evil wishes and becoming influenced with evil thoughts.<sup>(23)</sup> This will not only inspire others but also melt one's own stubborn attitude. The Meghiya Sutta<sup>(24)</sup> states that one could learn the lesson of becoming meek and obedient to those who seek promotes for welfare.<sup>(25)</sup>

Through attentive listening, one will know their emotions along with their problems. It is essential to listen to them with the attitude of helping them according to their needs (*kin̄kārapaṭissāvi*).<sup>(26)</sup> Having listened to their ideas and expressions, one could draw some conclusion<sup>(27)</sup> regarding their needs, and emotional problems. Only when a person can attentively lend his/her ears to listen, he/she will become closer and intimate. Consequently, one will have a chance to share and suggest emotional supports. According to the Dhammaññū Sutta<sup>(28)</sup> possessing of good understanding on others, we need to know their social castes like brahmin, warrior, householders, and recluse. Accordingly, a person needs to know how to approach, stand, act, sit, speak and stand silently. Although

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23. *Majjhima Nikāya* i 94.

24. *Āṅguttara Nikāya* iv 358.

25. *Suttanipāta* 25.

26. *Āṅguttara Nikāya* iv 268.

27. *Āṅguttara Nikāya* iii 438.

28. *Āṅguttara Nikāya* iv 114.

these skills are applied for approaching in a social gathering, this could also apply in understanding others in daily life. Furthermore, one should understand others according to age, gender, status, and religious background in order to have a better understanding about them.

One should interact with others through compassion and effective communication. One should discuss with a welcoming attitude. The Kakacūpama Sutta<sup>(29)</sup> states that for effective communication one should be able to interact with others and converse in timely, true, affectionate, beneficial manners and with good-will. Interacting through polite and compassionate behaviour (*peyyavajjam*)<sup>(30)</sup> will be fruitful for effective interaction. It is also significant that one should neither reject their beliefs and ideals directly. Instead one should ask further questions so they can understand their ideals from a place of general concern and well-being. Accordingly, one could give clear and comprehensive suggestions for physical and emotional well-being. Finding out their needs and offering solutions would make them convinced of the counsellor's skill.

The more one is emotionally balanced, the more he could convince and influence others effectively due to well-balanced mental attitude.

## 9. PROACTIVE BUT NOT REACTIVE

Emotionally balanced people could become proactive in society. An emotionally balanced person is 'one not sunk in the mire himself should pull out another who is sunk in the mire.'<sup>(31)</sup> Through this charismatic attitude, others will listen to the ideals and norms through an exemplary life. This will encourage others to imitate his ideals and norms. One should be proactive in teaching and showing loving-kindness, compassion through the cultivation of mindfulness which are conducive for cordial and harmonious existence in the society.

Having self-transformed he/she will teach others the application

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29. *Majjhima Nikāya* i 129-130.

30. *Ānguttara Nikāya* ii 32.

31. *Majjhima Nikāya* i 40.

of loving-kindness, compassion and mindfulness. It will show how to teach others of loving-kindness, compassion and mindfulness.

Firstly, one should know how one practises and shares moral lessons on loving-kindness. It is not just mental wishes of the welfare of all living-beings. The Paṭhamasāraṇīya Sutta<sup>(32)</sup> shows six ways of loving-kindness cultivation for cordial and harmonious existence in the society.

- i. One maintains bodily acts of loving-kindness towards his fellow both openly and privately.
- ii. One maintains verbal acts of loving-kindness towards his fellow both openly and privately.
- iii. One maintains mental acts of loving-kindness towards his fellow both openly and privately.
- iv. One shares without reservation of any righteous gain with his fellow even a small amount of food.
- v. One dwells both openly and privately in common with his fellow friend of virtuous behaviour.
- vi. One dwells both openly and privately possessing in common with his fellow friends a view that is noble and emancipating.

When a person applies these six ways, he will be loved and adored by his fellow friends. Through the application of loving-kindness in these ways, one not only will become an emotionally balanced person but also a role model in society. Through mindful compassion one will not betray and become cruel to others.

Secondly, it will discuss how to practice compassion in action. Helping others does not always require money but a simple act of compassion is sufficient. For instance, compassion could be shown through emotional support of elderly people. They will surely feel compassion of calm conversation with mindfulness. Teaching them to be mindful will be conducive to spend their final stage peacefully. This could also be performed by visiting patients in the hospital.

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32. *Anguttara Nikāya* iii12; 289-290: Bodhi, Bhikkhu, 2012. *The Numerical Discourse of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications) 866-867.

When one shares emotionally comforting words, one is able to generate a glad mind. This is called compassion in action. It is better to teach them mindfulness through breathing exercises. They can not only gain mental relaxation but also physical relaxation.

In order to be proactive in inspiring society, one could approach teaching through two ways: teaching at home and to anyone. Encouraging people to practice mindfulness, loving-kindness and compassion from home is a suitable place to begin spiritual counselling. One could easily encourage one's parents and siblings for applying these moral lessons due to having a close relationship. After that, one could extend to teaching to friends and relatives. In this way, one could expand to villages and districts. This method is gradually pervading for teaching moral lessons from close relationship to unknown people for the happiness of many.

The second approach is to teach to anybody. This method is more common as one could see the approaches of spiritual masters. In this approach, one should not be afraid of sharing one's ideals with others through the application of mindfulness. Through well-crafted mindful conversation, one could convince anyone how to relax physically and mentally. However, one should remind others mindfulness practice requires regular basis or by regulating our emotions according to the situation.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Self-transformation for oneself and youths could be trained through proper attitude and interaction. It will be however, a gradual process through the regular practice of mindfulness. It is self-transformative not because mindfulness is magic but because through the self-awareness practises one realized oneself as a result, he or she will not harm others at any cost. Constant practises of mindfulness will not lead to being cruel and forgetful but rather it will lead to becoming emotionally balanced through mindful and loving-kindness nourishment.

The ideals and norms do not limit to youth but are applicable and transformable for all stages of lives, whether old age or youth. It is from our very hearts that the seeds of awakening or the trash bin of negative emotions spring. Through regular application of

mindfulness practise, one can reveal one's inner potential. The vibes one feels and the influence on others will be stronger and more effective with the practises of mindfulness. The single and primary factor of transformation is the application of mindfulness. Without this, other factors will not function though they inter-relatedly function in the process of mental continuum.

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