

Practice Note: What Intentions Are Operating?

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on March 2, 2011

One of the axioms of Buddhist psychology is that for most people most of the time, the mind – our thoughts, the attention and inclination of the mind, and what the mind is doing – is based on intention, on wanting something. Sometimes it's wanting, and sometimes it's not wanting it, pushing it away or trying to ignore it. But there's almost always an intention, something that the mind is trying to do, or wanting.

One of the interesting things to do in mindfulness practice is to start becoming sensitive to and aware of what is it your mind wants all the time. If you're doing walking meditation, for example, what you want to do is to be present for your feet as you walk. Do you really want to do the practice of walking meditation, or does your mind have other ideas?

If there's a sound around you, what intentions or desires get triggered or activated by the sound around you? And then what does the mind want or not want, and how involved are you in the wanting and not wanting of the mind?

I don't want to suggest that wanting something or not wanting something is wrong. There are plenty of things that are appropriate to want and not want. But it's very important to be able to see how the mind operates on the intentions that it has. When we can really clearly see it, we have more choice about what we follow. Do we fall into the old grooves and channels of particular desires and intentions? Or do we not go down those chutes and say, "Well, not now. I'll do something else. I'll go down the mindfulness-of-my-walking-as-I-walk chute."

It might be interesting today for you in the next period to focus a little bit on what is it that the mind wants and doesn't want. What's going on there? What are the intentions that are operating – because something is always operating?

I hope you enjoy your morning. Thank you.