

Practice Notes: Don't Carry the Past

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on January 9, 2013

A few words about practicing here this morning, both walking and sitting, in whatever way you are here. It is useful to consider that every time you remember to be mindful, you are starting over again. It might happen that your mind wanders off and you get distracted and, when you notice that, you are ready to begin again, breathing with your steps as you walk, being in the present moment. There is no need to carry the past with you into starting the practice again. And there is a way in which the past becomes a bit of a wind drag for us.

The past could be just a second ago when you notice the mind wandering off. Instead of berating yourself for that, being upset with that, deciding that it's terrible, that is being weighed down by the past. Instead, just recognize that you were lost and caught up in thought, and then focus on starting fresh. Every moment can be a complete new start. You don't have to carry the past with you into the present moment.

Some of you will be weighed down not just by a second ago, but by days ago, months ago, years ago. And you review and rehearse long-finished conversations, repeating, and trying to figure out what happened long ago – sometimes with a lot of emotions and feelings about what you are thinking about. It is a normal enough thing to do, but the idea of mindfulness practice is to sever those ties in a caring, loving way so that we are not weighed down or held down or limited by them. Then we can start each moment completely new as if it's a whole new beginning, a fresh start – as if you've forgiven the past, as if the past is no longer here.

Just show up here. Every moment is a beginning of a new year with a fresh start. So, you might consider that as you do your practice today; and see if that consideration of a fresh start every time you remember to enter into the present supports you to be here in a full, embodied way.