



11 - Mindfulness with Clear Comprehension

This document is an extract from the full chapter, which is available for download in the table via this link: <https://raft2freedom.org/raft-to-freedom-downloads/>

When going forward and returning, he makes himself fully alert.

- Gotama, Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Having gathered breath and posture as our first two lenses on the first Anchor of Mindfulness, we now add a third, deeper layer: Clear Comprehension. Where mindfulness simply notices what is here, clear comprehension asks what it means and what to do about it - it is the same attention, sharpened by wisdom.

The tradition draws out four aspects of this alertness: purpose (why am I doing this?), suitability (is this the right moment?), mindful presence (am I actually here for this?), and clarity (am I seeing this as it really is?). This matters most where our attention is least free - in the moments when the drives to protect, promote and satisfy pull hardest, and an old pattern is already halfway into motion before we've noticed it starting.

None of this asks us to freeze or overthink every action of the day. It describes a quality we can bring, more and more often, to the ordinary business of living - a brief, honest check before we act. The self-reflections that follow invite us to look at our own moments of autopilot and clarity more closely.

Self-reflections

Take a moment to consider my own experience of awareness and intention:

1. How often do I move through ordinary activities - walking, eating, working, talking - on autopilot rather than with real awareness? ([view card](#))
2. Before I act, how often am I actually aware of my own underlying intention or motivation? ([view card](#))
3. Thinking of a recent action, can I apply the four aspects - purpose, suitability, mindful presence, clarity - to it, looking back? ([view card](#))
4. When have I acted impulsively and only afterwards realised it wasn't the right thing to do? What was missing, in terms of clear comprehension? ([view card](#))

5. Can I recall a moment of acting with real clarity and purpose, fully aware of what I was doing and why? What did that feel like in my body? ([view card](#))
6. Could bringing clear comprehension to a moment of reactivity change my relationship to it, even slightly? ([view card](#))
7. Of the four aspects - purpose, suitability, mindful presence, clarity - which one do I find hardest to bring to mind in the moment, and what might help? ([view card](#))

Journaling prompts

Use your journal to deepen your practice of clear comprehension:

1. **A mindful routine:** choose one simple daily routine - brushing your teeth, making a drink, washing up - and practise doing it with deliberate clear comprehension, attending to each movement, its purpose, and the sensations involved. Write about what you noticed.
2. **Applying the four aspects:** reflect on a specific decision or action you took today. Analyse it using the four aspects: what was the purpose? Was it suitable for the situation? Did you stay present while doing it? Were you seeing it clearly?
3. **A well-worn path:** think of a pattern or habit you find yourself returning to again and again, almost without deciding to. Write about the moment, just before it happens, where clear comprehension might open up a different next step - even a small one.
4. **Breaking the autopilot:** notice one moment today when you caught yourself mid-action, on autopilot, and brought clear comprehension to it instead. What shifted, if anything, in what you did next?
5. **Investigating the pull:** next time you notice the pull of a craving or a strong urge, pause and investigate it with curiosity rather than judgment. Where do you feel it in the body? What thoughts accompany it? Is acting on it actually suitable for what you care about?
6. **Meeting discomfort:** write about a difficult feeling you tend to meet with resistance or avoidance. What might it be like to meet it instead with clear comprehension and a measure of self-compassion, letting yourself feel it without being consumed by it?
7. **Gathering the weeks:** looking back over breath, posture and clear comprehension together, which of the three feels most available to you right now, and which would you like to strengthen?

For a printable reminder to carry this stage's practice into daily life, see the Self-Compassion card: <https://raft2freedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/appropriate-response-self-compassion.png>

Remember to remember

Mindfulness with clear comprehension takes the bare noticing of mindfulness and adds a further layer of wisdom: not just *what* is happening, but *why*, whether now is the right moment, whether we are actually present for it, and whether we are seeing it clearly. Brought to the ordinary business of a day - walking, eating, speaking, reaching for what we want - it turns simple awareness into wise, intentional living.

This is not a demand to scrutinise every moment; it is an invitation to pause, every so often, and ask a few honest questions before we act - and to trust that this small habit, practised patiently, changes the shape of a life.

Establishing mindfulness in this way allows a crucial pause before taking action, in order to enable a full apperception of the situation and a sober evaluation of the appropriate way to respond to it. This is vital.

- Bhikkhu Anālayo, Early Buddhist Meditation, Part 3: The Establishments of Mindfulness, Mindfulness 15 (2024), 733–736