

Practice Note: A Full, Clear Acknowledgement

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on February 1, 2012

Sometimes we're mindful; sometimes we're not. And sometimes we are somewhere in between, where we're kind of mindful, on automatic pilot. Maybe we're trying to be present and mindful of the breath, but the mind is thinking about something else. An interesting thing to do with mindfulness practice is to notice, as clearly as you can, what it's like to not be mindful, what it's like when you are drifting off in thought, or when you're caught up in thought.

When at some point you wake up enough from being distracted, rather than being discouraged, or coming strongly back to the breath or the present moment, turn toward the very distractions you have, and try to understand what's going on there. It's interesting to acknowledge very clearly and definitively what you are up to. What is it you're distracted by? What are the thoughts, the concerns you have?

Do it really clearly and definitively. "Oh, this is what I'm doing! I'm involved in this in some way." If you only

halfheartedly acknowledge thinking about the future, about planning, and then come back, the momentum to keep thinking is still intact. So stop, clearly and fully, and say, “I am thinking about later on today; I’m planning; that’s what happening.”

A definitive, clear acknowledgment does a couple of things: One is that you’re no longer caught in what you’re thinking about; you have taken a little step back from it. The other is that the fuller acknowledgment sometimes makes it easier for things to settle down. In the full acknowledgment of something, it is easier to disentangle yourself from it. It’s easier to see that you don’t really want to be involved in this, or don’t really need to be thinking about this.

As you go about your practice today, if it should happen that you get distracted by a thought, you might want to experiment with turning toward it for a moment and acknowledging it fully and clearly: “This is what I’m doing. This is what I’m thinking. This is what I’m up to.” Then see if that full, clear stopping and acknowledging makes it easier to come back and be present.