

Dharmette: Mindfulness of Harmony

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on May 22, 2013

It has been interesting to have leaf blowers here, and the sounds change over the years. We have Dharma practice days on Fridays, and as we went through the day, we would navigate the leaf blowers. I would try to do guided meditations during the leaf blowing. We'd have discussions during the sounds of these leaf blowers.

I wanted to go out there and talk to them about it – to explain to them that we meditate, and could they come earlier perhaps?

Or should we include it as part of the practice, and just be mindful – mindful of our aversion, our judgments, or in my case, my feelings that I'm not being a very good leader of a meditation center where they do leaf blowing. In my mind, I'd ask, "I wonder how long this is going to last, this Friday leaf blowing."

But today is Wednesday – it's a new era. So maybe now it's going to be on Wednesdays instead of Fridays. So it goes.

In this practice, part of what we do is to try and be in harmony with what is going on, rather than be in conflict with it. I think that the contrast between being in conflict versus being in harmony is a useful distinction to keep in mind. Many times we are in conflict with what is going on in our lives – with other people, with situations, and also with ourselves. But if we reformulate our aversion, and try to approach all the different circumstances of our lives as something to be in harmony with, then life becomes a lot more enjoyable – and also freer. There isn't much freedom around feeling conflict inside: tightening up, being aversive, pushing away.

What then does it take to live in harmony? One thing it takes is to be attuned to what is going on. You pay attention to the situation you are in. Are you attuned to the situation? Some people are so self-contained that they hardly notice what is going on around them. They don't really tune in to the context they are in. For example, if one of you decided to be a leaf blower, and you determined that the best place to blow leaves is near the meditation hall while we're meditating, then I would say that you are not very attuned to what is going on.

One of the functions of mindfulness is to help us have sufficient attention so that we can attune ourselves to a situation, understand what is going on, and then behave in ways that are appropriate. We don't force ourselves into being someone we are not, but rather we remain with who we are in a way that is harmonious or appropriate for the situation.

We all do this to some degree. Our behavior is very different if we walk into a nursery school classroom where the children are all napping, than if we go to a soccer game and our favorite team is winning, or if we attend a funeral. In different circumstances, we attune ourselves in order to be appropriate. We don't go to a funeral and sing some song from The Doors. We attune ourselves to what is there, and change how we are. One of the most wonderful experiences of life is to go into a nursery school full of kids who are napping. You don't want to disturb *them*; you're attuned, so you stay quiet. At a funeral, maybe we would whisper if we needed to talk to someone. We naturally adjust ourselves to circumstances.

Part of the attunement is to know ourselves. What is the appropriate way for us to be in harmony with the circumstances? Sometimes a situation is so compelling, that it defines how we should be. Or sometimes what is going on within *us* is so strong, that *we* define the response. Sometimes it is a combination of the two – knowing who we are, what we're feeling that day, what we're thinking, tuning into the situation around us – and then creating harmony.

In that attunement, how can we live so that we feel free and at peace? To be in harmony is to figure out the way to be at peace with what is going on. But actually, rather than saying “being at peace,” I would prefer the language of “not being in conflict” with what is. Peace might be too high a standard against which to measure ourselves.

It is preferable to not be in conflict with the leaf blowing. For me, when the leaf blowing is really close by, I feel it physically, as an uncomfortable, agitating energy. So, if my idea of being in harmony and being peaceful is the absence of that, then I am not attuned to the situation. However, if I am mindful of the value of harmony, I would ask, “Can I attune myself to this sound which is affecting me in a way that makes me uncomfortable? Can I attune myself in such a way that I am not in conflict with that?”

One very valuable thing I have learned is how to be comfortable with discomfort. If I am not comfortable with being uncomfortable, then I am not in harmony. If I have the idea that it shouldn't be this way, then I am overlaying conflict, separation, and distance from the experience onto the situation I'm in.

How can I not be in conflict with my agitation? How can I be attuned to that? Sometimes when we are trying to attune ourselves to a situation, we notice the situation; we notice ourselves; we notice we have to emphasize one more than the other. Sometimes, we have to share one or the other. When you are trying to be attuned to everything, a great thing to do in a social situation is to help other people to be attuned by telling them how you are. You might say, “I woke up this morning really grumpy, and you are better off knowing that.” You do them a favor. In case you start snapping at them, they might not take it so personally. They might be a little more prepared for it. So, sharing how you are can be a way of being attuned.

Or someone else may be having a hard time. So to be attuned, you might ask them what's going on for them. You try to find out more. And with whatever information you receive, you learn more, and can better attune yourself to the situation you are in. Then you can ask yourself, “How can I not be in conflict with this situation? How can I be in harmony with it? How can I respond to the situation in a way that is harmonious with what the situation needs?” It's a beautiful thing to do.

This is one thing we can do with mindfulness. Mindfulness teaches us how to pay attention, and as we learn to pay attention in the present moment, we can use that to attune ourselves to the situation, and to bring ourselves into harmony with it, inside and out.

Those are my thoughts for today.