

Enough. A Skill For Everyday Anxieties

Why is asking "is it enough?" a good diagnostic tool for many situations, and when "I have enough" might work better than "I should be grateful"

We, humans, always want more. Buddhism has recognized this for thousands of years as the human condition and calls it *dukkha* - an ultimate state of dissatisfaction.

But this is not some abstract spiritual teaching. It is one of the main mechanisms behind so much of our anxiety. Should I earn more? Should I try harder? Should I have more security? More houses? Should I be thinner? Stronger? More successful?

Obviously, we can look at it from a scientific perspective and say that this tendency has nothing to do with *dukkha* and is just biological wiring. Whatever the reason is, though, does not matter much- the tendency is obviously there.

It is genuinely difficult to know how much is actually fine. There seems to be no clear, consistent rule for how much a person should be doing or how much a person should have. So if there is no rule, comparison starts to look like the only reasonable anchor.

Comparison might seem rational, but it also creates the feeling of constantly walking on thin ice. This is exactly the dread and anxiety many people live with: one either has to keep making sure they are in front, or keep trying not to be the one behind, with nothing in between.

Another problem is that what comparison creates is, by nature, comparative. You can be poor because you have no real estate, only a rented apartment. Compared to someone without stable housing, that rented apartment is already a lot. Compared to someone with a house, it feels like not enough. So you want to be as rich as the person with the house. You buy the house. Now you are richer than the person in the apartment, but poorer than the people who have land, or a better house than yours.

The satisfaction from buying your own house is extremely short-lived, because buying your own house is like an elevator to the level of other house owners. And once you are there, you are suddenly compared to them — and many of them have a better house than you do.

This is how we go from abstract suffering in spiritual traditions to your actual suffering. You can hear “*dukkha*” or “human dissatisfaction” and think: yes, yes, abstract spiritual suffering, ancient

wisdom, whatever.

But this is not abstract.

It is the reason you wake up in a panic in the middle of the week. The reason you cannot fall asleep and turn from side to side for hours. The reason you cannot rest with your family on the holiday you saved for, because you are already thinking whether you will be able to afford another one. The reason you need a glass of wine on Sunday evening because you are stressing about your job and your mortgage.

It is a poor quality of life: constantly feeling that you should have more and do more, and that what you already do and have is never enough.

This is why enough is one of the most useful skills a person can learn.

Gratitude and enough

The usual answer to dissatisfaction is gratitude. And gratitude is genuinely one of the best stances a person can have toward life. It is a sign of maturity to understand that the universe does not owe us anything, and that whatever good arrives is not something we were automatically entitled to receive. Learning to be grateful, even for very little, is extremely useful.

But gratitude has a few problems when it is used as the main tool to fix dissatisfaction.

First, gratitude is often quietly based on comparison. “You should be grateful” often means: compared to people who have less, you should be grateful. Compared to children in Africa, you should feel very rich.

Second, gratitude can very quickly become a self-beating tool. I should be grateful. I am not grateful enough. What is wrong with me that I cannot appreciate what I have?

Finally, gratitude might function as an escape route from reality. If one is sitting in a garage with water dripping on their head, looking at luxury buildings in front and repeating “I am so grateful,” this no longer looks like gratitude. It looks like denial.

This is where **enough** becomes useful.

It does not require creating feelings that are not there. It asks a much simpler question: is this enough for what is actually needed?

Enough has two other major advantages:

“Enough” is not comparative. Either you have enough for the hot dog, or you don’t. If the hot dog costs four dollars and you have four dollars, you have enough. There is no better enough or worse enough. Your richer neighbor does not make your 4 dollars less enough. Enough is enough.

“Is it enough?” allows for a no as an answer. This looks obvious when enough or not enough is just counting, like with the hot dog. But the same structure matters in more abstract situations. Is this relationship enough for me? This question can produce a no. Gratitude says: be grateful for what you have. Enough can say: this is good, and I can be grateful for it, but it is still not enough for what is needed here.

How to recognize enough

Asking “is this enough?” only works if “no” is a real option. If “no” is not allowed, it is just spiritual bypassing—convincing yourself that something is enough when it isn’t. If a negative answer is allowed, then the next question becomes: enough for what exactly?

Enough for what is needed.

This is not an impossible question. Most functional adults are capable of answering it. To analyze it any further is just making a simple thing complicated, up to an endless rabbit hole of questioning how you know anything at all.

People are able to calculate how much money they need for the month, or for a holiday. People are also able to rationally know how much to train, or what they need from a relationship. The problem is not a missing capacity, but the fact that we very often mistake “what do I want” for “what do I need.”

And “What do I want?” can be a very difficult question because what we want shifts all the time. It changes based on comparison, what is available, and what suddenly looks possible.

“What do I need?” is much more stable and less dependent on circumstances, although often requires training in telling the difference from “what would I want?”

Enough and wanting more

Enough is, again, not a form of spiritual bypassing. It is not pretending comparison does not exist, and it is also not some magical antidote to wanting more.

Knowing you have enough does not automatically delete the desire for more. It just changes its weight. There is more out there. More may be available. You might even want it.

If you can look at your situation and see that it is enough, you still have the full freedom to look over the neighbor's fence, see that they have more, and want that for yourself.

But there is a giant difference between wanting more and feeling like you need more in order to be okay.

Training in enough

The great advantage of enough is that it works both ways. It allows you to relax and let go of chasing, but it also gives you a solid base to compete, take risks, and go after things. When your foundation is “what I already have is enough,” you have a solid base.

It is also an easily available and fast-working antidote to everyday material and productivity anxieties.

So obviously, it makes sense to know how to train in applying enough. How does one do that?

Enough or not?

The first distinction is simple: if someone does not have enough, then obviously the answer is not to sit there repeating “this is enough.” The answer is to move and do something to have enough. If the rent cannot be paid, you don't need a better perspective. You need to go get the money.

But if you do have enough—if next month is paid and you have a buffer—then the problem is already settled by the math. The anxiety isn't based on anything real. You check the numbers, see the proof, and shut it down: I have enough. This is enough.

“My job only pays \$15 per hour. This is not enough. I need to move and find a better job.”

“I've already eaten a cake and a pizza today. That is enough. I don't need another comfort food.”

Felt enough

Sometimes enough is not possible to calculate, but rather felt. The felt sense of enough is very similar to the felt sense of not being hungry.

It does not mean that appetite is absent: you can still feel like having an ice cream, or a piece of a chocolate bar. But there is no active hunger going on.

Anxiety is not the same as a hunger signal. A person can be hungry and anxious. A person can be fed and anxious. A person can be completely unhungry and still anxious that they will not have enough. Therefore, anxiety does not prove hunger.

Most people do know when they are hungry. The problem is usually not that they do not know. The problem is that other things may matter more. A person may know a relationship is not enough and still stay because the alternative feels worse.

Neuroscience research confirms that if hunger signals are ignored for long enough, they can become harder to register. Like with food, if a person overrides their “enough” signal again and again, they may eventually stop feeling it altogether. The solution is also similar to retraining the hunger signal - checking with oneself repeatedly, in low-stakes situations: “Is this enough?”

“This person is sweet, and we have fun together, but this level of connection is not enough for me right now.”

“I am not earning well here, but I am definitely following my passion; this is enough”

Good enough

Enough is also a very useful skill for overachievers, perfectionists, and people without a natural “stop button,” including neurodivergent folks with dysregulated dopamine signaling. It is the ability to recognize the moment when additional effort stops translating into a better result.

The work could obviously continue, but the equation has changed: more effort no longer produces enough improvement to justify the cost.

“35th message with AI about a synonym for this word will not bring much; this is good enough”

“I rewrote the code 12 times, and it still does not work; this is enough for today”

Deciding beforehand

At the beginning, things rarely ever feel good enough. Waiting for the feeling of enough to arrive on its own is a bad strategy.

A way better one is to decide beforehand what will count as enough, as in the moment itself, wanting more starts firing and the goal moves. The solution is to make an informed, rational decision beforehand and stick to it.

“I will write three chapters and stop”

“I will save 1000 this month, that will be enough”

Honesty: Need or want?

In order to assess if something is enough, one has to be able to see what is needed - which means, almost always, telling a true need from a want.

This connects to the previous parts: enough is hunger-like, and wanting is similar to appetite.

Hunger does not depend on what is available; appetite fires when something delicious appears. Hunger does not depend on what people around you are doing; appetite can be woken up by comparison. Hunger can be satisfied. Appetite is unsatisfiable.

There is nothing wrong with appetite. The mistake is expecting satisfaction from it.

Then the question becomes: am I still hungry or do I just have appetite for more?

“This person is sweet, and we have fun together, but this level of connection is not enough for me right now.”

“I would love to lose a few more pounds, but I already lost 20, and it is well enough”

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