

Practice Note: Attention to the Body

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on July 11, 2012

The practice of attention is multi-faceted, and involves different faculties. It also involves a selection process, as we select out what we pay attention to. If you're not taking some responsibility for how you use your attention, then this selection process – the way the mind tunes into the environment or into oneself – will happen unconsciously or subconsciously. We pick out different things in the environment to pay attention to, and some of that happens through the vehicle of our thinking. We have thoughts and concerns, and those thoughts are like the tip of the iceberg of our inner functioning. Those thoughts somehow will direct our attention.

For example, if you're thinking about food, you might notice where the kitchen is at IMC. If you're thinking about walking meditation, you might start thinking about where to walk. Or if you're thirsty, you're looking around and noticing where there's water, or how to get tea here. Attention is used for the purposes we have in mind.

An interesting thing to try doing in meditation is to reduce the selection process, and to not be so focused on what you're thinking – and to the degree possible, for the thinking mind to become quiet. Rather than orienting yourself through thinking and thoughts, let that recede into the background and become quiet.

Then let the attention select or focus on what's happening in the body. What's happening with the sensations of the body, with the feelings and the impulses in the body? The whole inner life. The body always manifests in the present moment. The physical body is a *process*, which is deeply connected to all the mental processes – and thinking gets in the way sometimes. If we get out of the way – if we can get the thinking out of the way – then we can, sit and really be as quiet and still as possible, then we can notice what is emerging. What is arising? What is bubbling up? What is moving through you as you stay connected to your body? Notice, without any judgments, evaluations, or thoughts about what it is.

In all the things you can select to pay attention to, it's very helpful as you sit to pay attention to what's emerging, moving or occurring in your body. It helps quiet the thinking mind, though it's not always easy to do. Maybe you can do it to some degree. Turn the volume down a little, so that the attention focuses less on what you are thinking about, and more on what's emerging or moving through you – the physical aspect of your body.

Maybe that will be interesting for today as you practice, and I hope you enjoy your morning.