

Mindfulness day of practice review

When I arrived at the temple, I liked the state of Kwan yin in the front. The parking area was very crowded and I parked right behind a white Honda and I was surprised when I left the temple and the cars were all gone and I was one of the last people to leave. I was very close to the white Honda, and I didn't see that they had any space to move but I guess the owner is a good driver because they could drive out of the tight space.

I was very comfortable the whole day, and as usual my legs fell asleep from time to time. I experienced calm from the meditation, and I also experienced nervousness about bringing my girlfriend to meet the class for the first time. But as time progressed, I wasn't worried about it and just enjoyed the afternoon. I didn't have any major difficulties or challenges throughout the day and I was thinking about the method of meditation we practiced.

From one minute, to two minutes, to three minutes, to four minutes, to five minutes the time passed by very fast but before we knew it, some of the people there had meditated more in that time than in their whole lives. I noticed that some people were not enjoying the practice but I was happily surprised that the Muslim girl was enjoying meditation. I am very happy to know that she is practicing for the first time and she is enjoying it. I feel glad when other people are truly enjoying something wholesome like meditation.

I did have a small difficulty when it was time for lunch because there was something that looked like turkey inside of the vegetarian sandwich, and it tasted just like turkey but my girlfriend assured me that it was just tofu. It was good but I never ate something like that before, as well as the pink, meat looking vegetables in the vegetarian fried rice, I thought it was all meat

in the beginning, but my girlfriend assured me that it was not meat so I continued to enjoy the meal.

A vivid benefit that arises from mindfulness practice is a sense of wisdom and clarity. Even when I am not practicing meditation or Samadhi, when I am just mindful of the present moment in my daily life, I can take an opportunity to be detached to everything and observe the true reality of things as they are. The peace that arises from practicing Samadhi is a benefit of practicing mindfulness as well. But another very wonderful benefit is being mindful of the present moment and watching the reality of our feelings, sensations, and thoughts. When we are not mindful of the present moment or the reality of our mind and body, we may have a thought or feeling that is bothering us for a long time. But as soon as we become mindful of the present moment and the reality of impermanence of all these things, I am overcome with a sense of ease and clarity.

4 Hours of Mindfulness

Going into the day of mindfulness practice I had no idea what to expect. I had never done any sort of meditation before. I am glad that I have this experience to share and dwell on in the future. I want to incorporate this practice into my daily life or at least perform it weekly.

To be honest waking up and getting an early start to your day is the best way to live a long and healthy life. So, waking up early and going to the temple was not difficult. The only thing that was negative was driving so far to the temple on my day off. I live such a busy life with school and work that it gets hard to even create a little time to spend on myself.

When we started off the sitting meditation, I liked how we increased the time after every meditation session. It gave me a good idea of how long I can sit in meditation for and what my mind and body are capable of tolerating. Anywhere from around 3-5 minutes I feel was a good balance of time for me to practice meditation. In that time, I could truly concentrate on my breath and forget about the rest of the world and my stresses.

When we started the standing meditation, I liked how we started off by stretching and relaxing our bodies. The standing meditation was probably my least favorite practice of the five that we practiced. I felt a little uncomfortable and because of that unpleasant emotions and thoughts were running through my head the entire time.

The walking meditation was my most favorite form of practice. I love to go on walks and just relax so that's why I liked this way of practice. Walking around in the temple and focusing on my breathing helped me relax and put my mind at ease. All the stresses and emotional that were running through my head had disappeared.

My second favorite form of meditation was the body scan. I was extremely tired that day so I think I used the body scan as a power nap practice, which I know is not the intention of this meditation. I

4 Hours of Mindfulness

started off by focusing on my breathing but then slowly started falling asleep. I have no idea how long we did the body scan for. If you know how to perfectly perform this practice I think it's a good way to meditate. For me, I feel like I would have to give some time and patience to this meditation to perform it correctly and learn from it.

Just like everyone I also liked the eating meditation. Like we talked about in the western culture it is common to talk while eating. Even in my culture as a Pakistani it is common to eat and create a conversation with everyone around you, but in my religion, it is said to eat in silence. Even when someone approaches you while eating and says hello, it is common to invite that person to eat with you rather than answer their greeting.

I feel like the 4 hours of mindfulness practice had a very strong and positive effect on my thinking and daily life. I felt so much more relaxed and ready to take on the rest of the day or even the coming week. I felt happier and upbeat the rest of the day.

I have in fact learned from that day and have started incorporating walking meditation into my daily life. Even if I'm just walking from my car into the office building or to my classes. I feel more at ease and relaxed.

I have experienced nothing but benefits and a more realistic and healthy lifestyle by incorporating mindfulness into my life.

Mindfulness T/TH
10/24/16

Extra Credit: Half-Day Meditation Experience

My experience with you and our class last Saturday at the temple was such an enriching experience. I'm so glad you gave us this opportunity to come and do longer sessions of meditation; I wish it lasted longer. When we first started meditating, it felt different because before, we would usually do it in class. Doing it inside the temple, I felt more peaceful and able to focus more. The first couple minutes is usually the hardest to settle my mind, but after the third minute, it got easier. At first when you asked if we could feel or hear our heartbeat, I didn't at all. I didn't realize you could get to a level where you could even do that; I thought that was so cool. So during the third and fourth minutes, I allowed myself to fully focus by quieting my mind and just going with the flow and follow my breathing as you suggested. Eventually I could feel my pulse while following my breathing. While I was in a deeper meditation, it felt like I was a small entity exploring the vastness of my being. I felt very very big, and very very small at the same time. I felt like a child again. I guess that's where the beginner's mind comes from. I felt like I was seeing things with new eyes again. Especially during the walking/body scan meditation, I felt like I was a child walking around and recognizing all the sensations I have when I'm just walking. Like the way my toes feel when they touch the ground, the way my knee bends and how little effort it takes for me to keep my balance. I watched the sunshine dance through the windows and tried to walk towards the light on the ground. Your meditation guidance was very enjoyable for that because I felt like I was in rhythm with your voice. I felt like I was seeing and feeling with beginner's mind and that felt really cool.

When we started lunch, I was really hungry, and usually when I'm really hungry, I'm susceptible to mindless eating. I'm really glad we were talking about eating mindfully at lunch because it made me eat more slowly and think about all the wonderful flavors in my mouth. When I first took a bite of melon and strawberry with a mindful intent, it tasted so delicious, especially because I was eating it slowly and savoring every last bite. It tasted so sweet and tart and juicy. It reminded me of how life can be. Sweet, delicious, nourishing, it felt like eating with love and care and attention. I want to be able to do this all the time when I eat. I love eating slowly not just because the food ends up tasting better, but because I get to actually be present in the moment and enjoy what's right in front of me, and I honestly think the intent you have when you're eating can affect the way your body processes it. I felt more energetic after eating in a mindful state of being. It was one of the best college field trips ever and I will take this memory away with me for the rest of my life.

Half-Day of Mindfulness Practice

I performed the half day of mindfulness in my dorm room undisturbed for 4 hours this past weekend. This practice couldn't come at a more crucial moment in my life because I am experiencing a lot of hardship right now. I first did 1 hour of sitting meditation, then 1 hour of walking meditation, 1 hour of mindful eating, and finally another 1 hour of sitting meditation.

The first hour of meditation was incredibly difficult for me because I found myself becoming anxious about having to do four total hours of mindfulness. I have never been formally mindful for more than 1 hour at a time, and even that is hard, so an additional 3 hours on top of that scared me. During that first hour, I could never actually become immersed in concentration. I was trying to force myself to be calm so in doing so I was not calm. I was very fidgety and wanted to stop because I didn't think I could do it anymore, but I pushed on regardless of that fact. When the timer went off I was so glad the meditation was over and just wanted to relax (I had stressed myself out in my attempt to not be stressed)

Once I set the timer for the hour of walking meditation, I got excited because in my past experiences walking meditation goes by much faster than sitting. About maybe 15 minutes in I started noticing that I was getting calm, but I also noticed that every time I noticed myself being calm, I would no longer be calm – I thought to myself that concentration is shy because anytime you look at concentration it disappears! I resolved to let myself get distracted with the concentration, but of course doing so only led to more stress for me. I did notice I was more relaxed because all that energy I spent trying to concentrate exhausted my mind and once I 'gave up/let go' I was able to enjoy the walking. Once I started enjoying the moment, the timer went off!

I have a problem with eating until I am super full as if I was starving, so during this next hour of mindful eating, I tried to make sure that I ate as slow as humanly possible and not worry about my hunger. Doing so proved to be easier than I thought—considering I just spent 2 hours trying to be calm and relaxed. I was able to taste the food in my mouth. I could feel the texture of the food transform from hard and rough to soft and smooth from my chewing. I set aside an hour for this portion because I wanted to make sure I did everything in my power to let myself eat slowly.

During the last hour of sitting meditation, I was able to become calm very fast! By this point, I was so tired from the first 3 hours of doing nothing that I just fell right into doing nothing like a pro—in my eyes at least. Before I knew it, I was drifting off into the feeling I had never felt before, but my noticing it was bad because as soon I noticed it I attached to it and wanted to see more of it. Of course trying to see more just made me see less, so I just went back to following my breath. I wish I had set the timer for like 2 hours because when it went off, I felt like I had just begun meditating for the first time in my life. But when the timer went off I was so distracted with the assignments I had to do that I couldn't go back into that mind state.

I hated doing this at first but after the walking meditation I started enjoying myself. As I am writing this, it has only been one day since I have done the practice, so I am not sure yet of any lasting results, but I am going to try and implement more walking and eating meditation in my life because I benefitted from doing them.

Reflection

Initially, I didn't know what to expect from this half day of mindfulness practice. Our class met at 8:30am. When you walk in, you are supposed to remove your shoes. It is a sign of respect to remove your shoes and my interpretation is that it's rude to show Buddha the soles of your feet. Not only is it a sign of respect to remove your shoes, but it also helps keep the temple clean because shoes track in a lot of dirt and germs. While waiting for others to show up, we sat around a table and drank tea made by members of the temple. To my surprise, the tiny cups we drank out of made me more aware of how much of the tea I was drinking. We quietly talked and relaxed until everyone showed up. I learned that Kung-Fu classes are taught downstairs at the temple. There was foam flooring for the classes.

After majority of our class arrived, we went upstairs to a room with wooden floors and a beautiful shrine. To my surprise, it was very colorful and decorated. When I think of a place of worship, I think of it to be very simple. This was not simple, it was beautiful, elaborate, and well thought out. We were handed cushions to sit on for our sitting meditation. I really liked meditating for the hour that we did, however what made it so doable was that we broke it into segments of five minutes and then you take a break. Doing mindfulness meditation with breaks allows you to deeply focus and to really take in the benefits of meditation. If we were to meditate for a whole hour without any breaks, I think that my mind would have wandered a lot. While practicing mindfulness meditation, I counted my breath, which is something I learned in class. Counting your breath allows you to focus on your breath while in my interpretation, given a task to count. Having to count doesn't allow my mind to wander from my breathing because I can't lose count. In between the hour of sitting meditation, one of my classmates showed us some yoga

poses while we stretched out our legs. These poses were nice because they were not strenuous on your body.

Next, we moved onto walking meditation. Before we began mindful walking meditation, we were taught to evaluate how we step. Being mindful of how we step showed us where we put our weight when walking. Walking meditation can be done in many different ways and is usually done outside. The purpose of walking meditation is to focus on the physical experience of walking. If your mind starts to wander, bring your attention back to walking. Notice how your arms swing by your side and what part of the sole of your foot touches the floor first and last.

After doing walking meditation, we moved onto the body scan. Traditionally, a body scan is done laying down flat on your back. We were able to lay down on cushions that we also sat on for the sitting meditation. We were guided through our body scan by our professor. During the body scan, you start at either your toes or your head and you scan each region of your body individually. You focus on what sensations you are feeling- both good and bad. It's easy to let your mind wander or to fall asleep because you are so relaxed, but you should try to focus on what sensations your body is feeling and to listen to your body. After the body scan, we went downstairs to our potluck where we would practice mindful eating.

I did not stay for the mindful eating because I did not feel well, so I researched mindful eating. Mindful eating is not a diet, it's about being aware of what you are eating and what sensations you experience while eating. You can observe the texture of your food, how it smells, if it's hot or cold, sweet or salty, etc. Mindfully select what you want to eat, it's also stressed to eat only until you are 80% full, never over eat. Mindfully eating helps you not over eat, and if you are being mindful, you may make healthier meal choices. When you are being aware of

selecting your food, you may consider where the food came from, who grew it, how healthy it is, or how many calories it might have.

What I have benefitted most from this class is teaching myself to stop, close my eyes, and take a few breaths and focus on my breath when I am in a very stressful situation. This has really helped ground me and connect myself. I am now able to stop and tell myself that this is happening and to accept it as it is in a calm manner. This has made me more aware of what stresses me out, and I have developed better coping skills. Once I am calmer, I can move on and continue doing what I was doing.

I was very hesitant at first to meditate for four hours. I thought that it would be very difficult and time would move very slowly. I was completely wrong. It was not nearly as hard as I thought it would be, and time moved very fast. It was much easier to be able to focus and meditate when the time was broken up. However, I did have some difficulty with falling asleep during the meditations. With my narcolepsy I have trouble staying awake during the day and take Adderall to help me stay awake. I usually take my Adderall before class, so when I meditate I often feel my heart racing and my eyes fluttering while they are shut. So, I knew that when going to this meditation it would be in my best interest to not take my medication. It was very difficult waking up that early in order to attend (8:30 am is very early for me)! I was doing fine at first staying awake during the breathing meditation, but once the time became five minutes I found myself asleep. I also struggled with the standing meditation and the body scan. With the standing meditation, I felt myself losing my balance as I started to nod off. I also nodded off during the body scan. I was a little embarrassed by this, but was extremely happy that I was able to hear the alarm go off and so no one noticed that I was struggling to stay awake. After we completed all the different kinds of meditation I did feel a little more at peace. I know that in order to feel the true effects of meditation one has to practice it daily. I have been slacking on my day-to-day meditation practice, so I knew that I would not come out of this experience a changed woman. I was scared that I could not do it, but I was wrong. I was more scared to try it than I was of the actual experience. Definitely one of the hardest parts was sitting with my legs crossed. That became uncomfortable really quickly.

I thoroughly enjoyed the mindful eating, I eat a lot of meals by myself, so I'm used to the quiet while I eat. Although I do sit and eat alone a lot, I do play on my smart phone. Now, if I went out to dinner with a few of my closest friends I do not think I, or any of them could practice mindful eating. We would want to talk to each other and enjoy our meal collectively, not individually. I think that this one would be hardest for most Westerners to practice. We were raised to talk to one another at the dinner table, so this old tradition would be hard to break. My family was really into family dinners throughout the school week. It was our time to check in with one another and to share what we learned at school, or what we went through that day. Overall, I found it to be an incredible experience and am so happy that I attended it.

Mindfulness

Practice October 27,

2016

October 22, 2016 Mindfulness Practice

Honestly, I didn't know what to expect as I woke up on 7:15 AM on a Saturday morning. Mostly, my Saturdays consist of sleeping in until 11-12 in the afternoon and going through the rest of the day with an easy mindset. Since my routine was changed with this unexpected drive to an unknown place in Sugarland about thirty minutes from campus I came to the event with low expectations. That was a mistake. I never felt anything so enlightening in my life. When I went to the room and we had started doing the meditation time on the mats in small increments, perhaps it was the temple itself, but I was more aware of how to calm my mind and get into the mode. The unpleasantness of waking up so early in the morning for the 8:30 AM session suddenly did not seem to be a hindrance. I embraced the atmosphere of the temple room and enjoyed listening to the professor's voice. It seemed to hold more strength and power rather than the stuffy classroom on campus. I had a sole purpose. To meditate. It was different than thinking about what class I have to go to next or going through formulas for my exam. It was easier to be more attentive to meditating to increase emotional stability, regulate levels of stress, and enjoy the present moment as it is.

I enjoyed the full body meditation the most. When we were sitting down on the mats I found it rather difficult to keep my back and neck straight. I naturally hunch over, so due to that habit, I would find myself leaning forward and my meditation would break focus because I tried to correct myself. Luckily, when we went to full body scan, I was

able to be fully engaged. It was an amazing experience that I will carry within me. I could feel every sensation and point of my body when the professor was explaining how to meditate lying down. It was both an awakening and soothing experience that instantly made the day better. What was cool about this half-day class was that we were able to actually interact and practice everything that we write in our daily reports. Rather than just words of how mindfulness can impact you, we actually were able to exercise it and know how to start doing it routinely. I was impressed of the results that I had felt after we finished the meditation and went to eat lunch. I could feel my body ease into a state of peace. When the professor insisted we have mindfulness while eating too it was another aspect that I had never realized before. As I sat silently eating my food, I became more aware of the way the food tasted, how others would try to talk due to social norm of mealtime, and the pacing of my chewing. It was familiar and yet foreign. When I'm with my family I usually don't talk during meals because my sister usually dominates the conversation. However, when my sister is up at school and I'm the only one at home, I feel like I have to fill the gap she left. Mealtime is a time to bond with conversation in my home, but the experience of eating silently at the temple will always remain a nice memory.

Lastly, mindfulness has impacted me personally and helped me look at my issues with a new perspective. Whenever I am upset, I try to calm down and rationally assess the situation before saying words that I would later regret. Mindfulness has made me become more aware of any issues I may have and be able to handle them with a clear mind.

Mindfulness: Half-Day Practicum

(Response below roughly follows the order of the prompt on Blackboard:

1. Good/Bad thoughts 2. Feelings & Emotions 3. Challenge/Difficulties 4. Class Information and experience 5. Benefits & Side Effects)

During our experience at the temple, I didn't notice any particular negative thoughts or emotions.

Among my "good thoughts" would be the things that I liked, such as having exposure to a period of time for each type of meditative/mindful practice, in which I found the guidance to be very helpful. I found the body scan to be particularly instructive. For the mindful eating portion of our practice, I noticed that there were several people that, though their attention turned toward the flavors and textures of the food, were still compelled to discuss their observations throughout the meal with each other, either due to the strength of their social eating habits or because of a discomfort with silence. Our discussion about vegetarianism, and how it connects to karma, was illuminating to me.

The primary feelings and emotions that visited me were a great deal of joy, peace, and gratitude for the opportunity to engage in this practice with my classmates at such a lovely and welcoming temple. I noted a small feeling that I wanted to stay later and keep meditating and talking with everyone, but allowed the feeling to pass, rather than clinging to it. I learned that I notice the benefits of meditation swiftly, and have since paid more attention to making time for that and short mindfulness exercises on a regular basis. The entire experience was calming and serene, but what stood out was the lightness and inner peace and abiding joy that stuck with me for the rest of the day.

I did experience a few challenges as I experienced body aches in some positions, and tend to have a high likelihood of falling to sleep very quickly if I get comfortable. I am trying a variety of techniques to work on this, such as: getting a little extra sleep, keeping my eyes slightly open,

and becoming more aware of when the feeling of sleep is approaching and noting what makes it come or go.

I believe that the effect of our class had a large impact on the practicum, and am glad that we had the practicum close to the half way point of the semester. The information from our classes prepared me to be invested in the outcome of the day, because of our discussion of the value of the practice. Since we had also had discussion of the method and myths about meditation, I was aware of how to get in the right state of mind and to place my attention on the correct things. In a more general sense, it has also been very helpful to have the diverse experience of my classmates to hear and witness during our discussions, especially when someone asks a question that had not occurred to me to ask.

The class and the half day of meditation have done a great deal in helping me to realize what a massive difference mindfulness practice makes in nearly every area of my life. I am investing in a dedicated meditation space in my home and am considering joining a temple or group that will help me keep building my practice and better habits. I am also deeply grateful that I appear to be developing friendships with other mindfulness practitioners that are willing to accompany me to meditation classes and who would encourage me to keep meditating.

I recognize that I am more of the person that I wish to be, and feel that I am at my best when my everyday life is infused with mindfulness. I am calmer, more patient, kinder, more creative, and tend to remember more and sleep better when I have that inner stillness that I perceive whenever I am not under the influence of counterproductive amounts of worry or anxiety. As a direct result of the half day mindfulness, I am also looking for the opportunity to participate in a 10-day retreat, if time and finances allow, after I graduate in a few weeks.

Mindfulness Practicum

Over the course of the past year, mindfulness has become one of the most defining characteristics of my life - both due to my interpersonal relationships and the impact of the material covered in this class. One of the most significant events that has helped shape who I am becoming was the group mindfulness session our class experienced together in mid-October. Although my journey towards inner peace and stillness started many months beforehand, utilizing the theories and practices I have learned in a practical group setting wound up being the best way for me to make strides in understanding myself.

After finishing up the previous fall semester's Introduction to Buddhism course, I decided I needed to do a little soul searching in order to figure out where exactly I and my beliefs fit within the scope of Buddhist worldviews. I spent the spring months talking with people from all walks of life, accumulating and trading various books that now overflow off of my little bookshelf dedicated to spiritual literature - along with about a million assorted textbooks the bookstore doesn't seem to want to buy back. I have books written in Chinese, books filled with pictures, and books dedicated to spiritual poetry; if it's a book about some form of religion, it probably sits on my bookcase. As fascinating as these pieces proved to be, however, they all seemed to approach religion from a cultural standpoint; over half of my books pertain to Buddhist practices, and more often than not, individuals in the history of the tradition are discussed in lieu of spiritual tenets. Many of the traditions and stories that were perpetuated in these various literatures were unique to the sociocultural groups that practiced them. I found suspending my disbelief enough to wholeheartedly believe these teachings to be far too difficult for me; I have attempted to do this before with other religions, but I was never successful. It

seems that I am just not meant to assimilate into new cultures; instead, I must appreciate them from afar.

When I enrolled in this class, I was instantly intrigued with the subject matter. After having delved into the dogmas of various world religions, I was familiar with mindfulness in a religious capacity, yet wanted to learn more about it in a secular sense. This semester has shown me that I do, in fact, believe in the effectiveness of many different mindfulness practices - maybe organized religion just isn't my thing. The afternoon of sitting, walking and eating meditations I enjoyed as a part of the class really solidified for me that I *do* want to cultivate a stronger sense of self-awareness in my everyday life. My back started hurting towards the end of the practice because I'm far too uncomfortable sitting directly on the floor for an hour straight, but as a whole I walked away from the afternoon feeling satisfied, refreshed and focused on myself and my state of being. The environment created by my fellow students was warm and welcoming, and I absolutely feel like that was the largest contributing factor to the positivity of my experience.

Since the beginning of the semester, I have made an effort to consciously sit at least once a day - and have actually done it on most days. I've discovered that scheduling a time to sit stimulates anxious thoughts in me - especially when I miss the time slot - and that I just have to allow the moment to flow into my day organically. I've learned to forgive myself when my mind wanders and to accept that I may not always accomplish things in the way I initially thought I would accomplish them. I've adapted my interactions with others to be more empathetic, and even though my dad says I can be a little condescending with my "don't carry so much anger" spiel, I've seen the impact my change in attitude has on the more receptive members of my family. I've learned that my internal thoughts are just that - thoughts, not my identity - and that a

few moments of present clarity are all it takes to quell some of the visceral emotions these thoughts can cause. I've started to accept that although patience has always been slow to come for me, it is simply a muscle that needs to be exercised - and I am starting to see small changes every day.

This class has made my path to stillness a little bit straighter, and I will - hopefully! - remember the things I've learned this semester long enough to teach them to someone else. I want to thank you for giving me the tools I needed to feel more fulfilled and appreciative as a whole. If you ever teach this course again, I won't hesitate to recommend it.

Half-Day of Mindfulness Practice Reflection Report

This is a reflection of my experience at the half-day mindfulness retreat. Therefore, I am going to exhibit an amount of candor regarding the experience and reflect on that.

There is a large difference between learning about mindfulness in class, and practicing it in a four-hour retreat. At first I was extremely nervous because I was afraid of not doing well enough. I drove to the temple mentally preparing myself to be an overachiever and try to get as much out of the retreat as I possible could. Unfortunately, my composure shattered when I arrived at the temple and was trying to center myself in my vehicle when a classmate knocked on my window and scared me.

As I walked into the temple I had to remind myself to have a beginner's mind. Reminding myself of this simple little trait taken from MBSR really helped me relax and calm down. I am usually high strung with a lot of energy to spare; I can rarely sit completely still. Thus, I knew this retreat was going to be a challenged for me. I stopped caring though. I wasn't going to let myself get caught up in my emotions. I was going to experience the retreat simply as it is without worrying.

During the retreat I experienced a whole host good and bad thoughts, comfortable and uncomfortable sensations, as well as pleasant and unpleasant emotions. During the sitting meditation I began to experience a burning sensation in my back. I could have sat in a chair, but I am much to stubborn, so I sat through the pain and tried to focus on my breathing. Focusing on my breathing really helped me

get through the pain. The sitting meditation really helped get me to a calm mindset that was maintained during the rest of the retreat. During the walking meditation I felt slightly awkward because I wasn't particularly sure that I was doing it right. I tried to focus on my breathing and the sensations I felt as I walked around the room, but my mind was more focused on not running into someone. My favorite part was the body scan since it allowed me to relax both my body and mind while simultaneously directing my attention toward separate areas of my body. However, the most difficult part of the entire retreat was the mindful eating. I did my best to be silent and focus on the food that was in front of me, but there was an overloading of my sensations. All of the food was so amazing, and good food makes me really happy. By the end of the retreat I was extremely relaxed and peaceful, and it was a lot better than I expected.

I am by no means excelling at practicing mindfulness, but knowing about it and having the tools of mindfulness I am provided a different way to deal with difficulties and challenges. Given that I am already prone to anxiety I face a lot of emotional distress in my daily life. In particular, I have a very large workload from school and this generates a lot of distress. Mindfulness has taught me to be present in the moment, and be aware of the work I am doing. It has also taught me to do one thing at a time, and not get caught up on the stuff going on around me.

Unfortunately, I also endure emotional distress due to my relationship and my family. However, mindfulness has also taught me to take a moment to breathe and center myself, to try and be understanding and compassionate, and to utilize tools such as cognitive defusion from ACT.

The amount of information from the class provided such as the materials, daily practices, and the mindfulness retreat have affected much of my life. Some of this has been previously stated, but there are a few other things that are worth mentioning. I definitely find myself realizing that there are moments where I need to center myself and be more present. Additionally, I have a naturally short temper. Therefore, I am really impatient. The information conveyed in class helps me deal with my short temper most of the time. I have also definitely tried introducing other people to mindfulness; especially ones who I believe require some sort of mindful practice to stay afloat. Some of them don't even listen, but at least I try.

There are a few main benefits and side affects to practicing mindfulness that I have experienced and recognized that are of great importance. The first one has been stated implicitly in this essay; a general decrease in the overall anxiety and emotional distress that I experience due to the fact that through mindfulness I am more equipped to handle stressful situations. The absolute and most important effect mindfulness has had on my life is that it has drastically improved my prayer life. As stated previously, I have a lot of excess energy. Mindfulness provides a means for me to calm down and focus on my prayer. Certain prayers within my faith tradition require a degree of focus and meditation in order to reap the full benefit from performing these prayers. As such, I have experienced an increase in the fruitfulness of my prayer life.

It is my hope that this reflection depicts the impact that this class, the retreat, and all the material provided has had on my life.

Mindfulness, this semester, has been an awesome experience. Before coming into mindfulness class, I hardly knew what to expect. Mindfulness can be a quite vague topic, but even the layman can master the practice of mindfulness.

Visiting the temple on Saturday was an awesome feeling and vibe for me. The atmosphere was quite welcoming. Upon arrival, I expected an atmosphere of peace, and I believe that expectation was met. I knew that for almost everyone who would be there, it would be their first time so I was not nervous. Actually, by practicing mindfulness I am learning to embrace and accept fear and anxiety. I have learned that it is these two negative emotions that keep people from being successful.

When fear and anxiety, are mixed with other strong emotions such as anger, the person may act very irrational, and they may even have regret after the case. The mindful walking was a great experience for me. It was interesting to see everyone really focused-in on the moment, and trying to make their walking pleasurable. I tend to try to focus on the walking when I am walking myself, but you don't really meet a lot of people that way.

I had no thoughts I would consider bad. These days I look at a thought just for what it is...literally. Whether good or whatever the case may be, I do my best to be merely an observer of that thought, not getting caught up in the thought itself, but learning to embrace it, and by completely embracing that thought, I find that they just do not hurt as much.

When practicing mindfulness on Saturday, I noticed that many students were able to cross their legs. Though I do not know if they were actually comfortable, they did seem like they were so that is good. On the other hand, I was not able to hold the sitting leg position, in a comfortable manner. Instead, I prefer to sit and meditate quietly.

Feelings, thoughts, and emotions are very dynamic as we meditate. I love knowing that I can experience how I would feel if some situation I had thought about were to happen. I am now understanding the science, and I am feeling the changes brought about from this practice of mindful meditation.

Mindfulness has been a great asset to my life, and now that I am gaining greater understanding, and feeling the benefits, I try to practice being mindful at least three times a day. Being an entrepreneur and student, I come across more information than an analyst because the business world is constantly changing. Mindfulness gives me an escape from all worry, and I can re-center and get back focused.

The class materials and daily practice have helped me. I appreciate that we have the articles to read. It allows me to explain to others the scientific benefits that mindfulness practice can offer. The four hours of mindfulness practice was awesome, and so was the food. My personal life and relationships are enhancing everyday. Since I have been getting serious with my practice, I realize that I am having lower cognitive reactivity towards others, which increases my tolerance levels and helps keep me emotionally stable and motivated. Blessings.

11/9/16

Mindfulness

Observation on Half-Day Mindfulness Meditation Practice

On Saturday October 22nd, our class met for a half-day mindfulness practice. For the first hour, we practiced different meditations--starting with one minute--building up to five minutes. During this hour, we counted our breaths and observed differences in each practice. I learned to not stress the breath and to not focus on the breath pattern. Personally, I've approached the practice of yoga differently. As a dancer, at first I was resentful of yoga as a physical practice, because it wasn't coming naturally to me, and I wanted to do every position turned out—like my training had taught me. It was frustrating not being good at yoga and the stresses of that didn't make it enjoyable for me. However, before our class started this semester, I made a commitment to myself to approach yoga differently. To look at the practice with an open mind and more of a mental practice, than a physical one. Since then, I've really enjoyed the few yoga classes I've taken and am looking forward to more. However, I felt like I was getting good at breathing and learned the breathing I had been so cautiously practicing was not the same breathing patterns we need to practice during mindfulness meditation, and that was also frustrating to me. This will be an ongoing practice for me, and I'm grateful I now know to be aware of my breath in my daily routine.

The next hour, we spent on body scans and walking meditation. During our body scans, we laid down and was led through the process of being aware of your own body. Aware of the pressure between our eyes, our fingertips and breathing. Our focus was on our spacial surroundings and being aware of ourselves and area during the directed walking meditation. I

was familiar with this practice, but not in the sense of mindfulness. I had done this with my own students, but it was a good reminder to do it more often with the focus on mindfulness meditation. I have also done this in improv dance classes, where it was for dance training and not mindfulness practice. It's essentially the same thing for the same result, and was excited to make the connection and have the experience again.

For the last hour, we ate a delicious and healthy meal prepared by monks and learned about practicing mindful eating. Something particular that stood out to me was the fact that mindful eating is a quiet activity--to be done without talking. While you are eating, you're to observe and appreciate the food and taste of it. This is so different than our practices in America. Eating in America is very much a social event, but being aware of mindfulness eating will follow me and though I'm not promising to from here out making my eating experience a quiet one, I do want to take the time and be more mindful about what I'm eating, and also appreciate what I'm eating. Especially as an American, I feel like we take this for granted—I know I'm always going to have three meals a day—plus some, and so many people in our world don't have that guarantee. If anything, learning about mindfulness eating makes me grateful for that, and will teach me to be more patient when I eat and appreciate everything that goes into my body. Maybe that also means less breakfast tacos and McDonalds—one can hope!

On Saturday, October 22nd 2016, I had a mindfulness practice class in Phat Giac Temple, Gaines Rd, Sugar Land, TX 77498. It was a quite cold and sunny day. In this short reflection, I will describe my experiences about that practice day.

I came early in that morning. I remember that I was the first one to come. Then, my classmates arrived. We sat together with our professor and drank hot green tea. Then, we began to practice mindfulness. First at all, we practiced breathing mindfulness. We sat in a circle. Each person sat on a small dark cushion. We practiced breathing in one minute. We counted the breaths. Each person had different numbers of breaths. It was easy to practice because we followed the instructions of our professor. We did practice for several times and then moved to practice breathing in two minutes. That time, I thought it was better. To me, I felt that the longer time, the more focus I did. We also practiced for a few times and tried to increase the minute. We just breathed and tried not to think about anything. I tried to feel the body sensations, temperature, and my feelings. I even could be aware of the feelings of my legs, and my toes. I did feel peaceful and calm. In an environment that everyone were so mindful and serious, I felt that we were blessed so much. After breathing mindfulness, we stood up and did some sketching activities. Then, we practiced walking mindfulness. We walked around the room, in our own ways, in various directions, in different speed. When we were walking, we knew our breaths, or body sensations, even the feelings of our hands, fingers, feet, toes. Sometimes when we walk, we do not realize the feelings of our body; but in that day, we did realize. It was not difficult for us to realize but only when we

concentrated on ourselves, could we know that. We tried not to think about anything when we were walking. We knew that we walked "in the present moment." We did not think about the past nor the future. We just enjoyed walking, like we were in heaven with nothing to worry about. Now I think that it was a sacred moment. We just paid attention on walking without talking nor doing any other activities. Next, we practiced a method called "body scan." We laid down on some or a cushion(s). We followed the instructions of our professor. We closed our eyes. The key point was to focus on the body and feelings, and not to let our minds wander around. If we had had any thoughts, we would have let them go, not attached to them. I think that the body scan method is very useful for people who have sleeping problems since when I was practicing, I felt that I was easily falling asleep. After the body - scan time, we had a mindful lunch. We did eat our lunch in mindfulness thanked to the gentle reminders of our professor. The important thing was that eating mindfulness helped us to recognized how blessed we were.

In conclusion, the practice day was very useful for me. I did learn a lot of lessons. I knew how important mindfulness was in my life. I hope I will practice mindfulness more frequently.

RELS 3396

November 30, 2016

Professor Thich Hang Dat

Report/Reflection

My overall thoughts of the mindfulness half day practice we participated in are positive. I remember leaving afterwards and feelings like it was still early morning, when it was almost one in the afternoon. I had to remind myself that I had been at the temple for hours because the experience did not seem long, time passed quickly. That is a great thought, because one of the main challenges I face in practicing meditation, is the time constraints I have in my day. This half day made me realize there was little really standing in my way in finding time to practice meditation regularly. I also liked that the temple felt like a home to me. I often am at home when I meditate and look for a safe, quiet space to be alone. Once we started to meditate, I forgot where we were, I can use this same concept at any location. I learned that meditating at my home should not be a problem amongst the noise and distractions, since I achieved it at the temple.

I did in the beginning of sitting on the ground feel a little uncomfortable, my feet fell asleep and it made my legs fall asleep too. I noticed myself focusing on my legs and feet several times throughout the meditation and had to bring myself back. I did really enjoy seeing the children join us, this made me very calm because they were so young. I felt like if the children could do it, so could I. Once I stopped focusing on everything new around me, I started to really feel one with myself. There was a peacefulness around me that I hadn't felt recently. I knew going into that day, and for days before I was carrying around a lot of hurt and sadness on my

back, and although I haven't gotten rid of it, I think the meditation helped me really see it and focus on the emotion.

I think overall the class came at the right time in my life, I needed a way to find peace and I think I'm doing a good job of working on it. Although, I know there will always be hurt and pain, I can see it now, and look at it from a different perspective. My faith has always been very strong and I know in my Christian heart I have a vision of Heaven, which has brought me peace when I think of my loss but it does not help in my healing or moving on with my daily life. I think the combination of the peace of knowing my mother's passing has placed her in a better place, and the teachings of meditation have helped to heal me. I also think mediation has helped me in my prayer and conversation with my Lord.

Something else I took from the lectures, is when you explained how you could take a shower and just let the day fall off you. I can vision the water washing away things from my body and life from the day and down into the drain; it has really helped me. I do this often, and even shared the technique with my family members. I have learned to incorporate mindfulness into the daily tasks I do regularly. I also think I had a form of mindful eating before because I've always been a slow eater and enjoyed dining alone, but it was just a preference of mine. Now, I have learned how to enhance the experience for a benefit as well as a preference.