

# Clear Recognition (1 of 5) Power of Recognition

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

*sampajāna*, clear knowing, clear comprehension, nonreactive, sage, mindfulness, awareness, *satī*, *A Monastery Within*, naming, pre-recognition, freedom

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Good day. The theme that I want to discuss this week is clear comprehension. The Pali word is *sampajāna*. *Jāna*, in this context, means “to know.” The *pa* of *pajāna* is an emphatic prefix: “to really know.” Here, *sam* means “with.” So, *sampajāna* can be translated as “with clear knowing,” “with really knowing.”

*Sampajāna* is an important quality of mindfulness practice. *Sometimes sampajāna* is translated as “clear comprehension” or “clear recognition.” The emphasis is on the word “clear”: to *really* know.

Learning the power of recognition is part of the art of mindfulness. In some cultures, people will not tell strangers their birth name. They will go by another name, like a nickname. They believe that one’s birth name has power, and if you give your name too easily to other people, they can have power over you. They believe in being very careful with their name.

There is an English expression: “to name something.” Naming what is happening means you simply describe or characterize what you see happening in the moment, which others are not noticing. “Oh, *that* is what is happening.” “Oh, I see. That’s how it is.”

We can do this for ourselves. I have felt off sometimes without knowing why I did not feel quite right. Later, I recognized that I was sad about something: “Oh, that’s what’s happening. I’m sad.” With that clear recognition of sadness, the clouds parted, and something became obvious and clear. The things that were cloudy or murky cleared up as I realized, “Oh, that’s what’s happening.”

Mindfulness practice involves two primary attentional faculties (among others). The two primary ones are *satī* and *sampajāna*. *Satī* is often translated as “mindfulness.” I think it may be more useful to translate *satī* as “awareness” and *sampajāna* as “clear recognition.” Mindfulness practice is the combination of those two. To have a sense of present moment awareness, present moment attunement, being aware of what is happening here and now. The senses – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, tactile sense, and the mind door are all open, so we can receive what is going on. This way of receiving is not filled with thinking and does not necessarily involve recognition. It is almost like pre-recognition – just being with the experience. That is *satī*. Clear recognition is the clear knowing of what the experience is. Modern definitions of mindfulness are often presented as the combination of these two: *satī* (awareness) and *sampajāna* (clear recognition).

Sometimes clear recognition – knowing what is happening in a nonreactive way – is called mindfulness (*satī*), but it is actually closer to *sampajāna*. As I said in the guided meditation, calling forth our capacity to clearly recognize even what is most obvious is a very valuable art to learn.

It is easy to dismiss what is obvious – that inbreath, that outbreath, that tingling or warmth in the body. These little details seem like they do not warrant much attention. What does warrant attention and engagement is our capacity to clearly recognize. This clear recognition is closely related to freedom – freedom from preoccupation, reactivity, and closing down around bias or judgment. This recognition is opening to possibility – opening to being present.

This is the art of recognition. It is very simple. To recognize, for example, “I feel warm and tingly.” Just to recognize that, without a lot of baggage and associations about what it means. To recognize something is like pausing and opening to experience it more. “Warm and tingly – what is that like? Ah, it’s like that.”

Right now, I see the camera that all of you are behind. There is a moment of seeing – of recognition. For over half an hour, I had been looking at times in the direction of the camera, but until this moment, I had not clearly recognized it. “Oh” – and now it stands out in highlight. It is like, “Oh, look at that,” as opposed to, “Oh no, the camera.” Underneath the camera is a monitor, so I can see what is happening in the chat. I also see the light and color. Now, I feel thirsty. I can clearly recognize that thirst and then maybe do something about it.

There is a story in my book *A Monastery Within*. It is about a very famous sage who lives deep in the mountains. The sage has a reputation for having just the right teaching for everybody. When you tell the sage your troubles and challenges, he seems to always have the right response. Everyone leaves satisfied: “Oh, that was perfect for me. He must have great intuition and understanding.”

It would take three days of hiking into the mountains and three days out. Because some people were desperate to find support and help with their challenges, they made that trek.

When they found him, the sage would sit and listen. He would listen for 15 minutes, an hour, sometimes hours, as people unloaded and told him stories of their concerns. The sage did not say much. He just took it all in. At some point, the person would stop talking. The sage would nod and indicate he now wanted to think deeply about this – to reflect and come up with some wise response.

Before he responded, the sage always made one request of the person asking for support and guidance: to not share what he said with anyone. It was very personal – just for that person.

It turns out that the sage always said the same thing to everyone: “What are you not paying attention to? What are you not recognizing?”

People were often disappointed: “That’s what he has to say? Okay.” But they gave him the benefit of the doubt and left. During the three-day hike out of the mountains, his question would echo in their mind: “What are you not recognizing?” Over those three days, all kinds of things they had not been noticing came up. And by the time they came out of the mountains, they were transformed. They had received something powerful that changed them for the better.

This is the power of recognition: when we meditate, to not only be present for the experience but to clearly recognize it. And to do this in a relaxing and calming way, as opposed to agitating. To do it in a way that is so clear that we are no longer being swept along in the mind stream of thoughts, or no longer mired or absorbed in the world of emotions.

Clear recognition is like stepping out of the mud and the mire – out of our preoccupation – looking back and seeing: “Oh, preoccupation, thinking. This is thinking.” Or, “Anger, sadness. This is anger. This is sadness.”

The art of clear recognition is to explore and use it until we feel the freedom – a kind of separation, a release. It is not aloofness or distance, but separation so that we are not caught in something. Then, the awareness of being present has a whole different quality of movement. Mindfulness can do its work. It can unfold best when we are not lost in the stream of thought or emotion.

This week I will talk about different aspects of clear recognition. For the next 24 hours, you might experiment with seeing if you can discover some of the power of recognition – how it is supportive and helpful.

See if you can recognize what is happening – even what is obvious, even what you already know, but have not really recognized. See what it is like to stop, pause, and recognize. If you care to, you could also consider the sage’s question, “What are you not recognizing?” See if that is interesting for you.

Thank you all very much.