

# Practice Note: Your Relationship to What Is Happening

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on November 7, 2012

I want to say a couple of words about the practice of mindfulness that may be meaningful today. There is one area of mindfulness that's particularly significant and useful, both as an area to be mindful of, and also as a great protection for you and for the practice. It is sometimes a direct route to being calmer, more equanimous, a little freer from what's going on, and to know where the really important area of practice is. That area of mindfulness has to do with our *relationship* to what's happening.

I like to say that there are always two things happening in any moment: there's what's happening, and there's our relationship to what's happening. This applies to everything. If there's a loud noise outside when you are meditating, there's the noise, and your relationship to the noise. It might be that your relationship is no relationship because you know it's happening, and there's no reaction of any kind. Or, it could be that you relate to the noise as a wonderful, pleasant sound. "I wish I could record it, and bring it home with me. I really like that car sound." And you spend time planning how to have more of it. Or, perhaps you have aversion to it because it interferes with your practice. You relate to your practice as if you are holding onto it for dear life. Or you have so much ambition about being the next great Buddha, that in this sitting, you have to protect your practice so that you can get enlightened – but the car traffic is interfering with your wonderful, spiritual task. So you have aversion to the car traffic, because it's interfering with being free.

Something is going on with your breathing. Something is going on with the walking meditation. Something is going on all the time with all kinds of things. You do walking meditation, and you notice the hot water machine, and you have a relationship to that: "I want more tea," or "I wish they served coffee here."

In almost every situation we're in, we can have some simple – or not so simple – relationship to what's going on. When we're practicing mindfulness, there's often the instruction to pay attention to something, such as your breath. But paying attention to your relationship is not noticed. However, if you step back, you might ask, "How am I relating to the practice? How am I relating to my breathing at this point?" Then you might notice that you're doing extra things. There might be judgments, reactions, expectations, demands, hesitations, resistances. All kinds of things might be going on in the field we call the relationship to what's happening. Some people find it very effective to turn around, and notice – in a simple, ordinary, almost permissive way: "How am I relating to what's happening now?"

This might be an interesting area to explore as you do your sitting and walking practice here this morning.