

Dharmette: Get Out of the Way and Trust

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on June 15, 2011

One of the approaches to mindfulness and meditation is that it involves very simple attention to what is happening as it's happening. What becomes interesting in doing this is to notice all the ways in which you feel like it's not enough or has to be different. There are attitudes towards what's happening that we have to fix it or avoid it, or the grass is greener somewhere else. "I can be present for this, but this isn't really what my neighbor in the meditation hall is experiencing – great bliss and infinite consciousness. I'm supposed to be having that. Not here with an irritated throat and a persistent cough. What's spiritual about that?"

So be present for things as they're occurring. Then notice what attitudes, beliefs and assumptions you have around your experience, and how hard it actually is for you to be willing to abide in, rest in, and pay attention to things as they're occurring with nothing added or taken away.

One of the interesting things to notice is the degree to which there is mistrust. We don't trust things as they are. We don't trust that things will unfold the way that they need to unfold. We feel or we believe that if I don't do something here, or I don't avoid something here, then something terrible will happen to me – or I'll be stuck forever this way.

In the external world of work and daily life, there are things we have to do. You can't sit on your living room couch and trust that things will unfold perfectly just the way they're supposed to. There are all kinds of things you have to take care of: your bladder, going shopping, going to work. There are a variety of things that you're supposed to do in this world.

But the world of meditation is a safe place to explore all the extra stuff we tend to add on top of our experience – all the ways in which this is not enough, this is too difficult or frightening, or I have to do something. The simple instructions to pay attention to what's happening as it's happening, and that's all you're supposed to do, is like a wonderful mirror that helps us to see all the ways in which we can't do that. We feel that's not good enough, or that something else has to happen. My hope is that eventually people learn how deeply trustable it is to have one's attention open to everything – and to not have to censor anything, or get involved in anything, or have to believe or disbelieve anything. Just feel and be

present for the immediacy of what's happening – not for the stories, narratives or images that come up – but rather the immediacy of how your experience is being sensed and felt physically and emotionally, right here, right now. You learn that this very simple attention to life as it's occurring is one of the most trustable things you can do. Mindfulness of your experience in meditation is also trustable if you're present for it.

Often what's not trustable is all the judgments, beliefs, attachments, resistance, and fears whereby we complicate things so quickly. So no matter what the terror, bliss, anger, love, pain or pleasure might be that bubbles up, learn that it's trustable to be present for it. There are a number of rational reasons why it's trustable.

One is that when we can be present in a relaxed way for things as they are, then we're not adding any reactivity, tension or stress to our experience. When we're relaxed about how things unfold, the whole psychophysical system works better. But if we're tense and not relaxed, then everything – the psychophysical system, immune system, muscular system – doesn't work optimally. Life tends to work better when we can relax with how things are.

Another thing that works better is that when we allow things to be as they are, nothing wants to stay the

same. Nothing's really frozen unless we freeze around it and hold tight. Everything is in process, moving and unfolding. If we let things be as they are and trust, then what we're saying is that we're trusting this unfolding and how things move through us.

In terms of this Buddhist psychological, spiritual life, the forces that keep us enslaved – the forces that keep us from being liberated or free – are active forces. The forces are things we are doing. If we cling to something, clinging is an activity – we tighten up around something mentally or even physically. It takes a lot of energy to cling and tighten up. What the system wants to do is to rest. It's like a ball: when you put a ball on a slope, what the ball wants to do is roll down the hill. You have to make effort or apply energy to block the ball so it doesn't come down the hill. But once you stop making the effort, it rolls down. Similarly, once you stop making the effort to keep clinging, tightening or being resistant, then the tension and holding releases and lets go. Deep in our psyche and psychophysical system, there is almost an inherent movement towards liberation, because to be unliberated takes a lot of effort and energy. It's an active process to stay unliberated. To become liberated is partly to let go of this active process that gets in the way.

So this idea of practicing being present for things as they're occurring is supported by a deep trust that this

movement of letting things unfold the way they want to can be a movement towards freedom and liberation. We're getting out of the way that prevents the movement toward liberation. Clinging to self, identity, pride, pleasure, desire, and fear – and resisting – are all activities or things we are doing. Trust that we don't have to do anything. We can just let go and let the process unfold and settle. Like when the ball rolls down the hill, it settles and comes to a place of peace.

Earlier this morning I gave the instruction to notice what your experience is without any censoring, and then feel what it's like. What does it feel like to have that experience? What does it feel like in the body and your mind just to feel it? Feeling it and being present for the immediacy of it – unmediated by thoughts, stories or beliefs – is one of the optimal ways in which the unfolding can begin to happen. Sometimes it takes a while, but just hold it, feel it, sense and experience what's there. It's a very beautiful and generous thing to do because for the things that trouble us the most, for the suffering we carry, some of the best medicine is not to understand it, but to hold it caringly. Something about this feels like an accepting presence or being seen. That's what children mostly want. They just want someone who can be present for them.

I remember when my son was maybe two years old, I was on the floor playing with him. He was building

something with blocks. It was a little bit boring for me, and after a while I noticed that he wasn't paying any attention to me. I wasn't doing anything; I was just sitting there. He was doing all the playing and was very absorbed and contented. So I thought, "Since he's happy and contented, he doesn't need me and I'll go." Then he was no longer happy and contented [laughter]. In fact, he was very aware that I was there. My simple presence – just being there – was what was holding him and what allowed him to be happy doing his thing.

So we can do that for ourselves too – simple presence.

Those are my thoughts for today. Thank you.