

Intro to Mindfulness Pt 2 (19) Simplicity of Non-clinging

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Hello everyone, and welcome to this talk on the signs, symptoms, and consequences of non-clinging. Non-clinging is a synonym for liberation, the kind of spiritual freedom Buddhism talks about.

The symptom or indication of non-clinging that I'd like to emphasize today is simplicity. Clinging is complicated. Clinging involves a whole background of conditioning, beliefs, desires, wishes, relationships with other people, memories, and projections into the future. Clinging can involve a complicated world. Non-clinging is simple. It's the absence of clinging.

In that absence, there is an absence of the immense complicated edifice that keeps clinging in place. So when we learn to not cling, when we learn to let go, when we become free of clinging, we can feel that things become simpler in ourselves. The world around us may remain complicated. But we can have an inner sense of simplicity as a line that runs through how we engage in the world.

Of course, we have to deal with many complicated things. But one way of helping with that is to simply do one thing at a time. It's complicated to multitask. It's complicated to do many things at once. Some of you may be quite capable and proficient at multitasking. But it comes at a cost. The cost is that we stay in a more complicated world. We keep spinning and juggling lots of balls in the air when we're multitasking, so there's very little opportunity to appreciate freedom, simplicity, and non-clinging.

More likely, there's a certain distractibility in multitasking so that we don't see what's behind all the things that we do. We don't see what the drives, fears, desires, and aversions are. We don't see the conceits that are operating because we're busy doing so much that this obscures the clarity that arises if we're just doing one thing at a time – listening to one thing, or doing one thing, being with one person at a time and listening well. When we do one thing at a time, maybe we get fewer things done. But we also might get things done better so we don't have to redo them. Maybe when we're at ease and relaxed, we do things in a better way.

When I feel like I have too much to do and not enough time, paradoxically I've found that if I sit down to meditate for ten minutes, somehow I have plenty of time afterward. In the complexity of having a lot to do, there's a kind of tension and pressure that builds up in the mind that makes doing whatever I'm going to do more difficult. It doesn't get done as intelligently, as creatively, or as fully. That difficulty contributes to the sense that there's not enough time.

Simplicity of being might be connected to contentment. But words like "simplicity" and "contentment" can be off-putting because our lives are rich and wonderful in complicated ways. Doing many rich and complicated things at once is enlivening and vitalizing. Maybe so.

But there is a way of staying simple in the middle of the many things we do. I was once a fast-order cook at a restaurant after being in the Zen monastery for almost three years. There was a lot of activity going on. I had to move fast and track many different things. But I would say that in the middle of it all, I was there in a very simple way. I was not caught up in a lot of desires, memories, or ideas about what was happening tomorrow, or what happened yesterday. I was fully, completely there for this amazing dance in the kitchen. I would leave the end of my shift feeling more settled, more peaceful, more simple, and more concentrated than when I started my shift.

It was a delightful feeling. There was a kind of simplicity of being in just doing the complicated act of fast-order cooking.

So just because we have a lot to do doesn't mean that we can't find that through-line of simplicity through "this as well. This as well." If we're distracted and caught up in thoughts a lot, that's a complicated world. If we're fretting over and anxious about things, I propose that's a complicated world. If we're living in our memories too much and reviewing and thinking about things, that's a complicated world. If we're trying to figure things out too much, it can be too complicated. Of course, we have to figure things out. But sometimes we figure things out better if our minds are clear and open.

With things that are difficult to figure out, sometimes I don't figure them out. Sometimes I reflect on and think about them, and then when I'm doing something else, the answer comes. Sometimes when I don't remember a word or someone's name, if I stop searching for it, 30 seconds or a minute later it comes up. If I'd stayed in that complicated mode of searching, wanting, being concerned, and worried about not remembering, that would have kept on obscuring the mind's capacity to find its way.

When you are able to let go, when you're able to find some modicum of non-clinging to things, to appreciate it better, look for what feels like simplicity. Look for simplicity of being, simplicity of perception, simplicity of thinking, simplicity of care for the situation, and maybe even love for the situation.

This is the theme for this week. Not that you have to be simple, but if you're able to stop clinging and let go of the grasping or the resistance you have, appreciate the results of that. Today, appreciate the sense of simplicity that comes from that, the simplicity of being. Something becomes less complicated.

It's complicated to expect people to be simple. I'd propose that it's simpler to suggest you notice the simplicity that arises when you are no longer clinging. Then appreciate that, take time with it, be nourished by it, and let it condition you. Let it recondition you in a way that might begin to heal you from the conditioning that comes from being overly busy. There's a huge cost of being complicated, doing too much, running around, and juggling too many balls. It can really wear a person out. It can really cause a lot of stress.

As we begin to appreciate the simplicity of being that can come from non-clinging, we see it's a medicine to recondition us from the unhealthy conditioning of living in a too-complicated inner world (and sometimes an outer world.)

As you go through today, you might look for opportunities to not cling. Maybe there are simple moments throughout the day. Maybe you're taking a bus somewhere and you just sit on a seat in the bus without looking at your phone. Don't do anything except just be there. By letting go of the drive, the desire to always be doing something, see if you can find the blessing of simplicity. If you are standing in a line in a store, waiting for the water to boil, or waiting for a computer to start after you turn it on, don't fill that time with something else. Maybe don't try to be efficient and do other things at the same time.

Maybe there's a way of just standing and looking out the window, or sitting down for a few minutes, breathing, and being mindful, that can overcome some of the clinging you go through. You can begin to appreciate simplicity of being. You can allow something else to condition you throughout the day, rather than always being on the go. I wish you the joys and blessings of non-clinging today, but also the joys and blessings of simplicity. Thank you.