

Practice Note: Connecting to the Present Moment

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

One of the interesting reference points for mindfulness practice is the distance or obstructions you have in being present for what's here and now. If you are pulled into the world of your thoughts – thinking about the past, the future, or a fantasy – it's good to take a moment to notice how this creates distance from the actual world here: your experience of breathing, being in your body, or stepping as you walk.

Get a sense of how, when you hopefully shift into the present moment, you are mindful of something specific, like the sensations of your feet on the ground, sensations of the body, or what you see. Sometimes seeing is a good exercise for what I'm talking about. When you are present, it is possible to see when the obscuration or distance in being caught up in thought is no longer there. It's been cleared away a little bit. Begin to appreciate, see, or understand how thinking distances you from your present lived experience, and obscures you from yourself so that you're not really connected to what's here.

It can be a very helpful to understand that because you get a sense that drifting off into thinking is not valuable because you're now in a virtual reality, an imaginary world. You can get a sense of how you're not connected, and that it would actually be richer and more valuable to be grounded, connected, here, alive – rather than lost in a personal world that takes you away from being connected to the world that is here.

To summarize: when you find yourself strongly drifting off into thought, notice how that creates a sense of distance or obscuration from the world that's here and now. You're not really here in some vivid, clear way. Sometimes it can be quite dramatic, and you literally can hardly see what's going on around you because you're so absorbed in some wonderful or horrible fantasy, or so strongly involved in some other preoccupation of the mind.

The more you understand how this works, the easier it will probably be to not do that when you meditate, and instead to really be here.

I hope that is helpful today.