

Practice Note: Look Behind Your Thoughts

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on December 8, 2010

It's fairly common for many people to live very much in their thinking, whether it's thinking in words or in images. What's interesting to do is to look behind the images, the thinking, the content, to the subjective feeling – the sense of how you feel, how you are, behind that. What's actually going on in a deeper way in your felt sense of being in a body, being in a mind? What's the mood, the attitude, the feeling, the emotional state that you're in?

Sometimes, by staying too much in the world of thinking, it actually inhibits or interferes with a deeper intimacy with oneself, with a deeper way of being connected. If you can go behind the thoughts to what it feels like to be alive and present now, then that's sometimes a more interesting place to practice from – to breathe with that, to breathe through it, to feel it, to make space for it, to be aware of it. There are a lot of things that could be there in the background, or in the foundation for it all. It's nice to check in and hang out there, and see what happens if you do that.

As you're practicing, whether you are doing walking meditation or sitting meditation, you don't have to necessarily stop thinking – it's not so easy sometimes – but can you feel your way behind the thinking, as if you're listening to someone speak? You feel your way into the tone of their voice. What's behind it? What the mood or emotional sense of how they are, out of which those words are being spoken?

Feel your way into yourself as you walk, as you sit, and then see if you can let your mindfulness practice, your awareness, flow out of that or be connected to that sense. Certainly you'll be pulled away into thoughts over and over again, but come back to what's behind, or below, or the wider context for thinking.

That context, that background that's behind thinking, is always in the present moment. See how it unfolds if you stay connected there. Although it's not necessarily easy, you might feel more content about things. See if you can find this contentment as you go behind the veil of thoughts.