

# Practice Note: What Arises out of Stillness?

**Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on June 9, 2010**

As we were sitting here together, I was appreciating how still it was in the room. There's something special that happens when a lot of people are together and it's still. The stillness gets heightened somehow – more so than if you're sitting alone.

In mindfulness practice, meditation practice, there's something very valuable about tuning into stillness – having a sense of the stillness that's here. There's always a powerful stillness present – all the time – but often the mind is not still enough, or focused enough to notice it. Many times we notice that the mind is so busy running around being active, that there's no room to pay attention to something as subtle as the powerful stillness. Or it never occurs to us to pay attention to it, unless it stands out by itself in some very strong way.

I've been in certain situations where the place itself seemed to have a tremendous power of stillness. Somehow just being there allowed the stillness to call attention to itself. But it's always here, and one of the

interesting things to do when you meditate, is to see if you can sense some stillness. It can be stillness inside. It can be stillness around you in the environment.

An interesting place to sense stillness is just outside of the edges of your boundaries of self. With your eyes closed, can you feel where the boundaries of yourself are? Generally, you don't feel it so solidly as you would if you touched your boundaries, touched your arm: "That's the edge of who I am." You may feel that there's no sharp line. But in that diffuse sense of your outer boundary, you might feel just beyond that. Maybe there's stillness there to hold you or inform you. It can be there inside or outside. It can be in the mind, if the mind is still.

Sometimes, whatever little hint we have of stillness exasperates all the activity, movement and thinking going on in our minds, and it can actually make us feel stronger. Sometimes we need patience or perseverance – just staying with that, and trusting that we can hold ourselves still. In holding your body still and allowing all the movement to happen through you is one way to help detach from all the movements of the mind or of the body – not making meaning out of it, or making self out of it, or thinking about it.

One of the interesting questions to study when you use stillness as a reference point is, "What seems to arise

out of the stillness?” And “What seems to arise out the preoccupations of the mind?” When the mind is being reactive, or thinking about a lot of things, it tends to create its own momentum, and things arise out of that. If I’m really thinking about lunch a lot, then thoughts arise like, “Oh, maybe I need to go out to the deli to get just the right bread for my sandwich.”

If you really sense and feel what arises out of the preoccupations of the thinking of mind, you probably feel an energy of being contracted, tight, stressful or tense. But if you tune into stillness, then what arises out of stillness? What bubbles up outside of the realm of thinking when there’s no tendency to think about experiences? Then there could be vitality, aliveness, or a sense of presence that seems to come out of that stillness, and which has a very different feeling than what arises out of the afflicted mind, or the anxious mind, or the thinking mind, or the preoccupied mind, the busy mind.

You might, during this day, see if you can, in some way that nourishes you, tune in to stillness. It might highlight how you’re not still, but maybe appreciate that highlight. Don’t be troubled by it. Just, “Oh look at that.”

I hope those words are interesting for you to explore today. If they don’t make any sense at all just forget them.

