

Practice Note: Ease as a Reference Point

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on September 15, 2010

A very helpful concept, or attitude, or approach, to mindfulness is to look for the ease in whatever is going on, or to be easy with what's happening. In mindfulness, there's a lot to do with being present for what's happening – so we bring our presence; we bring our attention to what's happening and, hopefully, give careful attention, presence, and really be present for something. But then how we are, how we are with that presence is very important and it's useful to look for ease in what's happening. Where is the ease? Can we find ease? Because the opposite of ease is not helpful for meditation.

The opposite of ease is to take things heavy, or tight, or contracted, or constricted. It's to be preoccupied, caught up. To be easy with what's happening is to make space around it, or hold it lightly, to not be so fixated on it, not take it as being so incredibly important, and be easy with it. Even very important things can be held easy. In that space of ease, there's opportunity to relax. There's opportunity to unwind a little bit, to soften, to step back and see what's going on with greater clarity, which you can't do if you're really caught up with things.

What's amazing is the degree to which our minds have the capacity to not be at ease with things. Generally, when the mind is focused on something, it's usually not so easy with what's happening. And so, to use the reference point of ease. To ease up. To be easy with what's happening. To find the ease with what's happening. To shift your relationship to whatever you're paying attention to, whether it's the breath when you're meditating, or your steps as you walk. As you go about your daily life, pay attention to what's happening in the present moment, whatever it might be. It might be a very global experience. You're driving on the freeway: the whole experience of traffic, rush hour traffic, stuck in traffic. Or it's a particular conversation with someone. Whatever it is you're paying attention to, in the back of your mind you can say, "What would it be like to be at ease in this situation? How can I find my ease with this?"

If you can't find your ease with the situation because you're so uneasy, then perhaps the task is to be easy with that. You could be at ease with being uneasy. It's really easy [laughs] to be upset, or reactive, or resistant, or contracted, or judgmental about feeling uneasy. Especially after I tell you to be easy about everything. Of course, you're going to be uneasy, so if that's what you're paying attention to, be easy with that:

"Okay here I am. That's what's happening. I'm uncomfortable. I'm upset. Okay, so I'll make some space for that. I'll hold it lightly. I won't be so much in a punching match with it. I won't be running away from it. I won't tighten up around it. Let me just hold it, make lots of space."

The last thing in this sense of ease, an expression I think is really beautiful, is to give something breathing room. One of the things we try to do in meditation is to give breathing room to our experience. So that brings us back to the breath. Breathe in an easy way with your experience. Make room for your experience. Make breathing room for it, so there's more space, and more circulation, and more possibilities for it to show itself, and unwind, or process, or do what it needs to do.

Breathing is a way of finding that ease. Breathe. Breathe in a relaxed way. Make breathing room for your breathing. Make breathing room for your mind. Make breathing room for your experience. Breathe.

As you go about today, I'd encourage you to use that category, idea of ease as a reference point and see how that lubricates, or opens up your day for you.

Thank you.