

Practice Note: Caretakers of the World

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on February 7, 2018

One of the worthwhile things to consider when you sit to meditate is who are you sitting with. Who is it that is part of your circle of concern, care or love that you're including as part of your sitting here? When you sit, it's easy to think that your circle of concern is just yourself. In our tradition, we usually sit with the eyes closed, and it can be just me, myself and mine. It's easy to have all kinds of thoughts and concerns that are very particular to us or our relationship to them. You're going to work through your issues, or try to settle and get calmer. So, in one way or another, if the focus is on yourself in either healthy or unhealthy ways, then it's easy to fall into the idea that the circle of concern or the people involved here is just you.

But, the circle of concern can be wider. It can be the people in the hall who are sitting together. Or the circle of concern can be wider still. It can be the people in Redwood City, who you're going to encounter on the roads and communities as you leave here. It can be your neighbors, or your friends, or family. It can be wider and wider circles.

One of the interesting ways of thinking about meditation is that perhaps we do it not just for ourselves, but even more so for the whole world – for all living beings. Even though we sit here and close our eyes, it's like we're sitting down to become the caretakers of this whole world. What would it be like if you were to sit here meditating – with your breathing and your body, staying present, and letting the mind get quiet – and as you do that, there's a sense that you're kind of holding the whole world in your heart? If you could imagine all beings, the whole globe, everything, here in your sitting, how would you sit? How would you, your heart, or your mind be if you were the caretaker of the whole world?

If it were not just for yourself, would it put you more in the present moment? Or would it put you more in your thoughts, and you wander off in thought more? What could you do to hold in your lap, in your palms or in your heart the care, and maybe even love, for all beings? Would that support you? So that when you settle down, get focused, and really enter the moment here, you are in really here and now, and not there and then, with your mind. In some silent way, you've brought with you the whole world, so that you're not sitting here alone. You're not doing it for yourself. You're being here for the whole world more than for yourself.

If you're inclined, it might be nice today while you're doing your walking and sitting meditation to see whether this idea that you're doing this to be present for all beings is supportive of your efforts to really be present. You're doing it as a way of caring for everyone in this world. How would you carry yourself? How would you be? How would you sit in the present moment if that were your opportunity?

I hope you enjoy the day.