

Clear comprehension (Pali: sampajanna, Sanskrit: samprajanya):

Traditionally, four kinds of clear comprehension are distinguished. They are closely connected with mindfulness—in the sense of present moment awareness—, and they add a particular understanding to it. Yet, they need to be supported by present-moment awareness. This is why in early Buddhism, you will often encounter the compound sati-samajanna (smṛti-samprajanya), i.e., bare awareness conjoined with clear comprehension.

1. Clear comprehension of purpose: Why are you doing what you are doing? You can look at this in terms of general/specific intentions or long-/medium-/short-term intentions. While your general intention may be enlightenment or the perfection of wisdom and compassion, you have to translate it into more mid- and short-term objectives. This is likely to make you aware of certain conflicting intentions (e.g., you may have a wonderful ideal of the simple life without the burden of possessions, but you don't actually want to loose your car). Explore the views behind those intentions, and aim to develop a clearer sense of purpose that manifests in actual priorities. It is important to keep alive and occasionally reinforce your overall purpose in life since it can easily be lost in the turbulence of everyday busy-ness.

The next two samprajanyas help bringing your general purpose more down to earth.

2. Clear comprehension of suitability: Which means are appropriate now, in this very situation, to achieve your purpose? How do the means reflect your purpose? (It is here that the saying 'the path is the goal' has some validity.) Consider suitability in both 'subjective' and 'objective' terms: Subjectively: What is suitable for you with your present capabilities in order to make the next step? Here you need a keen self-knowledge. Be challenging, but don't force yourself. This can be a good training in balanced effort. Objectively: The straight way isn't always the best, but sometimes it is. What does the present situation actually allow and call for?

Clear comprehension of suitability includes sensitivity for appropriate timing, particularly in our communication with others. Many conflicts and adversities result from our using unsuitable means of communication and at the wrong time.

Another area here is checking and re-considering our habitual ways to do thing. The fact that certain procedures were good and purposeful in the past doesn't mean that they still are suitable now, under changed circumstances.

3. Clear comprehension of your current field of application in spiritual practice: How can you use the given situation to apply your specific precepts of spiritual practice, i.e., your present emphasis or focus in developing wisdom and compassion? It is not enough to generally aim for enlightenment, but you must actually apply yourself to very specific practices that help you move through the next stage on the path.

Ask: How can I, in the given situation, give expression to my main meditation/spiritual practice(s)? E.g., 'how would kindness/mindfulness/generosity/truthfulness ... respond to this situation?' Note that it may not always be possible to directly 'translate' your present field of application into a particular situation. But, if nothing else, you can always practice mindfulness!

4. Clear comprehension of reality, i.e., non-ignorance or true understanding: How does ultimate reality manifest in this situation? More specifically, considering your experience in terms of particular teachings (impermanence, suffering, non-self, emptiness, etc.) To deeply practice this dimension of samprajanya, you are likely to need a good grasp on the basic Buddhist doctrines.

Still, you can usefully investigate the views and underlying motivations that you bring to a situation and ask: 'How am I maintaining my (deluded) sense of 'I' or 'self' in this?' 'What are the limitations/constrictions/suffering of this situation?' 'How is it conditioned and how will it change?'