

Mindful Consumption—Exploring Why What You Eat, Drink, and Otherwise Consume Matters

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

The precepts are fundamental ethical guidelines for sane and joyful living. Commonsense tells us that if we ignore them, our life is filled with confusion and unhappiness. If we try to live in accordance, we cultivate thoughts and behaviors that promote integrity and well-being. The following questions invite you to explore and perhaps expand your understanding of how the precept of mindful consumption applies to your life. You are invited to consider if there are areas where you might make changes to enhance the quality of your life and, by extension, that of those around you.

There are many renderings of each precept. A traditional Theravadan rendering of the precept of mindful consumption, is:

I undertake the training rule to abstain from fermented drink that causes heedlessness.

Our contemporary society is vastly more complex, with far more incentives for heedlessness, than in ancient times. A contemporary rendering of this precept by Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh expands the wording as follows:

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming... I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicants, or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain T.V. programs, magazines, books, films and conversations...

QUESTIONS TO HELP PROMOTE YOUR EXPLORATION

1. How does this precept show up in your life?
2. What does it mean to you?
3. How do you view the issue of using of alcohol versus complete abstinence?
4. Thich Nhat Hanh's rendering of this precept points beyond substances we usually consider intoxicants and notes that we can imbibe in an unwholesome way a host of other things. What intoxicants do you regularly allow into your life?
5. Is pornography an intoxicant?

6. Reflecting on your own “diet” with regard to what you take into your body, mind and heart, consider what changes you might make in your life that would enhance your relations with your family, friends, and the wider community? What changes would enhance your relationship with yourself? How would such changes deepen your spiritual practice?

7. What do you understand an addictive relationship to be? In terms of this precept, can such relationships be considered an improper diet? Do such relationships exist in your life? What changes in your relationship/s might you be called on to make if you deeply practiced this precept? Changing our patterns is never easy. What challenges would you face in instituting changes in your life?

8. What are your thoughts on medical marijuana and other mind-altering substances that may possibly help with pain, depression, anxiety, PTSD and breaking addiction?

9. There is a research revival on psilocybin and the effects of mystical experiences that lead to a sense of the interconnectedness and unity. Do you think such drug-induced experiences are consistent with this precept?

10. How does your practice of this precept benefit others?