

Practice Note: Awareness Holds Everything

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on January 26, 2011

Since ancient times in Buddhism, the word ‘dharma’ is said to come from the root meaning to ‘support’ or to ‘hold’ – that which supports and holds us. Since we’re doing an awareness practice here, one way of looking at it is that awareness – our ability to pay attention – also supports us. Our awareness is somewhat fluid; it’s not a single thing. It can be understood, felt, or experienced in different ways depending on how we focus the awareness itself. Sometimes our awareness is like a narrow laser that looks at something in particular. We’re here; the focus is there, and we’re looking at it.

But sometimes awareness can feel very broad and spacious, and can hold whatever our experience is. Sometimes it’s difficult to hold or to be present for something when we’re troubled by it, and we’re focusing on it in a narrow way. Then it can be useful to expand, so that whatever is going on is being held by awareness. Awareness is the container within which our life is experienced.

It might be interesting today to experiment to see if you can get a feeling for a sense of awareness or attention that's very broad and spacious, like being at the beach on a beautiful day like today. Should we all be at the beach? You see this beautiful wide sunset, the horizon, and the ocean. The mind almost feels expansive being there. In the expansive quality, you might also see someone on the beach in the distance walking, and that person is within this wide field of just the beach. The awareness is as big as the beach. I don't know if that image works for you.

So you might be following your breath, and rather than getting narrow on it, being caught by some thoughts or concerns that keep being insistent, or even getting rid of your thoughts, to instead open up the awareness – open, open, open. Make it really big, as if your awareness has the capacity to hold anything at all. Everything else is just a play within that wider field.

If that makes sense, you might try that. If it doesn't make sense, do it the way you were doing it. I hope you enjoy your morning. Thank you.