

# Dharmette: Welcome Everything

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdaal on February 7, 2018

When we do mindfulness, we are calling upon one of the most amazing capacities of the mind – or the heart if you prefer – and that is the capacity to be aware of something, to know what's happening. It can seem kind of uninteresting or unimportant. Often what can seem more important are the things that we think about or are concerned about. The mind's ability to know something and to be aware of what we're concerned about can seem incidental or not really to the point. But, in fact, the ability to hold things in awareness is a remarkable capacity that has all kinds of benefits. One way to think about this is that what you're learning to do in practicing mindfulness is to be able to welcome everything – welcome whatever happens into your awareness and into your attention.

Maybe we begin with ourselves. The task is to invite or welcome what we normally don't want to welcome. Some people come to meditation or mindfulness in order to fix something – to have something go away, or to resolve or overcome something they don't like. Or to become better at something, because they don't want to be how they are. These motivations can be fine. But, paradoxically, one of the most effective things we can do is to welcome the very thing we don't want, or the thing that we're trying to get rid of or to stop. Welcome it so that it can be seen more clearly. Welcome it so that we're not blind to what's happening. Welcome it so that we don't prevent the natural process or healing that might occur if it's given space and time.

You can ask a simple question when you sit down to meditate, or in your daily life. What are you neglecting to welcome right now? What would be useful to welcome now? Perhaps the more challenged you are psychologically or emotionally, or stressed out and busy, the more interesting it is to ask what is it that you're neglecting to welcome. Welcome means you make yourself a person who welcomes whatever might be there – whatever thoughts, emotions, or feelings you have.

They're okay here. They're safe here with me. I'll hold them in a friendly and generous way.

It turns out that in the bigger picture, it might be more important to make your mind or heart into a welcoming place for things, rather than to fix those things.

It might be that the whole process of what we're doing in meditation is finding our way slowly to being able to welcome all things. But, if that's what we're getting to, then why don't we start there [laughs]?

What you're trying to do is to make yourself hospitable. See if you can find within yourself a way that the atmosphere or attitude of what is difficult to be with, or things that you find challenging about yourself, or challenging about what's going on, can live inside of you for a little while as if it's a safe, generous and friendly place. You're not trying to get rid of or attack something, or to use it to blame or get angry.

If we can change the inner environment just enough that we welcome what is, that actually creates the optimal conditions for many things to resolve themselves, to fade away, heal, reconcile, open up, or move in ways that we need. Whereas if we attack or criticize things, or try to fix them too quickly or make them go away, and even if we're successful sometimes in doing that, we're not really allowing some deeper, inner process to unfold, or some deeper healing that can happen.

I like to think that welcoming your experience is an act of power or strength, because when you're the welcomer you've taken a certain kind of place of being independent, taking the initiative. You're showing up in a way that you're not the victim of circumstances. You're not the victim of what's difficult. You're not being pushed around by it. You're also not condoning it necessarily by welcoming it. You're just saying, "Come here and sit with me, and we'll have a chat. Come sit here and tell me what's going on. We'll find out."

Being welcoming in this way is really a function of awareness, and it might not be a function of practical life. Sometimes we have to say no to things, for sure. So to welcome things in, and to have the wisdom to say, "I can't agree with that." Practically that's not going to happen here in our relationships and other things. But the stance or the approach of the mind is to welcome things.

It's possible that one definition of being enlightened is that the mind can welcome everything. There's nothing that can't be welcomed into awareness, which means that there's no tendency in the mind to be antagonistic or to close down or to resist what is coming. No matter what comes, it can come into awareness, into the mind. Then wisdom can operate. If we have to do something, then we decide what to do. But the mind remains welcoming to all things.

I've been in difficult interpersonal circumstances in which I've done this, and my gut feeling was the other person was the challenge. And then I asked myself, "What is it that needs to be welcomed here?" And it wasn't the person or the challenge that the person might or might not be bringing, but rather it was my impatience, or sense of hurt or fear I felt. That's actually what was needed to be welcomed, because as long as I didn't take those in in a welcoming way, they were actually operating, subconsciously, almost undercover or on the side, contracting and influencing my view or understanding of everything. But, once I saw that I was afraid or impatient, and I could welcome and hold that, then I found myself no longer under the control of those feelings. They had space there, but they weren't running the show or pushing me around.

So, this idea of welcoming can be a place of strength that helps us to be more independent and have more choice in what we do. It's not wimpy. It's not something we do in order to go along with circumstances so everything's okay. It's actually a place of strength.

I think that when you do mindfulness meditation, the direction in which you're going anyway is to be welcoming. The Buddha didn't use the language of enlightenment as being welcoming. But, you're going in the direction of becoming someone who can welcome whatever comes, that has space and allows it to come without reacting or contracting. Some people will spend a long time practicing, working on all kinds of issues, developing concentration and overcoming the hindrances. And eventually they get the hang of what it feels like to be welcoming, to be open.

Maybe you can start this process earlier, more directly. What needs to be welcomed right now? How can you be more welcoming to this? How can you evoke or bring forth an attitude where it feels good to be welcomed, where whatever needs to be welcomed can feel like it's being received in a generous, kind, or supportive way, with hospitality?

But you also remain the host, and the difficulties are the guests. You're not going to let the guest forget that they're only the guest. They're not the host. You're the host.

So may your ability to welcome yourself well support you and help you in being able to welcome the people you encounter through your days. It would be good to live a life where we welcome each other. Thank you.