

Dharmette: Right Now, Nothing Needs to Happen

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on March 31, 2010

To support mindfulness practice and the Buddhist path, one of the great teachers is simplicity – to think of simplicity as teaching us something. So to be simple first. To find situations where we can just be simple with the circumstances that are happening. Simple with the conversations, simple with the activity that we're doing, simple just being alive. Keep it simple, and then see what happens.

It can be very hard to keep things simple. There can be a lot of momentum in the mind, a lot of activity in the mind about things that need to happen, that should happen, that shouldn't happen, important they don't happen. A lot of desires, fears and ambitions can operate. And so with that reference point of just being simple, you can start seeing all these other voices and beliefs in the mind, and start questioning them. It's sometimes hard to question them if we're already living a complex life and running around doing a lot of different things. But rather, keep it simple.

Simplicity is also a teacher because it is one of the ways that the heart or the mind can come to rest. One of the great goals of any spiritual life, is the experience of being at peace. And peace is something which is simple. If it's not simple, it's not going to be peaceful. Even though our life around us might be complex, the experience of peacefulness that we can have in our hearts and minds and bodies comes with simplicity of being. And so one way that simplicity is a teacher is it points us back to the possibility of being at peace with what is, some inner peace.

There's a great practice to experiment with – it's not a practice to use in all times and places, but you could use it in certain circumstances. Maybe you'll know when to use it. And that's to use the concept or even the phrase, the idea, that "Right now nothing has to happen." Try that.

I once taught this many years ago and said, "For the next week find a situation, where you can just be in the situation, and approach it as if nothing needs to happen." There was a couple in the class. He was a photographer and had a very expensive camera, and they were somewhere on the cliffs by the beach, climbing over rocks. Their child was holding the camera, but then it dropped and broke on the rocks. Then his wife turned to him and said, "This is the time. Nothing needs to happen." He told me this story with great gratitude because it saved all kinds of difficulties and problems in his family life.

Nothing needs to happen. Try it out in different circumstances and see what happens to you. See what happens with what can feel like an addiction that something needs to happen. Or maybe the feeling is, "Yes I know nothing needs to happen, and that means nothing is supposed to happen. Stay away from me." Maybe it's better to say nothing needs to happen means nothing needs to happen in any particular way. So just allow things to unfold, and see what happens.

You might learn a lot about being at peace with how things are. You might learn that, more often than people realise, we don't have to be in control, or to figure out, or fix, or make things fit some idea about what we want it to be. The whole dimension of peace that is so nourishing and meaningful for the inner life belongs much closer to that realm where we're not trying to fix or make things happen. That nothing needs to happen is a very profound thing.

Also from that perspective of nothing needs to happen, if you're relaxed about that, then you might be surprised that you find other sources of motivation inside of you, rather than the surface motivations. That place in the mind that has judgements and ideas and expectations and desires and aversions, that's a complicated world. But if the mind is relaxed, you can find motivations that are deeper than that: motivations of compassion or freedom, which are much deeper than the surface of the mind.

A lot of people don't trust the depth of their motivation. They're afraid that if nothing needs to happen, they'll be a couch potato. They'll just sit there, and nothing will happen; they won't do anything; they won't be able to take care of themselves; they won't be able to respond to life; and, heaven forbid, no-one will like them, or whatever their concern is.

But to be simple, at peace, and to really be able to rest with "nothing needs to happen," you might be surprised at what does happen. That may make space for something deep inside to come forth. And it might be different from what you expect. But chances are that what comes forth from that place will be significant. I

use the word 'significant' in a careful way because it might not necessarily be beautiful. But whatever comes from the depths of us is significant, and it needs our attention. It needs our care; it needs to be faced and dealt with, and worked with.

Once you start with "nothing needs to happen," you see what does happen, and then you might have a better understanding of what needs to happen after that. "Oh I need to address this deep fear. I need to address this deep beauty, this beautiful joy that's somehow deep inside, the love that I feel or something." There's a variety of things that might speak or come forth when the heart or the mind is at rest and at peace.

I think one of the fears that many people have, implicitly, is that their quiet, natural, deep motivations are not going to be adequate to get through this life. The surface part of the mind that has some sense of self, tries to fit everything into categories and boxes, and tries to know, ahead of time, how everything's supposed to be. The world of fear and anxiety, the world of desire and ambition, the world of hostility and aversion – that's how we make ourselves safe, how we make everything okay. But if you put all that to rest, you can have a very strong sense that nothing's going to support them anymore; nothing's going to come forth. One of the reasons for that is that when the heart and the mind are deeply at peace, when it's simple, the place of support and motivation, and response to the world is not going to be visible. It's not like a thing or place. It's invisible because it's not there until it's there. You may not going to know what you're going to say until you say it. You don't know how you feel until you feel it. If you look to see how you feel before you feel, it's invisible. If you look to see what you're going to say before you're in the conversation, it's invisible; it's not there.

So perhaps you can have a deep trust of your innate intelligence – that the innate response is adequate to take care of ourselves and get through life. It doesn't have to be brilliant. It doesn't have to make us the most popular person on the block. It just has to be enough. Our personality just has to be enough so that we can live in this world peacefully and wisely and, hopefully, in a way that helps other people as well.

I think of these mornings here, at IMC on Wednesdays, as being simple mornings. If you come back on another Wednesday, this might be a good place to experiment with this little practice of "Nothing needs to happen," and see what happens when nothing needs to happen. So thank you.