

# Dharmette: This Too – Awareness and Wisdom

**Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on February 4, 2015**

In practicing mindfulness or awareness, or practicing having our hearts be free, it is useful to make a variety of distinctions. One distinction is between what we do, and how we are. Both of them have a role in our lives, but they are distinct. It is possible in how we are, to be completely open and receptive to what the present moment experience is. But our actions might say, “No.” Our actions might say: “Well this needs to be clean;” or “this needs to be done;” or “this needs to be said.” If we confuse those two – if we think they are the same – we prevent the ability of the heart and mind to be open and relaxed. If we think we have to do something, sometimes the awareness, the mind, becomes contracted, tight, or gnarly with what’s going on. It is possible to have the heart, the mind, the awareness, be open and receptive, while at the same time taking care of yourself, doing the things you have to do to live a wise life.

Some people have a hard time listening to mindfulness instructions because they feel like they can’t take care

of their lives, or can't do the things they should to be doing. For example, naïve mindfulness instructions might be to be completely open and accepting of what is in the present moment. Maybe that's nice when it's a beautiful sunset. Maybe it's not very nice if someone is yelling at you, ready to beat you up. The idea is, that if we tease apart what we do and how we are, then our most important resource comes to the fore. The most important treasure we have is our own heart's – our own mind's – capacity to be free, open, present, and uncontracted. We become the custodian of that.

The task of mindfulness is to find a way to stay open, receptive, accepting, in a certain way, of our experience. The task of wisdom is to know what to do. The task of mindfulness is to know how to be present for the experience. The task of wisdom is to know what to do about the experience. Part of wisdom is to know when not to do anything at all, and part of wisdom is to know when to act and when to do.

A lot of the training in mindfulness has to do with learning how to be open to “this too.” So the mantra “This too” is a nice mantra for mindfulness meditators. This too, I have to be mindful of. This too, I'll be present for. This too, I'll open to. This too, I'll accept. Sometimes, you might think, “Really? I have to accept this or be present for this?” But if you want to have an awareness that is uncontracted, unreactive, unlimited –

not limited by the experience of what goes on – then yes, you have to have an awareness that says, “Yes, this too I’ll include.”

If you are in a difficult social situation, and it’s very hard to know what to do in this social situation, does that have to translate to your mind getting contracted? Does that have to translate to, “I’m not going to pay attention to that; I’m going to resist that, hold back from my awareness, put on blinders”? If you do that, then you’re not very free. But you could respond with, “This too, this is uncomfortable. I don’t know what to do. But this too, I have to include in my awareness”.

When you sit to meditate, you might end up with knee pain. You are sitting there. Your knee hurts a little bit. It’s not what you had in mind for your meditation. You thought you were going to get to the third *samādhī*, or some really important thing was supposed to happen with your meditation practice. But if you want to learn how to be mindful, you have to learn, “This too, I have to include: the knee pain.”

Or if there is lot of noise around you in the meditation hall: “This too, I have to include.” You might think, “My meditation is so precious, and my ability to sit and be quiet and present and accepting and open to everything is so important, that those people better be quiet. Those people are interfering with my ability to accept

everything because they're talking." It's kind of silly, right? The idea is, "This too, I have to accept."

Then you have your wisdom to decide what to do. This is a very important distinction to make. So you can start safeguarding, working on, and cultivating the ability to be more present and available to the experience you are having. I think it's a way of touching into, preserving, highlighting, discovering your own beauty and the preciousness in your own heart.

In addition, it's also a gift to the world. It's a great gift to have a presence where – this too – you have the ability to stay present for. This too, you are willing to hold in your heart. This too, you can be with, rather than turning away from someone, or arguing quickly with them, or wanting to defend yourself, or thinking "not this," or "this person is having too hard a time for me – I can't be with this person today," or "this person is angry – I can't be with this angry person." Instead, cultivate and learn the capacity to include "this too." This too, I'll include in my awareness. This too is a great gift. They can be held in your field of awareness, your presence, your attention, in a certain kind of acceptance. Then your wisdom will hopefully tell you what you actually should do in that situation.

Do you tell them, "You're so angry right now, it's hard for me to stay with you. I care about you; I'm here with

you; my heart is open to you. But this is too challenging for me, so, I need to go take a break”? That may be the wisdom side. Or you could say, “I’m here with you, and I’ll sit here with you. I don’t know what’s supposed to happen. I don’t know how to help you, but I’m here with you.” I have known people who have felt profoundly helped, not because we helped them, but because of our willingness to stay present with them and open to them.

So, this little mantra – “This too, I’ll be present for” – is a great thing to experiment with, and see, “This too, I’ll open to; this too, I’ll offer myself to.”

It’s one of the primary skills we try to teach to people learning Buddhist chaplaincy. When you see people in the hospital, for example, they may be dealing with tremendous emergencies and crises in their lives, or facing death. The chaplain’s purpose is not to go in and fix things, or to offer advice, or tell them what to do, or counsel them in some way. Rather, the first and foremost thing is to have the capacity to be with someone who is going through a crisis – and this too, you’re willing to hold in your awareness or heart – this too – and you pull up a chair to be there with them.

It’s a real gift to people. It is the gift of letting them be themselves, and helping them make space for who they are, so something can begin to shift and happen within

them –this too. I've had people angry with me, and in my mind – “this too” – I'll be present for now. It's not easy, but this is my practice. I'll be here. I'm not going to defend myself. I'm not going to turn the blame around. I'm not going to run away. I'm not going to shut down. I don't know what to do here, but at least I can be present and listen. I've seen people change when they finally realize, “Gil's just going to listen to me. He's going to be there for it.” I know one person who said to me that they had never had anyone in their life who didn't run away from them when they were angry. That is quite something. I didn't run away; I wasn't troubled by it; I offered my presence; I listened and was there – with this capacity: “This too, I'll open to; this too, I'll include.”

Sometimes your inner voice is more like: “This too? You gotta be kidding!” This too. The idea is for your heart's sake, yes. For your mind's sake, for your wisdom's sake, you might say no. Absolutely. The idea is, “Can your heart be big enough to hold it all?” Some people like the language of the heart. It means that you can receive what is happening – in the field of awareness – without getting contracted, without resistance, without closing down, without pushing away. The awareness can hold it all.

What you do with your wisdom – what you do with your body and your voice – that's a whole other story. But your awareness can stay open.

Make some sense? This too, we'll include. And if it didn't make sense, this too, we'll include [laughter].