

Practice Note: Melding Kindness and Mindfulness

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on May 12, 2010

In mindfulness meditation and practice, the attitude with which we're mindful is very important. The attitude is like the wings that carry the mindfulness, or support it. There are many different attitudes that a person could connect to mindfulness. Some of them are not very helpful. Unhelpful attitudes, for example, involve self-criticism in the background of the mindfulness – feeling bad about oneself one way or another. Another way that's not so helpful is an attitude of "I have to." "I have to get concentrated." "I have to get enlightened in the sitting." "Something has to happen." There's perhaps striving and pushing – a kind of ambition.

When there's an attitude of striving, self-criticism, aversion, anger, or a lot of judgments regarding what's going on, it's not very inviting to be in the present moment, because that moment has discomfort as part of it. One of the things that is helpful to do in practicing mindfulness is to pay a bit of attention to the attitude, and bring in an attitude that, maybe, would make you more happy to be present. The pre-eminent attitude that

is useful is kindness – to infuse the mindfulness with some feeling of kindness, a kind regard, a goodwill towards what you're experiencing.

There's a wonderful melding of kindness and mindfulness where, at some point, the mindfulness itself and kindness seem to be distinguishable, but inseparable. It seems like they arise together. To be really present here, to be mindful and attentive to what's going on, in a very clear, grounded way, is a kind act. This kindness comes through it. If you're really kind, in a very grounded, strong, balanced way, without being overly sentimental, or sentimental at all, or hesitant, there will be a lot of mindfulness as part of that as well.

As you practice this morning, see if there is some way that you could, appropriately call in to your practice, to your ability to be in the present moment, an attitude, or an approach of being kind towards whatever might be going on, including your lack of kindness. Meet that with some open kindness, goodwill, and gentleness, and see if that can help you be mindful, to be present.

If it's impossible to be kind, then that's okay. Then the practice is to be mindful of what's in the way, and to be kind towards that.