

Practice Note: Experiencing Purely

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on January 3, 2018

If a lake surface is agitated with a lot of waves, it doesn't really reflect very well – or not at all – what's around the lake. But when the lake water gets still, it becomes mirror-like. And the more still it is, the more clearly it can reflect what's around. A person might lean over and look at their face, and see it fairly clearly in certain kinds of still water situations. Or there might be a spectacular reflection of the mountains in the distance – in the reverse direction. It's quite beautiful to watch. When the water is still, you can sometimes look into it and see what's inside. You can see the fish and whatever other life, rocks, or stones that might be there. But what's required for both reflections and seeing inside is to have the water still, quiet. It's the same thing with the mind, with practice. Something needs to be still inside – to be quiet – so that we can see clearly.

What we're looking for in mindfulness practice is to see clearly, and to clearly recognize what's happening as it's happening. But we're also looking to do our observation from a place of quiet or stillness. What's unique about this practice is that we're not trying to force ourselves into being still, or to force a busy and agitated mind to be quiet. But we *are* looking for whether there's some place within where we can be still and quiet in our observation.

One of the ways to find this is to think that in looking, it's the looking that can be quiet – a certain stillness in the looking. The eyes might look at different things, but there's a quiet – a stillness – that's there in the looking.

In the hearing, we find the stillness and quiet that's in the hearing. We might be listening to noise, but the hearing itself is not the noise. Can the hearing be still and quiet?

In the tasting, can there be a quiet stillness in the tasting?

In the smelling, just the smelling. Not our reactions, not our responses, our desires and aversions. But in the smelling in and of itself, can there be a stillness – a quiet – in the smelling?

In feeling what's going on in our body, in sensing our tactile sensations – can that be still and quiet?

And we can be aware of what's going on in our minds. We can be aware of our thoughts, our feelings, our intentions, our desires, all kinds of movements of the mind. Can the knowing of the mind be still and quiet? The mind is allowed to be busy and agitated, to do what it does. The body can have lots of energy. But one other place to look for this quiet, still place is in the ways in which we know – the knowing of something.

As you practice today, you might think of the calm, still lake that reflects whatever comes. It reflects what it sees. The reflection is not troubled by what comes. It's not attacking what comes. It just allows what walks by the shore to be reflected. Can you find – or begin to find, approach finding – some place within, some way of being, where there's a kind of stillness? Sweet stillness. A kind of quiet. A comfortable quiet through which you can know what's happening.

In the seeing...quiet. In the hearing...stillness. In the tasting...quiet. In the smelling...stillness. In the body...quiet. In the mind...a certain kind of stillness that knows what's happening.

If what I'm saying today makes sense to you – as you do your walking meditation, as you go to the bathroom, as you have tea, if you come back here to sit – you might see if you can intuit, or sense, or feel your way, into a place of quiet and stillness that's not forced. It doesn't actually require you to quiet or still anything. But there *is* a place within – a place where you can be with whatever is happening in a still way.

You might experiment, and see if you can find that, and how it can support you as you go through the day. Thank you.