

Practice Note: Mindfulness as a Strength

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on January 21, 2015

One of the core practices of our tradition is mindfulness, which is to pay careful attention to what is happening in the present – not necessarily active recognition, but registering events in such a way that you are clearly aware of what is happening. This is it. Because if you don't recognize something clearly, there are all kinds of tentacles, all kinds of confusion in the mind about our relationship to what is happening. We can be reactive to it. We can judge it. We can have all kinds of commentary and ideas about it. There is something about the clear recognition of breathing in knowing, "Oh, this is an in-breath." As opposed to thinking, "The breath is kind of nice, but it's not as deep as maybe it should be. Maybe you should be thinking about what to get for dinner today." In this case, the mind is not clear about exactly what it is doing.

Mindfulness is a clear recognition, "Yes, this is what is happening." In that regard, the mental capacity to be mindful is sometimes called a 'faculty.' It is a faculty we have, but which sometimes is not being used. We want to start using this faculty. This faculty, this mindfulness, is sometimes called a 'strength,' a *bala*. When we utilize it, it is possible for it to become a strength. Sometimes when people use it, there is a kind of a drifting; there's no strength in it. It's kind of weak. When it becomes strong, it becomes a strength. It becomes one of your strengths. Not a strength that is a strain or is stressful. Not a strength that is inhibiting. Rather, when something is strong within us, it becomes ballast – a stabilizing force. We are not so easily influenced by the winds of our life, the things that come along.

As you practice, one of the things you might explore is if, in a relaxed easy way, your mindfulness can be clear – with clear recognition of what's going on. You may find strength in knowing, "Oh, this is what's going on now." Relaxed strength. Not pushing. Not rushing. So, when you take a simple step during walking meditation, you can be kind of there – or you can be really there, as if the most important thing happening in the world at this moment, is that step. You are going to be there with that step. You are not going to miss that step. That particular step will never happen again. You want to really be there for it. In this way, you develop this strength that you have. You bring a strong part of yourself: "Here I am. With this."

May a sense of strength support the deepening of your mindfulness, relaxation, and ease with your practice today.