

**Mindful Leadership – Another Perspective And Approach To Current World  
Crisis By Examining The Vietnamese Buddhist Monks In America’s Leadership  
Practices And Their Contributions To Society**

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**Contexts of the Research**

Given the continuing state of global affairs, apparent is a lack of a spiritual dimension (moral and ethical) in leadership. Whether in business, politics, family, or education we see the lack of deep spiritual leadership contributing to negative consequences caused by unethical or unenlightened leaders. Both Eastern and Western societies may lack an in-depth understanding of how the spiritual leadership practices of Vietnamese Buddhist monks might be models of moral and ethical leadership. Considering the potential for their spiritual leadership to be transformative in global and local contexts, we are reminded of the Thich Nhat Hanh’s wisdom:

*Whether or not the twenty-first century becomes a century of spirituality depends on our capacity of building community. Without a community, we will become victims of despair. We need each other. We need to congregate, to bring together our wisdom, our insight, and our compassion.*

Regionally, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) seeks to create a peaceful community within its member nations, acting in a spirit of cooperation to settle differences and disputes through peaceful processes. Seeking to create a caring society, ASEAN nations seek the common good for the people, one typified by well-being, inclusivity, and harmony. Those mutual purposes may be informed by the spiritual leadership practices of Vietnamese Buddhist monks revealed through this research project.

**Contextualizing the Need for Spiritual Leadership**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people appear to be “heading outward” rather than focusing on their inner lives. Consumed with running errands, devising and completing work-related tasks, dreaming of that better house or faster car, they are distracted by the temptations of material gains rather than concerned about the sensations of spiritual rewards and inner peace. The mass media tend to favor reports of individuals making dubious moral and ethical decisions that not only affect themselves but also those around them. This lack of the spiritual dimension—from the individual to the larger community, from public schools to financial institutions, from corporate interest groups to the politicians who ultimately make policy—has become a major factor contributing to a lack of ethical action by our leaders. Furthermore, recent studies, such as those by Bowen and Heath (2005) and McDaniel (2004) found that many corporate sectors collapsed due to the lack of moral and ethical values in the decision-making process.

Taking the time to reflect on actions and, thereby, begin to understand the impact of leadership on the greater good (in the larger society) seems to be severely lacking. The practice of mindfulness, fully being present in the here and now is, therefore, needed to make more mindful decisions. Buddhism, Zen, mindfulness, and Buddhist monks are no longer strange to the American mainstream culture. According to Gontovnick (2000), Gregory (2001), Gvosdev (2002), Asian immigrants conveyed Buddhism to America's shores as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to Fong (1998), Asians came to America for many reasons such as the need to emigrate from socially or politically insecure homelands, for financial opportunities abroad that offered the chance of helping them provide for their families back home, for military service abroad, and sometimes for the simple need to reunite with family. Chiefly, though, most immigrants came because of the aforementioned political and economic factors in their own countries. Many of these immigrants were Buddhists. Furthermore, according to Asai and Williams (1999), Japanese Buddhists arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1913. In addition, Thich (2007) determined that Vietnamese Buddhists arrived in the United States in the late 1950s, and their numbers grew rapidly through the many waves of political and economic refugees after the Vietnam War ended on April 30, 1975.

Thich, Q. M. (2007) and Nguyen (2008) suggested Vietnamese Buddhist monks, such as Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh and Thich Thien An, brought mindfulness meditation, Engaged Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, and Mahayana traditions to American soil in the 1960s. These practices and traditions are beneficial to the Buddhist practitioners and communities at large. In the West, many authors like Carlson and Garland (2005), Kabat-Zinn (1990), and Wingard (2005) have suggested the positive benefits of practicing Buddhism and mindfulness in both the workplace and in the medical field. Research on mindfulness and meditation along with many Buddhist principles and values are the keystone of the work by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn. Thich, Q. M. (2007) also suggested the Vietnamese were able to draw upon their Buddhist beliefs and values to support their adapting to, interacting with, and assimilating into the American mainstream culture. These immigrants and first-generation Americans have made great strides. Although they had a great number of obstacles, they also managed to adapt, assimilate, and contribute while keeping their distinctive Vietnamese Buddhist ethics and virtues. Thich, Q. M. (2007) concluded that Vietnamese immigrants have persevered and flourished by drawing upon their unique Vietnamese Buddhist heritage, while contributing positively to the cultural and spiritual needs of the Vietnamese and established communities in America.

While Love (2008) indicated, "Some qualitative research exists about religious figures in leadership roles (as cited in Capper, 2000; Nwachukwu, 2005; Santee, 2006) and the path of Buddhists in leadership roles" (as cited in Scharmer, 1999, p. 6), research that studies the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual leadership roles is very limited. The researcher, therefore, has sought to understand how the essence of their practices may positively impact individual, corporate, institutional, political, and educational leadership scenarios by pursuing the phenomenon of experiences of a random selected group of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual leadership roles and contributions.

A new habit of mind, a secular approach, and a solid measureable action of spiritual leadership may benefit organizations, governments, and education. A spiritual emphasis influences leadership in different ways: (a) in leading by example – as a fundamental foundation and/or motivation, (b) in practicing mindfulness – shaping leadership beliefs and values, (c) in cultivating compassion and loving-kindness – with an emphasis on justice, and (d) in sharing merit – nurturing relationships rather than

highlighting individuals (Thich, M.-D., 2011). The research described in this paper lays a foundation for understanding, from a Buddhist perspective, how a mindful leadership or spiritual leadership model can result in more mindful and harmonious leadership that will in turn result in a more ethical context within which to enhance family, organization, political, and educational outcomes for all.

The research presented herein focused on three key elements: (a) the limited research on the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks and thus the limited understanding of the living experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their leadership roles, (b) the contribution of useful information about different approaches to leadership, and 3) the contribution of the knowledge of how religious leaders perceive their spiritual leadership roles. Potentially, this research could contribute toward the development of a new model of leadership to foster change in individuals, families, and organizations for the greater good. Of evolving leadership Most Venerable Dao-Quang observed during an interview:

*I believe that everything changes constantly, moment by moment; therefore, my leadership style is flexible and adaptable to the current situation. I believe that life is interdependent. So as leader, I have to see that I am not separate from my followers. We work together, and we share life values and responsibilities together.*

### **Overview of the Research**

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to understand how spiritual leadership practices of Vietnamese Buddhist monks might/may be models of moral and ethical leadership for others in the larger society. It explored the phenomenon of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in their spiritual and leadership positions.

There were 14 participants who are the Abbots of Buddhist temples from across the state of California and from the cities of Chicago, IL, Denver, CO, Baton Rouge, LA, Panama City, FL, and Houston, TX. In fact, they established 22 monasteries, temples, or practice centers. There were 827 lived-years with all of their ages combined. There were 364 lived-years in the United States of America with 513 years combined of practice. Furthermore, the average age of the Abbots was 59 years old.

Out of 14 interviews, eight were conducted in English while six were conducted in Vietnamese, and the transcripts were later translated into English. It is essential to point out that all the interviews with the Most Venerables - the older monks who are at least 60 years old—were conducted in Vietnamese, plus Venerable Thich-Tue-Giac, who came to the United States 10 years ago. The rest of the interviews with other venerables—the younger monks—were conducted in English. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks have a combined total of 827 years of practice-based experience.

The audio file of each interview was transcribed, summarized, and organized in a concept map. From the concept maps emerged an umbrella map with five major themes: (a) Biographical information/background, (b) Beliefs, (c) Practices, (d) Lived-experiences, and (e) Leadership styles and Characteristics. Each of the sub-sections has four to six other sub-findings that expand the outcomes of each category. All 14 concept maps were compared and cross-examined, which ultimately lead to the three prominent themes (see Appendix A for chart of themes and sub-themes).

From these five themes emerged answers to the research questions and five leadership strategies. Answers to the three research questions are interdependent and “inter-being,” as the philosophy of Buddhism has indicated. In fact, they are consistent and interrelated while supporting, reinforcing, and enhancing each other.

**Research Question 1: What are the essences of the lived experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in spiritual leadership roles?**

The essence and nuance of lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks are dynamic, unique, and positively contribute to society at large because of their spiritual leadership roles and obligations. First, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks took Bodhisattva vows; they came to the United States of America from different situations, yet they all worked hard to lead with an exemplified life as spiritual leaders.

Vietnamese Buddhist monks have to overcome this hurdle to become authentic and passionate leaders to serve the community and society at large. Their understanding and practice of the Buddhist's concept of interdependence—the world is interconnected, as well as all life on planet earth—are the foundation for social justice and a more harmonious society. As Buddhist monks, they put meditation practice and Dharma teaching into action. To them, mindfulness practices help leaders cultivate skills of awareness, compassion, sympathy, and caring for themselves, others, and the natural world. Vietnamese Buddhist monks have dedicated their lives for the benefit of others, yet they are humble in their contribution. They have a high spirit of serving others and find their own inner peace by practicing meditation and mindfulness and cultivating compassion, understanding, and peace.

Vietnamese Buddhist monks are not born as leaders, but ultimately, they learn, adapt, and assimilate into their leadership roles. They are truthful to themselves and have a strong commitment—a mindful desire—to serve others through their belief system, which is the Buddhist doctrine. They take Bodhisattva vows, have interest in serving all sentient beings and making a difference in others and society as well as themselves. Their leadership qualities come from meditative minds, compassionate hearts, and tested wisdom.

Vietnamese Buddhist monks come from varied backgrounds and experience difficulties and challenges that they have to overcome. They experience *Dukkha* or sufferings and dissatisfaction firsthand, yet they are able to overcome these hurdles because of their skill sets and their character points. Over their spiritual journey, they are able to hone their leadership skills to deal with different types of people and environments. They are dynamic and adaptable in their leadership styles. While they are being truthful and contented, they are inspired and motivated by others.

Overall, the core essence of Buddhism for the leaders is to practice their belief. This is because, saying without doing is not enough to lead or convince others to follow or get respected, and, therefore, will not succeed. Vietnamese Buddhist monks are finding practical ways to benefit the larger society and improve the lives of others through their own action and contribution. They provide a new mindscape in leadership, a landscape of inner experience and practice. These ideas, such as the concepts of mindfulness, meditation, and compassion, are applicable. Furthermore, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks are the living proof that compassion and meditation work. They harvest the ability to be *in stillness* regardless of the surroundings and they make a positive difference for themselves and others.

**Research Question 2: How do Vietnamese Buddhist monks describe their ethical and spiritual practices as spiritual leaders?**

Vietnamese Buddhist monks describe their ethical and spiritual practices as a challenge; they are the spiritual leaders in their communities. In addition, they are able to serve commendably because of their daily practices. Their practices include, but are not limited to, meditation (sitting and walking), chanting, and being mindful in their daily activities both in their thoughts and in their actions. As Venerable Thich-Dao-Quang noted:

Being a spiritual leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is very challenging because I am expected to know many aspects of life (religions, psychology, counseling, sociology, politics, public relations, etc.) in order to bring a good service to my community. It is also very hard to counsel the community on the balance between spiritual and material life.

However, they are using *Sīla*, or precepts, as guidance. It is an ethical and moral standard they hold. They lead by example and practice as a part of their daily routine. They balance between a spiritual and material life. They practice mindfulness meditation and abide by precepts as the foundation for teaching and transformation. Vietnamese Buddhist monks' leadership styles are leading by example, engaging with the community and being authentic or truthful to their leadership capacities that are based upon the foundation of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom attained from their lived-experiences.

What is special about the Vietnamese Buddhist monks' leadership style is the exercise and implementation of their beliefs. Not only are they demonstrating their own beliefs, they are practicing their own beliefs and values as well as others. The notion of leading by example is embedded in their hearts and minds. They always emphasize that all transformations must start from within. Vietnamese Buddhist monks come from humble and different backgrounds, yet they have very positive outlooks to make their life and others better. A positive attitude is the driving force for the transformation of an individual's happiness and the community's well-being. Their optimism helps them tremendously in their efforts at easing the suffering of others. With their "can-do" mentality and determination through the Bodhisattva's vows, Vietnamese Buddhist monks enhance the quality of life and world-peace.

**Research Question 3: How do Vietnamese Buddhist monks perceive their roles in encouraging a spiritual life for those in leadership roles so they can effectively lead others?**

Vietnamese Buddhist monks offer their own practices and insights into meditation, compassion, and wisdom. Their own contentment and happiness are crucial for them to continue to lead and share with others. Their practices of mindfulness meditation enhance not only their personal well-being, but also that of the collective well-being of the whole community. The findings show that their practices, presence, and contributions bring peace of mind and happiness to themselves, others, and, ultimately, to society as a whole. Most of the participants agreed with Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien's perception in their monastic roles of encouraging others to live a spiritual life so they can effectively lead others:

- a) *Love thyself more: means practice more on yourself and expand your compassion and loving-kindness to others.*
- b) *Perceive that your own happiness plays a big part in your leadership role. If you're not happy, your leadership skill will suffer.*
- c) *Success is not accounted by benefits only but together with your own happiness and others.*
- d) *Lead-by-example.*

The Vietnamese Buddhist monks believe all transformations start from within, and that their roles are to enable and encourage themselves and others to live their lives happily. They always believe that *a temple built, is a prison less*. The Most Venerable

Thich-Tinh-Tu pointed out that Buddhism is not only religious in nature, it is educational, and it is a way of life. Buddhism's platform is the use of the five precepts to educate all Buddhists along deeper practice in the 10 precepts and many more. It is designed to transform personal shortcomings and unwholesome concepts to completion, to help human morality and transform negative thoughts and actions into positive thoughts and actions.

The leadership styles of Vietnamese Buddhist monks are dynamic and distinctive. The notion of a leader as an educator is crucial because when it comes to education, three other interactive elements such as compassion, wisdom, and ethics come into consideration. These are fundamental to making life in this world better. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks' leadership style contains these characteristics in which empowerment and enhancement of others is a requisite. Their leadership style is unique as spiritual leaders. They have a strong foundation and fundamental principles with defined obligations and responsibilities. The networking between Vietnamese Buddhist monks is just like a family structure where they respect and nurture one another. Their minds and hearts are always serving others as well as preserving, protecting, and strengthening their belief, vision, and mission. Vietnamese Buddhist monks have a strong relationship amongst the community leaders and have many inner values such as selflessness, and harmony. They also have a high spirit and moral. Some of these moral values include compassion, diligence, determination, joy, gratitude, love, integrity, honesty, mindfulness, perseverance, responsibility, trustworthiness, understanding and wisdom.

A conclusion that can be drawn is that the Vietnamese Buddhist monks embrace a spiritual awakening—the awakening from their delusions, thoughts, and actions. To be awakened or transformed, individuals must practice the core values and beliefs. As Venerable Thich Dao-Quang, a licensed psychologist, stated, “If you practice well enough, you can see tremendous change in your life which benefits those around you. Change begins inside yourself.” In addition, the Most Venerable Minh-Dat added, “First you have to see your practice through the scope of Buddha's teachings. You have to see its benefits, practice the Noble Eightfold Path, be an effective Dharma teacher, and live ethically.” The Most Venerable Thich-Tinh-Tu, a participant in the focus group, agreed and summarized these as “the wisdom accumulated from 58 years of practice.”

Conclusions drawn from this research will enable leaders and others in the general society to understand in-depth Vietnamese Buddhist monks' lived-experiences, beliefs, practices, and leadership styles by engaging in authentic leadership as well as leading-by-example. The findings reveal a strong, yet simple notion: *It is better to be a human being than a human doing*. What is embedded in the Vietnamese Buddhist monks' leadership style is their daily practice that has transformed the lives of those in their communities. It is the idea of living inside out; it is the idea of peace. The findings show that this leadership style is based upon wisdom, understanding, practice, peace of mind, harmony, and compassion. All these elements are associated with peaceful existence.

## Five Leadership Strategies

With all the gathered data, the researcher went on to interpret the discoveries of the essence of leaders and leadership styles of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks. From these discoveries, the researcher found five main leadership strategies or statics: (a) Leading from the Inside Out, (b) The Notion of Daily Practice, (c) Leading-by-Example, (d) Congruence and (e) The Notion of Completeness (*see graphic below on the Principles of Mindful Leadership*)



The five core leadership principles lie in this particular order for specific reasons. First the notion of *Leading from the Inside Out* is the foundation and mindset. It can be a mission statement and a vision of mindful leaders who embrace the path of leading others to a happy, harmonious, and compassionate society. Second, *the Notion of Daily Practice* is crucial to finding one's personal development, improvement, and transformation. However, that mindset is not enough, it requires a skill-set that can be obtained through daily practice. Thus, the *Notion of Daily Practice* is the stepping-stone for success. For the Vietnamese Buddhist monks, abiding by the 250 precepts is the way to harvest their understanding and merits. With their determination, daily chores such as mindfulness practices, chanting, and meditation they cultivate serenity, calmness, concentration and the wisdom needed to lead. Third is the notion of *Leading by Example*, which is a temperament and nuance of any leader. *Leading by Example* is the spirit of service all the research participants. According to Venerable Thich-Minh-Thien, what separates good leaders from great leaders is the spirit of service in their leadership. *Leading by Example* has been the soul and spirit of many Vietnamese Buddhist monks for generations. The fourth notion is *Congruence*, the connection and harmony of different aspects. Its quality of agreeing between alternative viewpoints and different findings is what makes it appropriate and suitable. The fifth and last notion is the *Notion of Completeness*, which closes the circle, and is the completion of all. This notion perfects a human being, all leaders would like to leave a legacy, which completes their life. This *Notion of Completeness* reveals the sense of satisfaction, self-fulfillment, and self-actualization of a leader or any leader.

### **Leading from the Inside Out.**

For leadership practice and implementation, the research findings revealed the notion of being or leading from the inside out, living inside out, and transforming from the inside out. *Leading from the Inside Out* is a mission statement and a vision of any leader. It is the wisdom accumulated from the other four leadership strategies that will be further explained. These are the leadership's beliefs, practices, values, and attitudes that leaders should possess in order to lead effectively and efficiently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The notion of being or leading from the inside out is a concept and practice in which Vietnamese Buddhist monks imply that individuals cannot give something they do not have. Thus, in order to give or share Dharma, that individual must have learned and practiced Dharma first. Living inside out is the force of life. For instance, consider this metaphor of an egg: If there is enough force and pressure coming from the outside, the eggshell will crack and destroy a potential life—negativities happen. However, if there is enough force and pressure coming from the inside, the eggshell will crack and a chick is hatched, thus its life begins—positivity happens. Leading from the Inside Out gives life and positive results.

Obtaining the habit of mind of *Leading from the Inside Out* for studying and applying mindful practices into leadership styles processes a means—a skillful approach—to a solution in the modern leadership and governance. The notion of *Leading from the Inside Out* enhances a new perspective and understanding that there is the notion of completeness or there can be completeness, which completes the journey of leadership, in the work leaders do with other human beings. The research findings reveal the notion: The mindful leader is the one who leads and lives *inside-out* with understanding, compassion, and wisdom. It is this new understanding that makes emergent and mindful leadership much more relevant. Vietnamese Buddhist monks also characteristically summarize, “Peace and happiness start within and that they spread out just like a drop of oil on water.” It spreads gradually. Furthermore, the art of obtaining peace is through the cultivation of self-awareness or the beginning stage of meditative practices.

### **The Notion of Daily Practice.**

The findings also revealed two major notions: The idea of daily practice and the manifestation of beliefs to make this particular society better. Vietnamese Buddhist monks have a solid/resilient belief in the teachings of the Buddha and carry on that belief through their daily practice, which is the bridge to extend what they believe into solid actions. Their daily practices include abiding to the 250 precepts, practices of mindfulness, chanting, and meditation to ensure an inner peace, the cultivation of serenity, calmness, concentration, and wisdom for themselves, which then spreads and embeds leadership characteristics into others. The idea of daily practice and the manifestation of beliefs extends into a really interesting area and is the people's need in society. All leaders must have their core values and belief system, or philosophy. However, its manifestation is the key and daily practice, a requirement, in order to turn their belief into something fruitful. Likewise, they need to help others no matter what their leadership position is—whether it is in the family or an organization, in politics or religion, wherever it is there is education—to begin to promote the notion that leaders need some kind of daily practice to center themselves in relationship to other human beings.

Practicing mindfulness is an essential tool for balanced, contented, thoughtful, and productive leaders. According to findings, the benefits of practicing meditation and mindfulness include the feeling of ease and calmness. It helps with concentration and attaining a better focus. While it decreases negativities, such as anxiety and stress

level, it increases awareness both inside and out. It also helps with the development of empathy, understanding, wisdom, and compassion. These are the essential life-skills for all individuals. It is pertinent to note that the notion of daily practice exists in all faiths. No matter what religion individuals belong to, once we go back to our own religion and practice, the fruitful results will be present. Put differently, this foundation is not only in Buddhism, but also in all religions. Vietnamese Buddhist monks emphasize that foundation is the daily practice. They urge that whatever one individual's belief system is, one should go back to the beliefs and core values and practice them diligently. Only then that individual will harvest peace, ease of mind, and happiness.

### **Leading-by-Example.**

The Vietnamese Buddhist monks' leadership style—considered as authentically leading by example from their daily practices—is transformative for themselves and others. Vietnamese Buddhist monks learn these leading by example styles from their masters. They practice and encourage others to lead by their own examples, actions, and intentions so as to make the world a wonderful place to live. They are the characteristics of mindful leadership. In leadership, it is these kinds of character traits, such as being mindful and responsive, grit, courage, and self-compassion, that are implementable. Thoughts and action must go hand-in-hand, that is the mentality and practice of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks.

### **Congruence.**

Vietnamese Buddhist monks' leadership style has both an authentic component and congruent component central to their daily practices of meditation, of mindfulness and of chanting. That notion of congruence and authenticity is there. It runs across all three of these because they contribute to their society around them in a very deep, meaningful way on a continuing basis. It is the Vietnamese Buddhist monks' belief that everything is interdependent with everything else. Thus, the sense of mutual respect and the showing of gratitude is revealed during the study. Likewise, their understanding and practice of the Buddhist's concept of interdependence—the world is interconnected, as well as all life on planet earth—are the foundation for social justice and a more harmonious society. This finding is also supported by Bass and Steidlmeier's (1998) transformational leadership on virtue and moral characters as well as Burns' (1978) theory of social-historical perspective that incorporates the moral development and mutual interdependence of human interaction.

The findings show the primary notion that Vietnamese Buddhist monks are in a constant state of living their leadership. They are practicing and living what they believe. There is a great congruence between who they are as men who practice the Buddhist faith and how they interact with others. Vietnamese Buddhist monks take Bodhisattva vows for the greater good of all beings; they are congruent between their own and others' *Buddha nature*, practices, and perceptions.

### **The Notion of Completeness.**

The findings suggest a need for spiritual dimension in leadership to have a sense of completeness. The notion of wholeness can be seen via the Vietnamese Buddhist monks' practice, morality, and spirituality. This *Notion of Completeness* helps them feel complete as human beings and be unified and whole. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks' spiritual leadership style, like many others, has the core values of understanding, compassion, and courage. Yet their approach is also holistic as they are connecting themselves with others and the environment or communities where they

live. They serve the community well since the spirit of service is fundamental. What is unique about Vietnamese Buddhist monks, however, is that they add the “mindfulness” component into their leadership flair. It completes the whole notion that leadership has a human being component that has an intellectual (wisdom) and spiritual (practice) dimension.

The viewpoints of the research participants in this study are consistent with Northouse (2004) who argued that there must be ethics in leadership. According to Northouse, “Ethics is central to leadership because of the nature of the process of influence, the need to engage followers to accomplish mutual goals, and the impact leaders have on establishing the organization’s values” (p. 307). Furthermore, Northouse (2004) also pointed out the five components of ethical leadership: (a) respect for others, (b) serving others, (c) showing justice, (d) manifestation of honesty, and (e) building communities. In addition, Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ leadership styles add the mindfulness component into their leadership flair. It completes the whole notion that leadership has virtues, values, and practice. The practice of mindfulness is backed by researchers Carlson and Garland (2005), Kabat-Zinn (1990), and Wingard (2005). They suggested there are positive benefits in practicing mindfulness in both the workplace and the medical field. Kabat-Zinn (1990) and Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) also revealed that mindfulness-based interventions enhance improvements in self-awareness and chronic illness conditions and promote well-being.

Overall, the ultimate goal of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks is to enable individuals and society to be more harmonious, peaceful, and happy. This is comparable to their authenticity and determination on mindfulness and awareness as individuals and society to become congruent with others in both the societal and spiritual worlds, which is central to leadership. That element of leading by example is just that congruence or that unity between who they are as Buddhist practitioners and their leadership or intersection with others. That notion of congruence and authenticity is intertwined. It runs across all three because they contribute to the society in a very deep, meaningful way on a continual basis. What the researcher found in the research findings is apparent and remarkable.

### **The Impact of Mindful leadership and Buddhism: What Next?**

The five core principles frame specific practices for leaders and directions for researchers. What emerged from researching the lived-experiences of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in the United States of America are concepts and practices that are expandable across international and national contexts. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ ideas and practices about leadership as well as their transformation for higher purposes, if applied, would help build more harmonious, peaceful, and happier individuals, families, and societies. Recommendations offered here are offered as assistance to leaders and practitioners as well as ordinary individuals who want a happy life, a more harmonious and peaceful society.

### **Recommendations for Leaders, Educators, and Policymakers**

Human beings desire happiness, peace, and harmony to ensure comfortable, balanced lives for themselves, their families, their communities, and ultimately, society itself. The need to understand what leadership means, particularly mindful practices are vital for developing a more harmonious and peaceful life. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks’ lived-experience, practices, and insights have made this research much more enjoyable, relevant, and valuable. Findings, results, and conclusions from this study are expected to enable anyone from students to teachers, from business leaders to political leaders, and policymakers to adapt, formulate, and practice compassion-based

and wisdom-based principles and virtues. Noted here are recommendations for the practice of leadership, ones that can generate both discussion and action.

1. Cultivate, practice, and share *Compassion*. What keeps society peaceful, orderly, and balanced emotionally and spiritually is the ability of individuals, leaders, and followers to control their own thoughts, speech, and actions in relation to others. Such is central to cultivating compassion and should be a predominate approach in enlightened leadership.
2. Practice meditation: This practice develops an awareness, which, in turn, creates an attentive and healthy mind. Leaders who are mindful practitioners can engender well-being and happiness in themselves and those they lead.
3. Practice and develop mindfulness: The practice of mindfulness enables leaders and individuals to handle strong emotions such as anger, sadness, and hatred, as well as anxiety, loneliness, and jealousy. In particular, a practice of mindfulness can help individuals reduce the effects of stress on themselves and others. Stress reduction through the practice of mindfulness has positive potential for leaders, those whom they lead, and the contexts of their interactions.
4. Learn and apply Buddhist-based principles and values: Such application can encourage leaders to move to a less ego-centric, positional practice of leadership and toward more harmonious, peaceful, and productive environments. In this sense, consider extensive teaching in Dharma that teaches and brings compassion to leadership as it is practiced in the Western society.
5. Provide adequate integrated mindfulness training: To invest in sustainable-based and wisdom-based practices, organizations and its leadership rank team should provide mindfulness training for leaders and followers. For example, teach and implement mindfulness-based programs in the private and public institutions as well as in the educational settings, especially K-16, for administrators and teachers, alike.
6. Convert from a learned-based approach to an applied-based approach: Leaders and followers need to emphasize the practice that nourishes the heart, body, and mind. World peace starts with one's personal peace and transformation. A balanced, happy, and harmonious life absolutely cannot be advanced without true understanding and love for oneself and others.
7. Advocate the physical facilities for mindfulness-based practices: Leaders and policymakers at local and state levels should give favorable conditions in the process of obtaining construction permits and use permits for Meditation Centers, Buddhist Temples, and Mindfulness-based Practice Centers in the United States of America because "These facilities are one of the most beneficial places for people to come to practice and to come to heal their problems." This alternative and newfound approach of mindfulness-based practices can enhance the quality of life for all.
8. Promote the notion of completeness: Essential to enlightened leadership, the "U theory" moves leaders through a suspension of judgment to enlightened visioning. Expansion of that notion and its practices hold promise, should the model continue into the "O theory," which is an expression and practice of "completeness."

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

1. Conduct replication studies with Buddhist monks residing in ASEAN member countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), as well as countries such as: Australia, China, South Korea, Sri Lanka, France, Germany, and other European

- countries. Doing so may reveal additional information about monks' beliefs, practices, and contributions as leaders.
2. Investigate whether, or how, the armed conflict based on ideology, religion, and territory impact the leadership of monks, their experience and practices that seek harmony, prosperous and compassion in the world.
  3. Replicate this research with Vietnamese Buddhist nuns: A qualitative investigation of their leadership practices may add to a holistic picture emerging from this research on the leadership practices of the monks. In addition, it may reveal new dimensions of leadership practiced within the realm of Buddhist-based principles.

### **Practices for Harmony and Peace – A Final Reflection**

What has emerged from this research expands both the understanding of enlightened and mindful leadership and its practice. Through this research, the monks send the message that leaders can develop the practices and habits of transformative leadership that result in them being harmonious, contented, and happy for themselves and those they serve. Mindful leadership is generated by the diligent practice of mindfulness, meditation, contentment, altruism, and appreciation, the nuances, and essences of which are cultivated virtue, compassion, understanding, and peace.

More specifically, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks cultivate contentment by finding the beauty within and around the environment in order to live a simple life. The simplicity of “being,” content and living frugally helps reduce the risks of uncontrolled greed and desires of the material world. As humble monks each found that beauty delights six senses and that beauty can be recognized in their own minds and hearts. The monks suggest that if individuals look deeply with compassionate eyes, all things are beautiful and so is each individual. The monks also recalled the teachings of Buddha, which noted that all human beings have the Buddha nature – the ability to be awakened – and so does each individual.

Reflecting on deep reflection and peace, Most Venerable Thang-Hoan suggested practices for enlightened leadership:

*Peace is a part of the Buddhist's daily prayers. The meaning of peace, according to Buddhism, can be achieved by transforming the defiled mind into a pure one, or from the disturbed to the peaceful. In particular, peace can be achieved through the following ways:*

- 1) *Practicing peace for oneself: lessening desire by practicing moral precepts, controlling hatred by being mindful, and liberating ignorance by understanding.*
- 2) *Practicing peace for people: do not take what is not given, do not do things that are harmful to others and living things, and do not hold prejudices against them.*
- 3) *Practicing peace for the environment: thinking of the hunger and famine of other people by practicing a life of self-sufficiency, to love and protect the environment by not wasting and destroying natural resources.*

Deep practices of spiritual leadership exemplified by the monks are in synchronicity with Buddhism's tenets of peace and harmony. As described within this research, their practices can generate within leaders the capacities to serve others in deeply meaningful and community based ways. Whether locally, globally, or regionally within the ASEAN community, these spiritual practices would create for people and societies the common good and well-being we seek in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Appendix A: Chart of Themes and Sub-themes from the Qualitative Data

### **Mindful Leadership – Another Perspective And Approach To Current World Crisis By Examining The Vietnamese Buddhist Monks In America’s Leadership Practices And Their Contributions To Society**

**1. Vietnamese Buddhist Monks in America and their lived-experiences are dynamic, unique, and contribute to the society because of their spiritual leadership roles and obligations.**

- a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America joined monkhood at a young age and escaped or immigrated to the United States due to different circumstances.
- b) Vietnamese Buddhist monks take Bodhisattva vows that dedicate their lives for the benefit of others.
- c) Their monkhood is challenging and they must overcome many obstacles.
- d) They learn from their own masters, practicing Buddha doctrines and shaping their own beliefs and practices to empower themselves and others.
- e) Their contributions and influences are mostly to the local communities and surrounding areas, especially to the Vietnamese communities as well as the Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Associations throughout the United States of America.
- f) They are content with who they are, and they are happy with what they are doing in the present time and circumstances.

**2. Their leadership style is characterized as authentically leading by example, basing decisions upon the core values of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom.**

- a) Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America learned from the living example of their masters and lead-by-example themselves.
- b) They practice meditation daily and are mindful of their thinking and actions that contribute to their leadership characteristics.
- c) Their practices are based upon being compassionate to themselves and other beings for the benefit of themselves and others in the present and in the future.
- d) They balance their hectic schedule with mindfulness and lead the congregation, laypersons, and others.

**3. Through their practices, their presence, and their contributions to the welfare of others, they bring about peace of mind and happiness for themselves and for others in society.**

- a) The foundation for peace in the Vietnamese Buddhist monks and others is the mindset of the Bodhisattva (making a difference for all beings) and is the practice of precepts, which transform negative into positive thoughts and actions.
- b) Their practices of calming the mind, opening the heart and soul, and seeing others as their colleagues, collaborators, and teachers brings peace-of-mind, optimism, and loving-kindness.
- c) Their own happiness, which is fundamental to their leadership and spiritual roles, depends upon their daily activities and mindfulness practice.
- d) They are humble regarding their contributions and lead with their sincere good-hearted intentions.

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