

Dharmette: Steady Practice

Gil Fronsdal

August 06, 2025

Keywords: mindfulness, meditation, evaluation, practice, calm, concentration, present-moment awareness, strength, capacity, starting over

A couple of words about the practice today. It's an ordinary human thing to evaluate what we're doing. And so with meditation, mindfulness, there's often some evaluation. How am I doing? Am I doing it right? Right.

And it's certainly valuable to do that sometimes. Some people do it every minute, every moment, you know, and overdo it. If you spend too much time evaluating your practice, you actually interfere with it. But sometimes the criteria we use to evaluate our practice is not so helpful. I want to offer you an idea about how there's value in just doing the practice without evaluating it too much. Maybe you wait a while to evaluate how it's going.

And sometimes when it's not going well, then we say it was not going well. I don't know what criteria we use for not going well. But here's an analogy. If you go in a rowboat, maybe you went across a lake to the other side. And it's a nice, calm day. No wind, no waves, no strong current.

You row across and it doesn't take long. You get to the other side and you evaluate yourself. Wow, I did well. I'm a good rower. Fine. But then another day you're going to cross the same lake, and it's a really strong wind.

There's even a wave against you. The wind is against you, the wave is against you. Maybe even now there's a current that's also against you. So you go out and you're trying to row the boat across the lake. You try and you try and there's no real danger to you, but you try, but you can't row against all those forces. After an hour of trying, you're exhausted.

You go, okay, I'm going to go back. It's easy to get back because the wind helps you to go back. Anyway, you didn't make it more than 10 feet from the dock anyway. It was so difficult. So it's easy to say, well, I failed. Okay. That was, you know, I can't, you know, I'm a terrible rower because I couldn't make it out.

The first way when the weather was good, it was fine to get across, but you didn't get stronger. You didn't become a stronger rower. The second time you failed, conventionally, to get across, but you're much stronger as a rower. You learned a lot about rowing. You learned how to row in strong winds, and you're stronger. Right.

The next day, just if you just go along with my analogy, the next day, if it was a nice, comfortable, easy row, you might have some challenge in the next day that requires a little bit of strength, but you don't have it because you didn't get strong. Right. But if you had the difficult day and you failed in the rowing across, you're actually more prepared for the challenges of the next day to the physical challenge of what needs to be done because you're stronger. So with meditation in the same way, don't worry about getting somewhere. Maybe getting somewhere is not the point. Getting calm, getting concentrated.

It might be in one kind of understanding, the fact that you're doing it and you're building the mindfulness muscle, you're building up the muscle of coming back and starting over again, just learning how to stay present, stay, hold the course. You're learning not to give in to your thoughts and to get lost. You're staying present, staying present. And it might not look so hot. You know, it might not look like you're really getting anywhere. But you're building strength.

And it might be in the long term over time that strength supports you so much more than whether or not you got calm here today, whether or not you were able to quiet the thinking mind today. So we want to be careful how we evaluate what we're doing. And sometimes what we're doing without even being the intention is we're building our capacity. And that actually might in the long term be much better for you than the fact that you got calm today, which would feel nice. Maybe it's just nice weather so it was easy to get calm. So thank you.