

Practice Note: Relaxed and Alert

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on June 5, 2013

One of the important ways of supporting your meditation practice is to have the right balance between being relaxed and being alert and upright. You don't want to relax so much that you melt into a puddle on the floor or on your chair. But to sit upright in a posture that allows your muscles to relax as deeply as possible is a great support.

There are many ways of doing this. You can scan through your body and relax, softening any holding you may have. A little technique of imagination that some people like is to visualize something like a pebble or a piece of flat wood sinking slowly into water – something that doesn't sink too fast as it goes to the bottom. Or imagine melted butter or warm oil slowly pouring through the body.

If you have this sense of a pebble sinking down through the water, imagine it's sinking through you. And as it slowly settles, imagine or allow your muscles to relax, soften, or melt.

This is useful if there is a lot of thinking or tension going

on. When the system is activated in the head, it is helpful to just drop that pebble. It slowly sinks, and then comes to rest. With this, our attention, gravity, energy, and center of focus can be grounded – not up in the head, but rather down lower, in a balanced way.

Then do it again a few times. Or just do it really slowly. Sometimes the relaxing might not be perceptible in terms of feeling the muscles actually releasing. It may be more of a wave of softening that moves through the body.

If we don't relax, then the tension we hold in the body all too easily supports the thinking mind, giving it fuel to keep thinking. We don't hold bodily tension innocently. There is a cost. The cost of being tense makes it all too easy to keep thinking a lot. But when the body is relaxed, it is easier for the mind to get quieter, and we can see more clearly what's here.