

## Practice Note: Letting Go

**Gil Fronsdal**

**January 22, 2020**

**Keywords:** Zen, walking meditation, letting go, breath, mindfulness, monastic rules, metaphor, practice, exhale, river

---

And then I'd like to say a few words about the practice. I'd like to use a somewhat famous Zen story as a metaphor for us and what we do as we meditate, and other times. Now, it's a story of two monks who are travelling on foot through China, going from one monastery to another, looking for a monastery maybe. On their way, they come to a river, and there's a woman there who maybe the water is too deep, and she can't cross, but the monks are kind of tall, and they can cross. So one of them offers to help, picks her up, and carries her across the river. He comes to the other side, puts her down, and then the two monks continue on their way.

Just before they get to the monastery for the night, the second monk turns and kind of has an explosive kind of building up the tension about what he means to say. He says, "You know, you're a monk and you're supposed to have a—you know, we have these rules. We can't touch women. And you touched her. How could you have done that?" The first monk who helped the woman across said, "I put the woman down at the river. Why are you still carrying her?"

We are constantly crossing the river of our breathing, rivers of our steps, as we do walking meditation. What are you carrying after you get across, after the end of the out breath? What are you carrying with you into the next breaths, for the next dozen breaths or more at the end of the exhale? What you put down, what you thought about, or do you carry with you and it goes on and on. Every time you cross an inhale or exhale, it's a time to put something down.

When walking meditation, every time that you take a step, that's your river. Whatever you notice you're carrying, put it down. Why do you carry all this stuff with you? What keeps you from staying and carrying and concerned with—it's possible to put things down. They might

come right back. But at each end of each breath, put down, let go of whatever has come up, whatever you're thinking about, or concerned with.

There's lots of time. You'll have lots and lots and lots of time in the future to think those thoughts again. You're not disloyal to the important cause that you put it down. End of the out breath, put it down and don't keep carrying it. And the exhale, put it down. Don't keep carrying it. End of one step, put it down. Don't keep carrying it. And that could be the practice for the day. Thank you.