

Practice Note: Notice Receptive Impact

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on April 17, 2013

In mindfulness practice it is useful to distinguish between the impacts our experiences have on us, and our responses or reactions to those experiences. Sometimes they happen so fast, that we don't always see the difference between them. In the practice of mindfulness, it is sometimes useful to intentionally linger with and be curious about the impacts that things have on us in the moment.

The word 'impact' is an alternative for what in Buddhism is called "contact" or "sense contact". For example, if you hear a really loud car rumble by, you experience the contact – which you can feel and sense – of that sound wave hitting your ear. Then you can ask, "What is the impact on you of that sound contact? How is that received in your system?"

If you immediately go into your judgments about loud cars and IMC being in this kind of neighborhood, then you lose touch with the immediate, receptive impact of the car sound. If you have an ache in your knee, you could go into how you should go to a doctor, or your knee might fall off, or "This is terrible!" But before you go

into the reaction, linger with the impact. What does it feel like in your feet, leg, and knee? How is the receptive impact if you don't go into all the stories and ideas around it?

If you go out and stand in the sun rather than in the shade, the impact on you will be different. It will be received in the system differently. Standing in the sun, you might feel warm and relaxed, before you start thinking that you shouldn't stand out in the sun because you might get skin cancer. What is the immediacy of the experience? What is the impact?

When you step in walking meditation, what is the impact on you of that contact with the ground? If you are there and receive it, you feel the receptive impact. How does it reverberate through your leg and system to feel that contact with the ground? You certainly feel the hardness of that contact, and the shifting sensations in your leg. Maybe some people, feeling the solidity of the ground, have a sense of assurance.

If you are sitting in meditation, what is the impact of the experience of breathing? If you are attentive to your breath, what is the receptive impact on you – not just in the immediacy of your chest or lungs – but in opening up and expanding the field of awareness in your body? Is there a receptive impact?

The idea of receptive impact is to notice it *before* there is a reaction to it. There is not a hard and fast line between the impact and the reaction, but rather, the idea to see the difference between the experience of the impact and the reaction to it.

As you practice this morning, you might see if you can linger, stay with, be curious about the immediacy of the receptive impact on you. Stay in the world of the sensory impact, and how it's received in your system, whatever it might be – even thinking. You might have a thought, or a story – but if you relax and open up, you might see the impact on the system of having this sort of response. If you have a tense thought, you might feel the impact as unpleasant.

What's the receptive impact on you? Can you hang out there and receive the impact? This exercise is not an exercise of doing, or making something happen, or changing anything – but rather just being curious, staying in the present moment. What's it like to receive this experience in the system?

I hope that makes sense.

Enjoy the impact of the world on you.