

# Intro to Mindfulness Pt 2 (17) Expansiveness of Non-Clinging

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Hello, everyone, and welcome. I feel delighted to have the good fortune to talk about the symptoms of letting go. Certainly, we can become aware of how we cling, hold on tight, and close down. Then there is also the possibility of opening up and the release of clinging. The Buddhist practice of mindfulness has the potential for more than just relaxation. We can find a real sense of freedom through it.

One of the very profound little sayings from the Buddha – a summation of what's most important – is, "Nothing whatsoever is worth clinging to." He didn't say that nothing is worthwhile at all. He said, "Nothing is worth clinging to." Clinging is the extra that we add as we hold on, resist, push away, and tighten up. When there is enough clinging and enough things we're attached to, preoccupied with, or caught up in, we find that the mind or heart, even our very life can feel claustrophobic. We can feel there's just too much going on and swirling around. Sometimes it's so much that we can't get our bearings. We don't know what to do.

Sometimes I've asked people to notice the difference between being caught up in thought and being mindful of what it's like to be thinking. What's the difference between those two states – lost in thought compared to being open and aware that thinking is happening? Some people report that they feel really small and closed in when they're caught up in thoughts. Something almost goes dark; things become obscure. But when there's awareness and mindfulness, there's an opening. There's a feeling of clarity and brightness that happens in the mind and in our sense of being.

One of the symptoms of non-clinging is space, room, and a sense of expansiveness. Sometimes the mind and the sense of awareness can feel very expansive. It can feel as if there's lots of room in our body, lots of space. Whatever arises, we can just be there in this ocean of space and awareness. An expansive state of mind is a symptom and result of non-clinging, letting go, and release – the kind of spiritual freedom that the Buddha emphasized.

We can feel it and tune into it. The reason to notice the symptoms of relaxing and letting go is to reinforce our appreciation of that state. It allows us to notice more often when letting go is there, when we normally would have overlooked it and not paid attention to it. Because the expansive state of being has no monetary value, we can't buy it. It's not about having some experience, having opinions, getting what we want, or making ourselves safe in conventional ways. But still, people would say it's priceless, it's invaluable because great spaciousness of mind and heart makes room for some of the most beautiful parts of who we are to begin to flow. It makes room for our most beautiful connections with other people to flow.

When we lock down or get tight, caught up in compulsions and addictions, something closes down and narrows. Something gets lost in that process. Instead, we want to notice the sense of spaciousness and expansiveness. We want to make room for our experience.

Sometimes I've used this as an orientation for my practice, with the question, "How can I make room for this?" But sometimes I've wondered, "Really, this too?" Then the practice mind says, "Yes, this too. Make room for it."

One of the reasons to make room for everything – to make space and hold everything in this spacious mind – is that the alternative is not good for us. The alternative makes the situation worse. The alternative of closing down, locking in, resisting, tightening up, getting narrow, and shrinking is a form of suffering. It diminishes us.

And so it's not the better alternative. But being expansive, open, spacious with everything, making room for whatever is happening is just a fantastic thing to tune into, notice, and appreciate.

This approach can come with challenges. One of the challenges is that it can be frightening. Maybe there's a false sense of being protected if we tighten up and cling, resist and hold back. But we're not really doing ourselves a favor. When we are more expansive and open, it can feel like we're now more vulnerable and there's nothing protecting us. But there was nothing really protecting us before if we were locked up and tense and had armor on. We were actually harming ourselves. But being afraid is one of the reasons why it can be hard to open up.

The art of it is to learn how to be open and let the ordinary threats, which normally we might close down with, affect us. We let them touch something so we learn how to not react to them. When we react to things that are threatening – things that people say or do to us that are independent of any physical harm – something inside of us locks up, resists, feels challenged, threatened, or hurt. Sometimes that's reasonable, but sometimes it's extra. It's not really needed. We might think we're protecting ourselves from external danger, but what we really need to protect ourselves from is the inner danger of shutting down, closing up, and getting tight.

The expansiveness of non-clinging has its challenges. But it's a wonderful challenge to have, explore, and navigate. It's almost like a new territory, learning a new language, coming into a new city, and learning our way. It takes a while to learn how to navigate in it, but it's really worth it.

One of the signposts for freedom, release, non-clinging, and non-grasping is a sense of expansiveness. Some people even call it “big mind,” since the mind gets big, or “big heart,” as the heart feels big and our presence feels bigger. We can appreciate it, explore it, include it, and not worry that it might be a sign of conceit. One of the reasons not to be expansive is that people are afraid, “If I do that, then I'm too big. I take up too much space for people, and it's a sign of conceit or being domineering.” Again, it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, people might not feel we are too assertive. They might feel we are safer now to be with, more available and friendly, or more kind.

If we let go a little, maybe we can feel a little expansiveness. If we let go more, we feel more expansiveness. If we let go of a lot, the sense of expansiveness can be quite spacious – maybe almost infinite in feeling.

So as you go through today, you might see what it's like to give more room to your experience. Whatever is happening, can you make room for it? Can you make more space for it? Can you allow it to be there in expansive receptivity or openness? Then navigate what happens as a result. Find your way with it. Learn to be wise in the space of an expansive mind and heart. Appreciate it. Don't have a high bar for what expansiveness means. It can just be a little bit more than how you normally are. Or maybe when you feel most contracted, that's the most interesting time to experiment. “Given this, can I make room for being contracted? Can I make room for this too?”

In this process, I hope that in this shared world of ours we begin to feel like there's lots of room and space for us to be alive, free, and to be ourselves. Thank you.