

Practice Note: Marbles in a Bowl

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on September 12, 2012

An image I like for the mind or awareness in meditation is that of a wide bowl. It's quite open and large at the top. It's nice for kids to put a marble in and see it spin around. The marble goes around and around, or back and forth, up and down. But eventually it comes to rest at the base – the central, lowest point of the bowl.

The idea in meditation is to have stability of mind, to be centered in some way. Concentration involves centeredness, but it's not centeredness where you try to focus on some-thing one-pointedly with your awareness. Rather, it is to have the mind, your awareness, your whole sense of being, come to rest at the center point, like the center point of a bowl. You can't force that. You let the ball go back and forth and around. But the momentum or the gravity of the ball will work in such a way that eventually the ball comes to rest in the middle.

In the same way, your mind may be like many marbles running around, and you can't exactly fight that. But by letting go, making space for waking up to it, and being clearly awake that you are thinking – as opposed to just

merrily going along with thinking – all your marbles will eventually come to rest in that center.

Being in the center is quite open to everything else. The sides open to all the marbles going around and around, and open to the world. The mind is open, available, and inclusive of it all. And when you come to rest, you are resting in the middle.

It may help to have an idea that there is a center point for the ball inside yourself. For some people it is the object of their concentration. It could be the breathing, some part of the breath, some place in the body that you imagine is your center. It isn't that you focus on it one-pointedly, as much as that you compose yourself there. You rest there, open there, come back there, and settle there. Let that be the center of gravity. Let that be what's most important, the place you relate to, the reference point for you – as opposed to having your thoughts of past and future worries be the reference points. Instead, let that center place be the reference point, and let everything else just settle into that.

In walking meditation the reference point might be your feet as you step. Include everything, but let the feet be the center, and everything will roll back to the feet as you walk back and forth.

I hope you enjoy your morning. I'm happy you're here.

