

Practice Note: The Three Steps of Mindfulness (Part One)

**Transcribed and edited from a short talk by
Gil Fronsda1 on February 27, 2013**

This morning I want to offer you three steps that can be helpful in the practice of mindfulness. Some people find it useful to consider these three different steps in their process because having a process can keep you engaged and on track.

When you begin this process, always acknowledge what is happening. If you aren't acknowledging what is happening in the present moment, then it's not quite mindfulness. There is a lot that can be acknowledged in the present moment. You don't have to acknowledge it all quickly. Rather, acknowledge what stands out for you: what's compelling, what's happening. Acknowledging might take a little while. This is not just a checklist approach. Really stop. It's like the friend who really listens to you so that you feel well heard. Offer some

acknowledgment – some clear kind of presence
– to what's happening.

The second step is to feel what is happening. Once something has been acknowledged, then take your time to feel it. Again, we are talking about what is happening in the present moment: what does the experience feel like? For example, if you acknowledge the presence of tension, then you would go into the part of the body where the tension is, and you feel it. To feel it from the inside is a way of getting to know the tension more fully. Or if what you are doing is staying with the breath, then you acknowledge the breath first, and then feel what breathing is like from the inside. What is the experience of breathing like? What does it feel like in the body? Or if you are thinking a lot, first you acknowledge the thinking mind, and then feel what the energy of thinking is like in the body, the sensations. What does it feel like to be this way?

The third step is to soften around what you are feeling and what you are acknowledging. 'Soften' might mean that you are making more space around it, not being contracted around it, resisting, or in any way tight around the

experience. If there is tension in the experience itself, maybe there is some simple way to soften a little bit. If there's tension in the body, maybe you can relax it, soften it. Maybe just an infinitesimal amount – that's enough. Or if you can't relax it, maybe you can soften around it or around how you hold it in your mind.

These are the three steps: to acknowledge, to feel, and to soften. And then we can do it again. This process can hopefully keep you engaged in the present moment – it gives you something to do – but it also sets a nice pace in the practice. You are not in a hurry to have something happen, but you also are not dallying. You're just engaged in this three-step process.

If that makes sense and it's helpful, you might try it. Otherwise, you're welcome to do the practice as you've been doing it. Thank you.