

## **'Mindfulness in Meditation'**

Now. The topic of a community study is a tough one. In terms of writing something about the community that I lived in for a year, I don't think I can dedicate this piece entirely. I would say that I have more thoughts and memories of myself developing than the environment that surrounded me having much influence. It's a hard one to explain but in one simple sentence, I believe that my year in Thailand truly changed the way I think about things. If I was to summarise this organised dump of my thoughts then 'Mindfulness in Buddhism' would have to be the title.

I won't lie and say that I didn't struggle at times while I was away. I had come to Thailand with one dream and that was to travel. Ever since I was old enough to hear about travelling I wanted it so badly. It was always in the back of my mind but suppressed by school and people asking the same old question of 'what do you want to be'. Being given the opportunity to go to Thailand and work with Buddhist monks was life-changing and I mean that with all my heart. I didn't even believe that was an option but when it was presented to me my eyes lit up and before I could think about it, it was all I could talk about. I had one ambition and that was to head to the place that I had dreamed of for years. A place where culture met my thoughts and desires. The way of life.

When I say I struggled, I am talking about finding a connection to something. Through my A-levels, I had lost an ambition of what I wanted to do after. For me, going away was going to my path to finding something I loved so I could come home and start the next journey. Teaching was quite daunting at the time but as I became more confident standing in front of a class and teaching them my language, I soon realised this was for me. But there is a deeper meaning to it all. A deeper connection that I hadn't quite obtained.

This is where living at a Buddhist Monastery was the best thing that could have happened. My interest in Buddhism has always been there but I've never experienced first hand what the teachings could offer me. This being mindfulness. Buddhism in my mind has always been a religion of peace and dedication. And yes, it is, but there is more to it than that. Buddhism has different levels of learning and the teachings can be used in all walks of life either in a religious way or not. It's open to the person's perception of them. Living at a monastery I learned that not all those that take it upon themselves to dedicate their lives to the religion actually follow all of the rules. I mean, let's remember that while my students are novices in Buddhism, to me they are simply teenagers in robes. They still have phones, talk about girls and eat when they like. It's just that they need the education.



Now relating this back to my main point of making a deeper connection in my life, I think this is where I didn't quite grasp the fact I was living in a monastery. I was too engulfed in an egotistical manner where all I could see was monks breaking the rules and ruining what I thought Buddhism should be that I didn't realise what it could offer me. I wasn't truly happy or, I guess, connected is a better way of putting it. I wasn't making the most of the opportunity I had been given and by not doing this I wasn't getting any closer to making a connection to what was bringing me down and of course eventually what would connect me.

It wasn't until I was back from my holiday travels and back at work teaching that I experienced a breakdown because my life was completely out of sync. I had spent the last month not sleeping properly and not doing what I love that I fell into a place where I knew something needed to change. This time was also when I made the connection to the teachings of Buddha and I became interested in reading more about them. I had tried meditation in the past but hadn't quite got the hang of it but it wasn't until I started learning more about mindfulness that mediating became easier. The two go hand in hand. This process is called Mindfulness Meditation. Something that I have been practising ever since.



I read some books and talked to people around my monastery about the teachings of Buddha and rather than finding information out I used it as a way of listening to their stories and figuring it out for myself. Each individual monk has a story because of their background and journey into the religion. I read a book by an ex-foreign monk who we are friends with. He has now left the religion to run a foundation which supports the school which I was teaching at. Scholarships are also given to other young people from other disadvantaged backgrounds. His book 'Little Angels' describes the stories of 12 monks who had unfortunate backgrounds. What I got from this book was understanding. An understanding of the lives of my students. The lives of young people who didn't have great starts in life. This enabled me to look further into the religion and to learn more.

I was now getting a better picture of Buddhism. I said at the beginning that I never understood how the teachings could affect me first hand. However, now I was starting to experience the shift in my thought processes and in my growing connection. Through meditation I was and still am able to stay calmer in situations where before I wouldn't usually. I was also able to focus better and devote more of my energy and time towards things that mattered to me like teaching and making a difference. I evaluated everything I was doing and I was more mindful of changes happening around me.



This doesn't mean I have become very religious but now I just had more of an appreciation of all religions. I felt like I was becoming a better person because I was more accepting of others. Not that I wasn't already but in the past when I had taken part in activism events I became caught up. Learning about mindfulness helped me step back and be mindful of what I was doing. This leads me to onto my next piece of advice given to me by the headmaster Phragamon which translates to monk 'Gamon'. He once said in an interview I did with him something that I will use into the future. It was that 'everyone and everything everywhere is knowledge'. It sounds simple enough, however, it wasn't until I started learning about mindfulness and evaluating the situation that I understood how I could use it. In my own terms, this saying means whatever happens to you, whatever somebody else has done, no matter where, this is knowledge. Everyone around you has a story to tell and it is up to us to realise this and take time to listen i.e being mindful.



We all have the need for such things. Everyday we pass people with incredible stories to tell but in no fault of our own, we are caught up in everyday life only focusing on whats important to us personally. And this doesn't mean we should stop. What I am talking about is having a deeper connection with and learning from others. We all have a part to play in listening to other people's stories. It's what makes us human. The more we learn the deeper the connection and understanding. And I know what you're going to say 'I haven't got time to listen to other people's problems'. I absolutely agree. But I would suggest instead of listening to the problem, listen to the solution. What did that person do to get them to where they are now. That's knowledge, my friends.

Before I told you that listening is important you listened to my story and more interestingly how I solved my problem by listening to others. To round this up I would just give one piece of advice. It's not a massive piece of advice but none the less something I use that I think could help you. *'Learn to love by learning to listen'*. Interpret as you wish and use as you wish. Now that I am back home and have time to reflect and evaluate my whole experience I can map the changes I've made and where I should go next. Where ever this is I'll do this mindfully and with others in mind.

