

Practice Note: The Heart of Buddhist Practice

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on May 26, 2010

There are so many different ways of looking at Buddhist practice, but today I'd like to suggest that Buddhist training has two aspects. The first part is all the preparatory practice and training. We train ourselves to be mindful. We train ourselves to be calm, to be concentrated, to be patient, to be compassionate. These many things in which we train ourselves are all preparation. The second aspect of training – and this is the most important part – is when things are not going right, when something's not happening the way we want. That's really the heart of it.

For example, today, there was street work outside. Perhaps some of you thought, "Well this shouldn't be happening." That's good that you should think that, because that's when you really start practicing. That's what everything else is preparing you for. Or your knee hurts, or your mind is busier than you want it to be, or you have some kind of angst or fear or anxiety about something. Sometimes when all these things happen, it's like, "Oh this shouldn't be happening." As soon as

you hear yourself say that, or imply that, then you've come to the second stage of practice. Before that, you were just at the first stage of preparation.

You can congratulate yourself for graduating to the second stage [laughs]. And then the idea is to look at that, and look at what you're holding onto, what you're clinging to, what your expectations are. There are so many different things going on. For example, it was so noisy here, relative to how it usually is. Then in the end it got really quiet. I don't know if you noticed, but it was really peaceful and quiet – a different kind of silence because of the contrast. It was very pleasant, and then they started talking again. So there was this movement towards the peace, the pleasure of that, and then a reaction, perhaps, to the lack of the pleasure. So there might be holding onto pleasure or comfort. It could be that you're holding onto how incredibly important this practice is. This practice is going to save you, and don't they realize that out there [laughs]. That's where the clinging is holding onto something.

So two very important parts of practice are the preparation you do, and then the real practice when things aren't working right. If you can train and do the preparation, do that as best you can. And when you're not successful at preparing yourself for the real practice, then it's started [laughing] – the real practice has started then.

Enjoy it.