

Dharmette: Mindfulness vs. Bodyfulness

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on January 13, 2016

Being mindful is not the same as being thoughtful. Mindfulness does not arise through the filter of thinking about things. There might be thoughts involved in being mindful, but we are not thinking about the experience. It would be like looking at a sunset, and thinking about it vs. seeing it.

Another example would be listening to music. You can take in the music; you can sometimes even feel it in your body via the base and the beat. You can feel the sensation, the pleasantness of it, and this is very different than thinking about it, wondering if that was a C sharp, or wondering what key it is being played in. It may be interesting to have those kinds of thoughts, but if we're thinking about the construction of the music, then we're not really listening, we're not experiencing or feeling the music.

Mindfulness is more like feeling or sensing our experience, than it is a thinking exercise. One of the things we actually learn to do with mindfulness practice, is to step away from our thinking a little bit. Most people take up residence in their thoughts – that's where they

live. It's ok; thoughts are fine, but we don't have to live in them. The idea is to take up residency in your body, so that your thoughts are like a room, but they are not the whole house. Relax into your body; settle down, and begin noticing how the body experiences what is going on. How does the body experience music? How does the body experience conversation? How does the body experience meditation?

I know people who have thought a lot about meditation, and their thinking about the meditation keeps them from being settled, because they have all these ideas about meditation, about getting mindful and concentrated. They listen to people like me too much, and they have all these instructions about breathing. They wonder which of the 16 steps of *ānāpānasati* are they are supposed to be feeling? Or the four foundations of mindfulness, and which exercises to do there? Or maybe *mettā* would be better...

There is all this information, all these ideas, all this negotiating and thinking about it, as opposed to simply asking, "What am I feeling right now?" Or "What's happening for me right now?" As though it's not good enough just to feel. You're supposed to have some purpose, something you're supposed to do, or some place to get to and figure it all out. No.

What are you feeling right now? Come back, and just

feel, and be here. Breathe here. Over and over again, the emphasis for the Buddha was the direct experience we're having. For the most part, direct experience is unmediated by our thoughts. If you put your hand under flowing water, you can experience the fluidity, the coolness, and the wetness of it. That's a direct experience, which is different than thinking about it.

If you close your eyes, and someone takes your hand and puts something soft in it, and then asks you to guess what it is, at first you just experience the softness. But you don't yet know what it is. Soft! Then you start going through your mind... what do I know that is soft like this? You have to use your mind to think it over, to try to remember, and guess. But the experience of softness is not a thought. It's just soft.

The rush to think, and the rush to understand, limits how much we can actually feel, and be with what is. This is why I like to think we shouldn't use the term mindfulness for our practice, and instead use '*bodyfulness*.' For some people, the word mindfulness over-emphasizes the mental side of it all. It keeps us removed from the experience, whereas '*bodyfulness*' puts us in the experience, to sense and be with it. The body is always in the present moment – but your mind might not be. It probably isn't. So, if you rely too much on the mind and your thoughts to navigate through your life, or through your meditation, then you're probably less often in the

present moment than if you use your body to navigate the path, the practice, and your life. Be here in your body, and ask, “How does it feel? What’s going on here? And how is the body experiencing it?”

The reason I wanted to mention all of this is to make a different point, which is: when we begin relaxing and softening all the thoughts we have about life and we’re more in our body, then we can allow something to emerge out of the body that can take a very different shape in our lives than what comes about out of thinking about things. The thinking comes in the wake of all the emotions that are driving the thoughts. But there’s a deeper place.

I like the word ‘aspiration’ because it has a connection through the Latin with the meaning ‘to breathe’. What is the aspiration that arises out of you? If we have an expectation, or a demand, or wanting something too much, this is when we become limited. We get weighed down. It’s a burden to have expectations. On the other hand, the notion of an aspiration is something born of our hearts, something born deep inside, which opens us and expands us in the process – like the heart’s wish.

Aspiration is something that feels really good to have, even if you can’t act on it. Isn’t that nice? You don’t have to have it fulfilled to get the benefits from having an aspiration. You can think, “Yeah that would be nice,

maybe someday” – as opposed to having a desire, where we feel we have to have it, or it has to happen now. For me, an aspiration is more like a heart’s wish that flows up, and comes out of me. And may it be so. Let’s see how it plays out.

Try dropping below the usual thinking place. Drop into the body. Relax into the body to find out what it is that wants to be expressed through the body, to discover what it is that wants to come out of you, what wants to live in you. Not because you thought about it, but because you made space for something different to arise.

Some people find that taking time in nature, meditating, being quiet or taking a Sabbath day is really helpful, because it allows the deeper movements inside, the deeper feelings, aspirations and thoughts to finally have a chance to come forward. I don’t know how it is for you, but for me, I feel that some of the deeper aspirations, wishes or movements in my life that have been so important to me are shy and quiet. If there’s a lot of noise, you can’t hear it, or it’s drowned out. It will recede, and be shy, and not be known. But by having some quiet time, some meditation, or some other way of settling below the thoughts, it can allow for what is deeper to show itself. Then when it shows itself, you can welcome back your thinking, and figure out how to live that way, and follow through.

So, what is your aspiration? If you get really quiet, and you don't answer from your mind, but you answer from the quiet place in your heart, does anything come out of there for you? If you had no fear, no worries, no expectations, and if you allowed yourself to wish for anything – when you get into that still place – what kind of aspirations are born then, in that courage, or allowance that allows something deep inside to come up, before any social restrictions arise or reasons why you can't? What is in you?

I like to believe, I hope it's true, that when we get to this deeper place inside, the embodied deeper place, that our aspirations are good. They are trustable. They are coming from a good place in our lives. So as you do this mindfulness practice, and you learn to make the transition from thinking to being, from mindfulness (having a full mind) to that of *bodyfulness* (a full body), then sooner or later, hopefully your aspirations will discover something. Maybe what comes out of you will even surprise you.