

INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS: SERIES 2

Class 3: Intentions and Letting Go

by Gil Fronsdal

As mindfulness develops, an important area to notice is the intentions that precede any physical, verbal or mental activity we initiate. Most of these intentions go unnoticed, but greater awareness of them brings a number of benefits. Including, we will tend to become more aware of the action that follows and we will be able to investigate the nature of the intentions motivating us. In addition, by providing us with a gap between the impulse to act and the act itself, mindfulness of intentions tends to increase our creative ability to choose wisely. In seeing clearly an intention we can exercise wise choice about whether to pursue it, let it go, or choose a different intention.

Intentions can be experienced in different ways. They may appear primarily as words or images in the mind. They may be an impulse or urge somewhere in the body, e.g., in the arms, legs, or torso. They may be felt as a surge of energy or as a minor or major contraction of the mind or heart.

During your meditation sessions this next week commit yourself to sitting completely still (some teachers even instruct the meditator to not even move their eyeballs). With this commitment as a support to help highlight intentions, bring mindfulness to any intention to move, including even the smallest movements. Instead of moving, note the impulse, feel it, recognize it. Notice what happens to it. Does it increase or decrease, disappear or become some other intention? What does the intention feel like? Does the presence of an intention to move narrow or cloud your awareness? What motivates the intention? Bring mindfulness to that motivation. What happens then? How entangled are you with your intentions?

If after being mindful of an intention for awhile and it persists experiment with letting go of it. Let go of the thoughts; relax the impulse, soften the mind or body feelings connected with the urge.

If the impulse to move continues or returns you are welcome then to move if you feel it is the wise thing to do.

If there are times when your mind is quite still and concentrated during your meditation be attentive to the subtle intentions governing your mental actions. This could include the impulse to follow some thought, to let go of thoughts, to direct attention toward some different experience, to become more focused, or to relax. See if your awareness of intentions can help you become more alert, peaceful and free.

At the end of the sitting, write down your experience of exploring intentions. At the end of the week review what you have written to get a sense of how your understanding and mastery of intentions has changed.