

Practice Note: Mindfully Aware of the Body

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on January 14, 2015

A few words about the Dharma, and the practice this morning. I want to suggest two things. One is, it is very interesting to be aware, to be mindful of, and to know, where your attention is. What are you paying attention to?

There are six different domains, or ways, that your awareness could be channeling the world. For many people, the most common channel of attention is thinking. A big percentage of their attention is thinking about things in one way or another. Another way is to be aware of what you see. You can be very focused on seeing, sometimes very intently looking. In this case, a lot of attention goes into seeing. At other times, you are certainly seeing, but your active attention is not really on seeing. You are not really giving yourself over to seeing, you just happen to be seeing. Another way of channeling is listening. You can just hear, or you can be actively listening, and your attention goes to listening. Then smelling, tasting, and the body.

So, where is your attention? At different times, as you are sitting, or walking, or moving about, do you know where your attention is? Just be interested. Where is the attention primarily going – the active attention, in which you are more involved? Where is it going? If you find yourself in thought a lot, that's just interesting. You could be other places.

The practice of mindfulness is very much a 'body-fulness' practice. So first, be aware of where your attention is. Especially notice if you are thinking a lot. If you are thinking, turn yourself over to your body. Really feel what is going on through the body. Let the body be the antenna through which you experience what goes on – not your thinking. If you're thinking, let yourself come into your body, and feel what is happening.

For people who are not familiar with being mindfully aware of the body, maybe an analogy would be helpful. Imagine that it is a cold winter morning. Your house is cold when you wake up, and you are in your cozy, warm, comfortable bed. Maybe you don't want to get out of bed. Chances are pretty good that, at that moment, you are not entirely lost in your thoughts. The coziness, the warmth, the comfort of being in bed, you feel in a tactile way. You feel it in your body, and it feels so good. You feel the cold outside, and you have the warmth inside your covers. You feel this visceral, tactile, physical sense of the body. Then, if you leave your bed, and it's cold, and you're walking barefoot, you can feel the physicality of that. You might tense up around it. To turn yourself over to your body is to be in that zone where you are feeling the warmth or the cold, the comfort or the discomfort.

Turn yourself over to whatever is going on, to what is happening in your body. Feel it in your body. Turn yourself over, and just be there with experience. If you are thinking a lot, turn yourself over to your body, and feel what it is like in the body to be thinking a lot. Let the body be the resource, the negotiator, the finder of the path. Let it be the practice.

So, notice where your attention is, and whenever you can, turn your attention back to your body. I hope you enjoy the morning.