

Practice Note: The Process of Unification

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on April 3, 2013

An important way in which Buddhist meditation unfolds can be subsumed under the word 'unification' or 'unity.' Meditation is a process of settling in, so that the disparate parts of ourselves get unified and harmonized.

For many people, as they lead their lives, their thoughts are going faster than their bodies. They are concerned about things of the past, the future, or elsewhere. They can be jumping around a lot between concerns, sometimes very quickly. Then there is the emotional life, the mood we may be in. Generally the emotional state or the mood lasts longer than the fleeting appearance and disappearance of thoughts. We might be happy, or calm, or grumpy – and that persists for a while.

Sometimes you can have a state of mind or a mood that is one way, but thoughts that are different. You might have a feeling of irritation, but it occurs to you that it would be a good thing to be generous to your neighbor. So, in spite of your mood, your intentions and thoughts may be generous. There are all of these different parts of ourselves, which can be going in different directions. The body can be one way. Our thoughts can be concerned with something different. Our intentions can be something else entirely, and our emotions and moods can be something else again.

Sometimes the mind jumps around quite a bit. You can see that in meditation. You sit down, and you see the different aspects of the mind. Even if you have some major concerns, you might notice fleeting thoughts. Different kinds of thoughts come in. They may not be about the meditation, even though meditating is the intention that you had set for yourself. The thinking mind may not have that intention at all. It might be involved in fantasy or other concerns. Then you might have a mood or emotion left over from something that happened earlier in the day, and you bring that with you. Your body may be restless or hungry – or it has gone someplace else. What I am trying to convey is the idea that we have these disparate parts, which can be involved in different concerns almost at the same time.

The process of meditation is to bring these different parts of ourselves into unity – so that our body, our breathing, our thoughts, our intentions, our feelings and emotions are all working together harmoniously on the same thing. In a similar way, if you are reading a really good book, or are very involved with a movie or with a craft you are doing – it's captivating and you really enjoy it. Everything in you gets pulled into that activity. Because you are absorbed in that activity, you are not jumping around between many things.

Meditation is a process of unifying, bringing together different parts, so that our body, mind, feelings, thoughts, and intentions are all working together, harmonized for the same purpose. One way to help that unification process is the simple practice of mindfulness. The act of being mindful – the presence of mind of holding something in awareness – is like putting all the puzzle pieces of our life on the table so that we can see them all. One function of mindfulness is to make *space* in the mind to be able to see all the different things going on. It is like creating a bigger container or context, or a large table to hold the different parts of our life. Rather than singling out one part and getting contracted onto it, it's an expansive movement. We expand, open up, create space around what we know. You might know your thinking, your breathing, what you're feeling in your body. The point is not just to see it – but to see it clearly, to recognize it, and to meet it with expansiveness or openness.

Some people like the word 'allowing' what is there. Making space and allowing things to be there is part of the process of unification. Together with that open and expansive quality of mindfulness, something else that can help the unification process is to choose, in a clear and conscious way, where you want to have your attention.

Our ability to choose our intention is one of the factors we want to unify – it's part of that gathering together. To choose something such as focusing on the breath, or in walking meditation on the feet, gives a purpose to our practice. The very gentle sense of opening that allows you to be there is helpful for setting the purpose that you focus on. And with that purpose, you fully allow the different puzzle pieces of your life to settle, to get absorbed and focused into what you are doing.

I hope that makes some sense. You might consider this today. How are you? How scattered? How many different things are going on? What is the kaleidoscope of feelings, thoughts, sensations, moods, and purposes that come through? What would it look like to start unifying these different parts, or gathering yourself together, or collecting everything?

So, collect yourself here and now in this body and mind.

I hope you enjoy your morning.