

Simple Clear Awareness

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January 17, 2026

Keywords: mindfulness, vipassanā, Munindraji, calm awareness, simple awareness, body-centered experience, emotion, grief, happiness, meditation posture

Sometimes I think that it's helpful to see mindfulness as a practice that's going to help you be aware of everything, not all at one time. Is this loud enough? Can you hear? Can we turn the volume up a little bit? Yes. So let's see, is this louder now?

So that mindfulness is a practice of learning how to be aware of everything so that everything that happens to you as a human being can be known, can be an object of mindfulness. But we're changing how we're aware of it. Mostly when people are aware of something, we're aware of it through the lens of me, myself, and mine, my beliefs, my stories, my preferences, my desires, my aversions. And what we're doing in mindfulness practice is we're not changing our experience so much as we're changing how we're aware of it. It's not to have a new experience, it's to see in a new way, to be aware in a new way. And that way your experience of mindfulness is not dependent on your experience. Right? It's dependent on how you're aware, what you meet, how you meet it.

So there's kind of, for many people, it's kind of a paradigm shift. And away from the objects of thought, the objects of attention, away from even the notion of that our life is being mediated through the experiences we have. And many people involved in spirituality or in meditation are looking to have a special experience. Are looking for, most commonly, is to look to be calm, which is reasonable because people come because they're stressed. And yes, you can become, you can experience calm, you can experience serenity, you can experience joy and peace through mindfulness practice. But it's best not to see that as the point, because if you do, and the peace and the calm goes away, you might feel lost. You might feel, oh, you know, I need to get that back again.

But if instead how you understand the practice is it's learning how to see in a new way. Can I get back to seeing it that way? It's being aware in a new way. And some of the things I've

offered today is the idea that to be aware calmly, to be aware with clarity, a very simple clarity, to be aware in such a way that the awareness has some pleasure in it, something good in it. It's something that feels good. And another kind of part of this little family of things that... But how we're aware is simply, a simplicity of awareness.

Munindraji, he was a teacher in India that a number of us knew, and some people were very important teacher, *vipassanā* teacher. He said that if it's not simple, it's not *vipassanā*. So it's not simple. So that's almost like a little mantra, a little saying you can tuck away and remember. If it's not simple, it's not really this practice of mindfulness. So if you find yourself in there engineering and probing and looking for the subtleties and the complexities of it all, and that's the way, that's not simple.

And this paradigm shift is to... Can you be aware simply? If it's chaos, know chaos simply. This was really important for me because there were times when I meditated where so much was going on at once. I felt like I couldn't track it. I couldn't be aware. And then it all became simple when I just saw it as chaos. Oh, yeah. It's just chaos. There's just all this stuff happening at once. And I just, once I had that little label of chaos, then I could be simple and calm and open, receptive, and just be aware of it this way.

And so this is, all this gets a wonderful application for our emotions. You're allowed in this mindfulness practice to have any emotion that your system drums up for you. There's no unacceptable emotions for mindfulness practice. You're welcome as you're sitting quietly with your hands not moving to have murderous rage. You're welcome to have, you know, strong desire. You're welcome to have ecstasy, joy. You're welcome to have depression, grief. There's all this stuff. So it's part of our humanity to have these emotions coming through us.

And the task in mindfulness is not to have a different emotion, not to cling to any emotion or prioritize any emotion as being the thing, but rather how we're aware of it. Can we be aware of it calmly? Can we be aware of it clearly? Clearly this is grief. Just where's the clarity? There's no clarity because I'm all muddled, I'm all caught up in it, I'm.... Okay, well where's the clarity? The clarity is, I'm not clear. The clarity is this is all muddled and confusing. This feels, what's clear is I feel overwhelmed. That's what's clear. But can we find that where's the clear knowing?

And can we know it simply? Simple depression, simple joy, simple pleasure, simple pain, just to know it. And that goes very much, it's very different than how most people relate to emotions, partly because we identify with emotions a lot. We have, some of us will define ourselves by the emotion. If I'm angry, I'm a terrible, angry person. As opposed to, oh, it's

anger is here. That's all. I don't have to define myself. And some of us have, for all kinds of reasons, we consider some emotions to be preferable, we should have them, and other emotions that are, we shouldn't have them.

In mindfulness practice, there's no such preference, no such idea that one is better than the other. Because what we're trying to focus on is this magic. It's really an amazing thing. It's where freedom is found. It's where a depth of intimacy, depth of connection. It's where deeper understanding can be born. And that is, we're trying to just see something clearly, calmly and simply. And that's the exercise.

And so if there's an emotion which is strong and present, then to have those three words as a reference point, in what way can I be aware of this calmly, clearly and simply? And you might already have access to it. You might already be doing it. So it's not like you have to do it, as kind of look around and recognize, oh, that's how I can be done. That's how it's being done. And one of the things that helps with emotions is because strong emotions often come with a lot of stories. And sometimes it's the stories, which is the hook. The stories is where we get attached.

So one of the things that helps with mindfulness is to come back into the body and feel the emotion as a body-centered experience. Right? The sensations of it in the body. And sometimes if you can kind of be very simple, when you can just feel the emotion there in the body, the way it manifests there, the way it appears there, and keep it that simple. Oh, my stomach is in a knot. Calm, simple awareness of tension in the stomach. Oh, that's the fear. That's just calmly beware fear in my belly. There might be a warmth and happiness in the chest, kind of a tingling.

And you can tell a story about it to yourself and build fantasies around the happiness. Or you can just drop into the chest and feel the warmth tingling there. And know simply and relaxedly happiness. And then you feel you're leaning into the happiness. That's not simple. That's getting involved. Step back, be simple, be open, be calm, be just simple clarity. So I hope this makes sense. So let's do it.

So to assume a meditation posture. And with your eyes closed, how are you feeling now? Is there a mood? Is there an emotion? A mental state. If there is, how is it experienced in the body? What part of the body is it manifesting?

And can you be present for it simply? Or in what way can your psychophysical system here be with your experience with simplicity? What way is there simplicity here? In attention and awareness, in knowing, without digging and trying to analyze. In what way can you know

your mood, your state? Clearly. How can there be a clarity of sensing, knowing?

In the clarity, whatever you're feeling, you're allowed to feel that way. The emotion, the mood, the mental state has permission to be there just the way it is. Is there a way to know it calmly? And then in the middle of it all, breathing. Breathing with how you feel. Breathing through your emotional state. Relaxing with the exhale. Softening.

And as you breathe in, expanding the torso. Gently touch in to how you're feeling, your mood, your emotion. You don't have to linger there, but gently touch it, or feel it, or know it, calmly and simply, and then settle on the exhale. And with every rising inhale, calmly and clearly know how you feel, and then let go and settle into the exhale. As you breathe in, to touch whatever mood or emotion is here, maybe the mood or emotion shifts and changes. Maybe it stays the same, but as you breathe in and touch it, allow your attention to spread and grow to be larger than the emotion.

So at the top of the inhale, there's a wider field of calm attention. And then settle back all the way to the end of the exhale, leaving the emotion alone, allowing it to be there, maybe in a wider field of spaciousness, openness. In what way can you be aware simply, calmly, clearly of what is here as you breathe? And is there a refuge in that simple awareness? Is there something good about it? Stay close to that simple calm awareness.

And whatever arises, whatever appears, welcome it into that awareness, inviting the thinking mind to become quieter, to be quiet, so the awareness of it all can be heightened, so there can be greater clarity of knowing, sensing, so you can feel your way to greater simplicity of how you're with your experience. Simple awareness. And as we get ready to end the sitting, ever so gently, maybe in a very small way, can you turn up the corners of your lips for a small smile? And with a small smile, what shifts inside for you? And what shifts in terms of how you're aware? Maybe your mindfulness, it's almost as if your mindfulness can have a smile.

As you know and sense and make room for your experience in bringing in the idea of simplicity on top of clarity and calmness, it might seem I'm making things more complicated than need to be. And now maybe bringing in joy or smile. We have one more walking period today, a period of walking today. And I would suggest to you that you do this walking caringly, caring for whatever has been developing for you here over the course of the day. If you are, in fact, a little calmer, if you have a little more sense of intimacy and connection to yourself, or a little bit more clarity or clarity, maybe a little kind of inner smile to your attention or something.

Go about this next period of walking, staying close to that. Or be very careful you don't do

something that kind of just pops you far out of it. Just stay simple and don't do much and just kind of walk or take a break or have some tea or walk around the block, whatever you feel like you need to do. But stay close to this. We'll come back and do one more meditation. And then after that, we can have a period of, if you have questions about all this, we can have a session for all of us together with that, before the end, that five. So enjoy your walk, and we'll start in here at three o'clock. So it's about 25 minutes. We'll start again in here at four o'clock. And so in about 25 minutes. Thank you.