

Practice Note: Sitting like a Mountain

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on July 28, 2010

There is an ancient metaphor of a mountain, quite solid and stable, which is not moved by the wind that blows by it. And there's a way of meditating, sitting, practicing, where we can be more like the mountain than like the leaves that are pushed around by the wind. There are many winds that blow through us when we sit. The practice is learning how to let the winds of thoughts, feelings, or emotions move freely, while at the same time having an inner stability – a solid, stable core or presence that can allow these things to move through us, as if they were wind, while we reside or abide in this stability like a mountain.

Many people are very influenced by the winds of their mind or their feelings, and so they're like the leaves that are pushed around, up and down, and this way and that way. Moods go up and down. Concerns and fears and all kinds of things are pushed around by the wind. So how is it to have this greater stability?

One of the things that can be very helpful, especially for people who practice sitting meditation, is giving some care to your posture when you meditate, and having a

posture that is stable and upright – a posture that somehow expresses stability. Sometimes there's talk in Buddhism about having a posture that expresses dignity or stability, because the physical body, especially when seated cross-legged is like a triangle, like a mountain. If you sit in a chair, you can also get stability, a strong sense of presence, provided that you don't use the chair too casually. You don't use it as a place to rest back and be supported. There has to be something we offer to the posture ourselves: uprightness, presence. It might not be right away, but with time the body can feel a strong sense of refuge or support – a resource – something you can fall back on and that will hold you, and that creates a strong sense of presence that is not moved by the winds going through.

It's quite something to have a strong sense of presence that is stable and larger than any of the particular winds that might blow. It starts by losing some of the interest, or preoccupation, or some of the tremendous authority that we invest in the world of thinking. And the winds begin to abate. We realize there's another game in town. There's another place to abide. We don't have to stay involved in thinking. There can be a lot of feelings and emotions that go through, and it's beautiful to have them come through, but we can feel like those emotions and feelings are not who we are. Closer to who we are is some stability or presence, that seems radiant, full, or compelling. And this begins to lessen our attachment

and clinging to all the preoccupations and winds that arise. The winds can just be winds coming through – and we can be the mountain.

So maybe today as you sit and walk, you can give some attention to your posture, and see if your posture can provide you with stability. Postural stability can translate into becoming more stable, concentrated and present.