

# Practice Note: Heightened Awareness

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on April 25, 2012

Using the breath – the breathing – as a stabilizing focal point for mindfulness sometimes works nicely. The mind wanders off; you come back to the breath. There are a lot of sounds, and your mind goes to the sounds; then you come back to the breath.

But sometimes this sets up tension with something else that's actively happening, which is different from the breathing. In those circumstances it's sometimes useful not to focus on the breath, but to bring the attention to what is happening with you. Or to say it in a different way, and this is what I want to emphasize this morning, one way of doing mindfulness is to bring your attention – a more heightened attention – to where your mind wants to go on its own. Rather than controlling your mind, or directing your mind to the breath or something else, you can give a certain freedom to your mind to have the experience to do what it's doing. And then notice what the mind is doing. Notice what is the most active thing happening for you, but not just in your mind. What might be most active are sensations in your body. What might be most active in your field of perception are the sounds outside. What might be most active are certain emotions. What might be most active is the thinking mind going a hundred miles an hour. The point is not to engage as if any of that is wrong or is supposed to be different, but rather to bring a heightened attention to what is already happening.

What's active for you? What's up for you as you're here, sitting, or walking? And then for whatever is up, can you bring a heightened awareness to that? The heightened awareness is mindfulness. The heightened awareness is not meant to be thinking about it further. It's not to engage in the content of what you're thinking about. It's not to engage in the meaning or in the interpretation of what's happening.

But stay very simple. What is up for me? How can I just step back? Heightened awareness means to have an overview of it, or an under-view of it, or an inner view of it – some way of being connected to it without being entangled – without thinking more about it, or wondering about it, or fantasizing about it.

I think the approach I'm trying to emphasize is a very beautiful one because it means you are not in conflict with anything. There's no conflict going. Rather your effort is to try to bring a heightened attention to it. Some people find that the language of intimacy is nice for heightened awareness. Others prefer stepping back and observing from a distance.

You might see if you can practice this way today. Notice what's up for you. Instead of letting go of what's up – instead of turning away from it and focusing back on the breath – turn towards it in a calm, fuller way, and see how that unfolds for you. Thank you.