

Guided Meditation: Nothing Extra

Gil Fronsdal

August 04, 2025

Keywords: mindfulness, simplicity, meditation, breathing, self-concern, present moment, loving-kindness, body awareness, judgment, radical simplicity

Hello. Welcome to our virtual meditation hall, broadcast from this wonderful room here, Meditation Hall and Insight Meditation Center. And as we begin this meditation today, I'd like to offer you the principle that what we're looking for in mindfulness meditation is to be aware of what's happening in the simplest of terms, to not add anything extra. And if we add anything extra, to know that in the simplest terms, not building and adding more on top of that. So... What can be extra to the simplicity of sitting in meditation that's not really needed, it's not inherent in the meditation during this time, at this place, is to think about the future, to think about the past, to go off into fantasy. What's extra is to spend time judging oneself, the meditation, and get wrapped into that. What's extra is to try to make something happen, to be goal-oriented.

Like if I do these steps one, two, three, then this will happen. It's okay to sit down with a sense of purpose and maybe even a goal. But once we sit down, the radical simplicity is just to be here with this experience in the simplest terms. So, to center yourself on the breathing. And it's just breath, it's just breathing. It's not comparing yourself to another breath that you had in the past.

It's not holding that breath accountable to some ideal standard you have. It's not even needing to judge the breath. Oh, that breath was too short, that was too long. It also applies to the mindfulness practice itself. Maybe the mindfulness is not very strong. A simple way of being is, oh, the mindfulness is not strong right now.

Keep it that simple. Don't recognize that mindfulness is not strong and then say, wow, maybe I shouldn't be meditating now. I need to try harder. I'm a lousy meditator. Maybe I should try doing loving-kindness instead. To some degree, those kinds of reflections can be useful.

But for this meditation, I'd like to encourage you to discover... What it's like to have a radical simplicity with nothing extra added on top of the experience, the simplicity of the experience. Maybe we can even call it the pristine simplicity of each thing in and of itself, free of any comparisons to anything else, without the extra of a past and future, just this, at this moment, arising and passing, being here. So to assume a meditation posture and finding a comfortable alert posture that you can hold for these minutes that we're meditating is part of finding this simplicity, simplicity of body, not needing to move the body, or not needing to move it much, only if it's a real need. And as a movement towards simplicity, for some of us, might be to close the eyes so the eyes don't have to be involved in seeing. A movement towards simplicity is to relax the body.

Tension represents how we add something extra to the present moment. On the exhale, softening the muscles of the face. On the exhale, softening, relaxing the shoulders. Sometimes a small adjustment to where the hands are can make more room for the shoulders to relax. Maybe if you have your hands on your knees, your thighs, bringing the hands back a little bit, an inch or so, towards your hips, does that help the shoulders to relax? Yes. Free up, softening the belly.

And then the primary place where we add something extra is through our thinking, through our reacting and to relax the thinking mind. Soften the tension, the contraction associated with thinking. And then lowering yourself into your body, like you're lowering yourself into a comfortable pool of water, lowering yourself down to where you experience the breathing, the physical sensations of breathing, maybe the movements of the chest or the belly, and maybe there are slight ways. As you inhale, you can relax around the inhale, on the exhale, relaxing around the sensations of exhale. And then noticing the breathing body in the simplest possible way, simple as possible for you, allowing the inhale to just be the inhale. No need to associate it with anything else, including meditation, associated with accomplishing something.

Allowing the exhale to be known in its simplicity in whatever way that you're knowing, sensing, feeling, breathing, or any other experience. Know it, feel it, as if you're adding the word just, just knowing, just feeling, nothing extra. Letting go of what you're thinking for a few moments, resting in the simplicity of being present in your body, the present moment simplicity of a single breath. And notice if there's anything extra that has to do with how you define yourself, think about yourself, judge yourself, are concerned about things having to do with yourself. It's a radical simplicity of the moment in the meditation. There's no need to be thinking thoughts of self-concern.

No need for self-referencing in the simplicity of the moment. Can you notice how that's extra, not needed? It's enough for the next few minutes to be living intimate with the simplicity of the body breathing, of being here. And then as we come to the end of the sitting, take a few moments to appreciate whatever way you can sense, feel, understand the benefits, the pleasure, the peace of not adding anything extra. On top of this moment, in addition to this moment, even if you can't do it, can you have a feeling, an intuition, an understanding of the goodness of being resting with the simplicity of now, here, and not stirring up here and now with self-preoccupation, where a simplicity of being is not overlaid with self-concern, self-preoccupation.

So the heart is open, the gaze is open to see others with a different kind of clarity. To see others without a lot of extra that we add on top of it. We don't have to automatically add memories, ideas, judgments. To see the pristine simplicity of each person, meaning seeing people without putting extra on top of it. And with the eyes of seeing in such simple way, clear way, wishing others well, May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.