

Practice Note: Practicing with an Attitude of Compassion

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

In the practice of walking meditation and sitting meditation, one thing is the practice you do – following your breath or following your steps as you walk. Another thing is the attitude you have as you do the practice. One thing we like to pay attention to is the attitude we have in being present. Many times it's easy to be focused on trying to do something – to be present, concentrated, not drift off, stay connected to the breathing or whatever the meditation practice is that you're doing – and to not notice the attitude that comes along with doing it. There could be striving, reluctance, or judgments about how things are. There could be a feeling of "This is too difficult," or "I'll get to it eventually." A lot of different attitudes can be embedded in how we practice. Sometimes it's useful to step back and look at our attitude. In noticing this, it may be possible to bring forth a more useful attitude than the one we just happen to have.

If it's available to you, one of the most useful attitudes is having some compassion for the moment. When you're sitting, mostly just with yourself when you're meditating, there can be a field, an atmosphere or attitude of compassion for what is unfolding for you. If the mind wanders, or if you judge yourself negatively, you may have a negative attitude towards what's happening. There can be a lot of suffering, strong emotions, or struggles that come up.

Whatever is happening, whether it's joyful or difficult, see if you can receive it with an attitude of care, compassion, and empathy. It's as if you recognize that it's a challenge to be a human being, and whatever is happening to you has happened to many people before. You're not unique. So be willing to step back and treat yourself with kindness, empathy, and compassion as you would treat someone you're friendly with, making space to let them be who they are. To sit and practice here with an attitude of compassion can make it a lot easier to settle and relax into the present moment.

If that's helpful, you might consider it. Thank you.