

Mindfulness of Mind (2 of 5) Simplicity of Recognition

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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We will continue today with the talks on mindfulness of mind. It also could be called mindfulness of attitude or, in a purer sense, mindfulness of recognition. The theme for Tuesdays is recognition. Recognition is a powerful factor, if it can be simple, if we can simplify our recognition of all the baggage – all the associations – that comes along with it.

For example, look around wherever you are sitting. Can you find something to look at which you can recognize for what it is, but is very neutral? This recognition doesn't evoke any ideas for or against – “I want that” or “I don't want that.” The object is just there in a very, very simple way.

My eyes are now landing on the far wall. There's an electrical cord of a clock. I see the electrical cord, and it's just there. I don't have any reactivity to it or preference around it – for or against it. It's just there.

Then, I turn my eyes up and look at something I find likable. There's a Buddha statue near the electrical wire. Now, I find that there's a kind of liking, wondering, and engagement with it. There is not just recognition, but also appreciating it and remembering its history – where it came from, who gave it to us, all kinds of things.

Then, I look down and there's some tape on the floor. I have a little bit of an issue with it because it's a long piece used to mark a spot on the floor, and it's crooked. It wasn't laid down straight. I think: "Oh, should I change it? Can I use the same tape? Do I have to throw it away?"

Suddenly, my involvement is much more complicated. Then, I look at the electrical wire again, and it's just very simple, just a wire.

Can you look around your space and see the different ways you can recognize something there? How simple can recognizing it be? And how much does it start to arrive with preferences, judgments of for or against, commentary?

In meditation, and at other times, the movement is toward becoming cleaner and cleaner, simpler and simpler with recognition, so that we can see things as they are, not as how we want them to be or through the lens of what we don't want.

There is a time and a place for preferences, desires, for things we don't want. There's definitely a time and place for that. This is not doing away with that forever. But there's also a time and place to learn the art of very simple recognition. So simple that the recognition is not distracted by our desires, our thoughts, or our commentary.

We recognize there's an in-breath – just an in-breath. The recognition is so simple that the in-breath isn't tied to, or connected to, notions of time. “Oh, I need to stay here so that in the future, I can be concentrated. I need to stay here so that I'm present for the next exhale, which is coming in the future. I lost my attention to the breath a few breaths ago. I can't have that happen again. I have to be able to stay with the breath.”

All of those ideas complicate the simple act of recognition. For this moment, you are able to recognize this inhale as if there's no before and no after. It's that simple. If your mind wanders off in between, and at some point, you come back to the next inhale, the past is gone. It's just this inhale. Just that recognition.

If the simplicity of recognition is there – just this breath, this step, this chewing our food, this sitting in a chair, this walking down a hallway – if it's there in the simplest possible way, then, at some point, what we recognize is recognition itself.

We recognize that recognition. As we recognize it, we see that recognition is simple. We see that recognition is free of associations, commentary, preferences, or desires. And wow, there's this thing called recognition. There's this thing, this experience, this movement of recognition, of knowing, of being aware. It becomes its own object of awareness. And it starts being special: "Wow. There's clarity. There's openness."

It's as if awareness now becomes a guest house. All travelers are welcome to come into the guest house. The guest house keeper is very gracious and allows everything to have its room so it can rest. It can be left alone. It can be accepted as it is. Nothing's needed. No judgments. No nothing.

The idea of recognizing recognition, being aware of awareness, and knowing that we're knowing can seem challenging – a hard thing to do – and even nonsensical to some people.

One of the ways we come to that is we begin recognizing as a guest house keeper – “Welcome” – that we are seldom aware simply. There are all kinds of things we bring along with that recognition. We recognize something, and we recognize that we don’t like it or we do like it. We want it to be a little bit different. “It should be sitting over there, not here. Can I have that?”

We go into a room full of people, and we start recognizing what’s there, but it’s not just simple recognition. “Who is it nice to sit next to? Who should I not sit next to? Is it safe here? Where are the good snacks? That’s what I want.”

There are all these preferences and agendas going on. And our awareness – our recognition – is being used by our agenda. It’s being driven by it. Now, of course, it’s normal and healthy to do that in many circumstances. It has to be that way.

But in meditation practice and mindfulness, one of the potentials it has is to begin to recognize how we complicate, engage, and use awareness in the service of our agendas and preferences. Sometimes we make wise choices in what we pay attention to. When we’re driving, we pay attention to the road.

But sometimes our attention is hijacked by things that if we thought about them, we would say: “I don’t want to focus on that again. I’ve had the same complaint about my neighbor down the street. I’ve probably had that thought a thousand times. I feel lousy after I’ve had it. It doesn’t feel good to have it. It kind of hijacks my attention. Whenever I drive down the street and see that neighbor or that house, my attention gets contracted. I feel my awareness looking and get pulled away from the house.”

There are all kinds of ways in which you see how awareness is being used, hijacked, and influenced as it’s being used.

When we do that in mindfulness meditation – sitting in meditation – welcome it all. Don’t add judgment on top of judgment. There’s an art to welcoming it, allowing it to be there, which is paradoxically a movement toward simplicity of recognition. When we’re not for or against things, they can just be themselves, and there’s room for us to recognize them as they actually are.

Then, as I’ve said, a very special time comes when we start to recognize recognition itself. That recognition, in and of itself, is a jewel, an amazing capacity. Depending on how that attentional faculty shows itself at any given time, the ability to recognize – to be aware, to know – can become its own strong presence, its own strong

entity, its own feeling of strength. It feels like a guest house. It feels like it has room for things. It's okay for things to arise. And if the idea of welcoming is too much, just allow things to be there.

Why do this? It might seem like we're just victims of circumstance. Things just come and happen. But we can keep our attention very simple, just recognizing the thing that's happening – including just recognizing how we complicate recognition, how we have desires and aversions. If we just keep doing this simple recognition – being the guest house, allowing it to be there – then the best in us begins to come forth. That which needs to rest – that which needs to relax and has a chance to relax – is not being fed. It's not being egged on or encouraged on.

As the simplicity of recognition of awareness starts happening, it's almost like there's space for us to hear ourselves. There's space to know ourselves in a deeper way. There's space to start recognizing that there is goodness here. There is wholesomeness here. There is space.

There begin to be cracks in our hearts so that we can see where kindness, love, care, generosity, and goodness reside. The simplicity of recognition, the simplicity of awareness, is key to recognizing our own

inner beauty. We just welcome all the inner ugliness:
“It’s okay. Come. I’m a guest house for all of you.”

It’s in the guest house – in the space it makes, in the allowing – that there is welcoming, generosity, and goodness, which allows something to settle and relax. I suspect you’ll be surprised by how much goodness exists within you through this simple act of recognition.

All along in mindfulness practice, we’re practicing recognition of the breath, the body, emotions, and thoughts. Everything I’ve been teaching before still applies. But, as we continue this practice, it’s appropriate at some point to start recognizing recognition itself. Recognizing that the way we’re aware of the breath, body, emotions, and thoughts is not neutral. It’s not welcome. There’s an agenda. There are complications we bring to it.

Turning around and being mindful of the mind – mindfulness of awareness, of attitude – begins to free awareness from all this extra baggage, all the extra stuff we add to it. And goodness has a chance to grow.

For this day, may you practice being a guest house for all things that come along. Look for and remind yourself of particularly appropriate places where you can do this. Try being receptive and welcoming, instead of your usual habits of mind in how to be with things.

Thank you very much.