Wednesday guided meditation

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August 06, 2026

Keywords: mindfulness, awareness, non-clinging, clarity of awareness, aversion, greed, ill will, three characteristics, middle way, Paṇḍita

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I find it useful, this idea of the gatekeeper sitting at the gate and monitoring, watching what comes and goes, and having some ability to choose comings and goings. What comes into our experience, into our perception, and what we do with it—whether we invite it in to participate in all our attachments and say, “No, not this one.” Or whether what we send out the gate, and sometimes we send out into the world all our attachments.

But to sit there at the gate and watch—and if you remember that silly example of the gate person under Roman legions waiting to come in—the attitude of the gatekeeper makes a big difference. It isn't just who comes and goes, but also the attitude of the person who's there. The watching there, the attending that happens there.

So it's one thing to be aware of your body, your breathing, to be aware of your emotions and your thoughts. It's another thing to be aware of how you're aware, to track the quality of your attention, to track how you're aware. Many people use awareness to see what's happening. So, what is important? What we're aware of?

But we have this amazing ability to also notice how we're aware. And not a few times, our awareness comes along with a lot of baggage. It might be if we're afraid, we're aware in a tense way, the fears kind of being carried in how we're aware. It could be we have a lot of desires, and we're aware through the filter of the desires. When we look around the world, we pick up the things that support that desire, satisfy that desire.

We might see through aversion. Some people have a kind of disposition, an aversive disposition, and so things are seen through the filter of the aversion. They see, looking into the world, they see what they don't like. And looking into the world includes our inner world. How we see that? We see what we don't like. We see what we want. We see with fear. We see with confusion. We see with searching, and people are searching, looking.

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Sometimes the idea of insight meditation suggests that you're supposed to have penetrating insight into things. If you just bore your attention into your experience, the three characteristics will pop up, and you'll be enlightened. So you just have to look intently into the thing. My teacher in Burma, *Paṇḍita*, kind of reinforced that. But he had this analogy of using a fork to spear your broccoli, and somehow that was supposed to be—I guess it was well-cooked broccoli—so it was kind of easy to go in with the fork.

But that was supposed to represent this incisive way of looking into your experience. Not to dismiss his approach, but it lent itself to people getting really tense when they were mindful. Their awareness was all tight, looking and searching.

And then there's the awareness which is complacent. “Yeah, I'll get around to being mindful soon enough. I'll be aware. You know, this is nice here. Yeah, I'm kind of aware of my breathing. It's certainly there. But, you know, should I look at it more carefully? Yeah, that might happen. But I'm here, kind of. That's good enough.”

So there's all these things that come along with how we're aware. And the primary thing I think we're trying to do with that is to simplify it. And the amazing thing is that we can. There's a way of being alert, being vigilant in a certain way, that doesn't really take any effort. It's kind of a being, kind of turned on and alive, and not searching, not trying to do anything except to abide in a certain kind of clarity of awareness.

That's very calm, very peaceful, but not complacent. Not leaning back into the couch: “Everything's okay in Buddhism. Just accept everything.” And not leaning forward like, “I have to do something and get somewhere.” But just really here at the gate, in the middle, middle way, sitting here attending to the experience we have and noticing how you attend to it.

And can it be simple? Can it be calm? Can it be peaceful? Can it be steady? Can it be useful? And can how you're mindful, how you are, can you be mindful in harmony with what awareness is?

And I offer you that as a little problem. What is it to be in harmony with awareness? What is it to operate mindfully at the speed of awareness? Not behind it, and not in front of it. Not lagging, and not pushing ahead. Just right here.

So, assume a meditation posture. Take a few moments to scan through your body as a way of checking in how you are at this moment. And within this body, as part of the body from the inside, in a relaxed way—not too much—take some deeper, fuller breaths as a gentle way from the inside to feel your torso more fully. In a gentle way, a gentling way, relax as you exhale.

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Let your breathing return to normal, and perhaps, as you exhale, as you inhale, feel your belly. Allow the belly to be as it is, maybe without commentary, just feeling it. Allow it to be the way it is on the inhale, and on the exhale, soften the belly. Knowing, allowing on the inhale, softening on the exhale.

And moving your attention up to the heart area at center, knowing, allowing whatever's there to be there on the inhale, and softening the heart area as you exhale. As you inhale, feel and allow the sensations of your shoulders, having no problem with how it is. On the exhale, soften the shoulders. On the inhale, just simply feel and allow the sensations of your face. And as you exhale, soften the muscles of your face.

On the inhale, feel and sense the area where you're thinking, the thinking muscle. Maybe some subtle, not-so-subtle pressure, attention, contraction. Maybe a place where things feel a little more solid in the mind, in the brain. And as you exhale, soften the thinking muscle, as if the mind can spread out wide and flat, like the waves on a lake going flat, broad.

And then, when you're practicing mindfulness, awareness practice, is there a location from which you're aware? You tend to be maybe above the neck, in the head, in the heart. Are you aware of a place associated with thinking, with seeing, or is mindfulness free of any location at all? Being aware mostly from the neck up—that's where the knowing is tracking. Is there some way that your mindfulness, your attention, can also soften, become calm, useful?

And then maybe, like lowering yourself into your body, to your torso, like lowering yourself into a refreshing pool of water, become aware of your body breathing. And in being aware of breathing, it's not so much that you're focusing on the body breathing as if you're allowing the sensations of breathing to appear in clear clarity. Sensations of breathing appear in the clarity of mind, clarity of awareness. The clarity of awareness that, in and of itself, is word-less.

And as you breathe in, feel and sense, recognize how you're aware. And on the exhale, relax the awareness. Loosen any tightness, pressure, as you exhale, letting go of thoughts. And open to the silent clarity of awareness.

And for you, how is it that you can stay intimate with your breathing, with an awareness which is the closest thing, almost doing nothing, next to nothing, but being aware? Is there some reference point within an awareness which is not for or against? Doesn't make a story about things. That's almost doing nothing except keeping the light on.

There's many things that might come into awareness: breathing, body, emotions, thinking. Might there be a way in which they appear in the softness of the mind? They appear with the

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openness of clarity. No resistance, no pressure, no need to make anything of them or react to them. Simply transient visitors in the quiet clarity of awareness.

Oh. Oh. Oh.

And becoming sensitive to how or where there might be different ways, different hows, at the same time. There might be part of you which is activating, but if you look around, you might find there's a part of you which is still quiet—a quiet awareness, clear. Maybe it's subtle. There might be a pull, an attachment to certain thoughts or feelings, sensations, reactions to them. But if you look around, there might also be a small refuge inside that is not attached, that is peaceful, open, clear.

There might be greed, side by side with non-greed; ill will, side by side with the lack of ill will; confusion, right next to non-confusion. Allow yourself to be guided by that part inside of you which doesn't cling. That part of you inside which is a simple clarity. What wisdom does that offer you for how to be present for whatever's here? How to be present peacefully.

There is a way in which the mind often prioritizes our preoccupations, our desires and aversions, our fears and our attachments. The mind leans that way. What if instead you allow that to be as it is? Not opposing it, but instead lean towards non-clinging, to be non-attached to the ways that you're attached. Right there, you find some clarity.

Yeah. Of course, we have attachments, clingings, and cravings and aversions. Of course. But we don't have to be caught by them. Awareness can be bigger. Our wholeness is so much more if you look beyond the edges of your preoccupations and clingings. You might find what doesn't cling, that which can hold clinging and everything without clinging.

Hmm. In this vast world, there are infinitely more things that you don't cling to than you cling to. Infinitely more things that you don't react to, grasp onto, resist. Whatever your attachments are, they're just a small little subset of this vast world. Can you feel the non-clinging, the non-attachment that's beyond the edges of whatever small world that you're attached to?

Noticing how, for you, there is awareness, knowing, knowingness that is free of attachments, clinging, grasping. No matter how subtle it is, sense it, feel it. For a few moments, trust it. Maybe feeling how inside of it there's an invitation—an invitation to let go.

Oh. Hmm.

To be steady in what doesn't cling, to be at ease with non-clinging, where non-clinging is the ease, and to be in harmony with non-clinging, to be in harmony with awareness as you go

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through the day. You're losing awareness, losing your presence of mind with what's happening, is a loss of harmony. Can you find the harmony? Be with the harmony of awareness, in harmony with awareness, in harmony with that which doesn't cling.

So we have—so there's a wonderful way of practicing, which is to practice with care. Be caring and careful with the stay here. Go about carefully with a special day of practice. See what it might mean for you to be in harmony with non-clinging. To have non-clinging as a reference for how you're with clinging. It's okay.

The harmony with awareness and the aid, support for that being in your nature. To be in harmony with awareness of nature. It's no bit different than saying in harmony with nature, but in harmony with this way that we participate in nature through being aware. And if any of this doesn't make sense for you, it's completely okay. And find your—maybe find your peace or your orientation. Oh, it's okay not to understand.

May you enjoy the day. And Adam, I think he's put up a sign-up sheet. Or he has three practice sessions today again.

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