

Practice Note: Noting Thinking

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on April 21, 2010

One of the very useful things to be mindful of is noticing, as quickly as you can, when you start thinking in meditation. Or if you are constantly thinking, notice that. But, in the course of your sitting, or your walking, to very clearly name, or note, 'thinking' when you're thinking. To have a very clear acknowledgement, recognition, "Oh now I'm thinking. Here is a mind that's thinking. These are thoughts or images, that are bubbling up."

To have a clear recognition of it when you are not living in the thoughts – you're a little bit pulled back. It's a bit like you're viewing it, as opposed to being in the thoughts. And then to be content that if you're recognizing that you're thinking, you're being mindful. You don't have to stop thinking. You don't have to be at war with your thinking. But to have a very clear recognition, "Oh I'm thinking," and to be ready and alert enough to do it as often as you need to.

Sometimes if you're following the breath, which is one of the core practices, it's easy to get focused on the breath, but in the background to have this constant churning of thinking about things. And so the very simple naming it, "Thinking, thinking" – being alert enough to notice when thinking comes into play again, "I'm thinking, thinking." And if all you did, in the course of 45 minutes of sitting, was just to note, 'thinking,' and let go of it, it would be a very significant session of meditation.

One of the reasons why it's so powerful to note thinking is that thinking lies at the foundation of many of our problems. It's one way to address all your problems – say your problems are a building, like a ten-storey building – you could take care of all the problems that are on the tenth floor, the ninth floor, and the eighth floor. Or you can just pull out the cornerstone, and the whole thing comes crumbling down. Maybe that's not a very nice image, but to be able to see thinking and not stay involved in the thinking – to step back – is like pulling the cornerstone out from a lot of things; it makes life a lot easier. You might try it.