

# Practice Note: Enjoyment and Presence

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on January 18, 2012

This idea of being present, of being mindful for what is actually happening in the present moment, without judging it, without reacting to it, without being for or against – to just be present – is something I've found to be very useful. In doing this, with time, there came an inner stability or steadiness where I could be non-reactively present in a steady, stable way, even with a wide range of things churning through me or happening around me.

After doing this for a while, I learned that there's a lot going on in the present moment. And there's a sense that out of all the different things happening in the present moment, the mind will select out what it thinks is important to focus on. We don't tend to think that we have intention or choices in that selection process. But there are times when I've sat with a lot of sounds around me, and haven't noticed them at all – they just weren't part of my selection process. At other times, the same sounds will be what the selection process picks out, pulls up, and makes a big deal out of. I learned to see the selection process in what I'm present for.

Sometimes physical discomfort can be prominent, but sometimes the same physical discomfort has no pull in the selection process operating in the background. There are a lot of different things going on: sounds, sensations in the body, feelings, thoughts, and moods – a whole wide range of things. It's okay to be a little bit involved in that selection process. But you don't have to necessarily go along with whatever selection your mind happens to make. In fact, that's what you do when you focus on the breath. Out of the whole range of things you could pay attention to in the moment, you focus on the breath, because the breath is stabilizing, centering, and helps you stay in the present moment. It's a nice anchor to the present moment so that you don't wander off.

There are some other simple choices you can make in the selection process that can help you to be more concentrated, more in the present. One way is to give some choice to noticing that part of your unfolding practice that is pleasant and enjoyable. Look for the pleasure in the practice.

When I was a new Buddhist practitioner, I thought that you weren't supposed to enjoy yourself. In Zen, you were supposed to just be there. The idea of feeling pleasure seemed a little bit besides the point of just being present in a non-reactive, free, and non-attached way. But pleasure is a normal part of life, and is also something that supports concentration and a sense of well-being.

So as you stay present for the breathing, for the present moment, notice that part of your experience which is enjoyable. This is not at the expense of pushing away or resisting what is uncomfortable, pretending it's not there, or trying to override, or deny it. We're supposed to be realistic and present to see what's going on; but if there is some enjoyment, even a small percentage of the whole experience, it's fine to take that in, and choose to include it. Then the mind wants to be present. It has an easier time being present if the experience is enjoyable – and the mind is going to want to be there.

You don't want to be too actively attached to success in this, but when you are sitting down and getting into the meditation, look around and see where in your meditative experience there is something enjoyable, pleasant or comfortable. Is there pleasure in the experience? Is there pleasure in the breathing? Is there pleasure in just sitting still? Is there pleasure in not being caught up in all the different activities of daily life, running around taking care of things? There's a whole range of things that can be enjoyable in the present moment if we scan around. When we feel that enjoyment, feel that pleasure, then there is a simple, relaxed way to include that pleasure and that enjoyment, as part of the gestalt (part of the whole) of what's happening in the present moment. Then being present becomes welcoming and desirable.

If your fantasies are more pleasant than your immediate experience, then the mind will go off in the fantasies more easily. Hopefully you can find some simple pleasure, some innocent enjoyment. It doesn't have to be bells and whistles – just something simple and relaxing that helps you.

As you go about your sitting and walking practice today, you might consider whether there is some enjoyment or pleasure or sense of well-being that's here. Then, is there some way you can use that to help you be more present? Not to use it so that your mind drifts off more in thought and starts fantasizing. For example, if you

stand in the sun, feel the warmth and start thinking of going to Hawaii, that doesn't help you be present; but if you can go out in the sun, feel the warmth, and this connects with your body so that you feel more grounded, then it supports the practice.