

Dharmette: Awareness of Practice

Gil Fronsdal

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Are the doers of mindfulness and doing a mindfulness the way it's usually instructed is you're supposed to know things or be aware of things. So the focus is on, okay, there's a sound, I better hear it. If there's a breathing, I better be focused on it and... There must be something to discover there or something supposed to happen there. The way they look at the breathing. And so it's always the object of attention that sometimes gets the focus, gets the emphasized when we're talking about mindfulness or this awareness practice.

And there's definitely a place for that and a very important part of the practice, in fact, that that's what we do. But it's only half the practice. Right? The other practice is how we're aware, how we're mindful, how we are as we do this practice. And to the degree to which we can adjust how we are, it's okay to do that. And so if you're straining to be aware, straining to practice, can you adjust that to not be using that forcefulness or tightness to try to strain and accomplish something?

Right. If you're complacent, if, yeah, you know, I'm sitting here, I'll get around to being mindful, you know, but, you know, I have important fantasies to finish or... you know, I don't want to, I'm not supposed to be stressed with this practice, so, you know, I'm just going to chill and hang out and just daydream for the first five minutes. Well, I guess it turned out to be 15 minutes, but that was okay. We still have, you know, 30 minutes left, so I'll get around to it. And then suddenly the bell rings, oh, I guess I'd never got around to it.

So you're too complacent, too kind of chilled. I think next time I come to practice, I have to not kind of give up on myself, give up on the practice. I have to at least offer to be there for it, to be present. And I word it that way because being present for the practice, being present for our awareness has a very different feeling than doing mindfulness, doing awareness practice. Because then it becomes a thing that we're projecting or get caught up in a purpose or

something. But there is a way to really kind of adjust the inner life, how we're aware, so that we enjoy being aware.

It's a nice thing. Many of us live with a lot of tensions, a lot of challenges. We live with a lot of shoulds and shouldn'ts, with demands around us, demands of work, family, all kinds of things that come that we have to do, do, do. And sometimes there's no way around it. We have to do these things that we have to do. But if you learn to focus on the how, then you can ask yourself, how am I going to do this?

Okay. Am I going to do it leaning into the future? I'm going to do it tensing up because I have to be thinking about all the things I have to do and get through them. Like the to-do list is like six feet out there and you're like trying to get down the to-do list. You're always ahead of yourself. And some people, I felt that in myself sometimes. My center of gravity is usually maybe one foot in front of me. You know, that's where my center of gravity is because I'm psychically, I'm not, doesn't look like I'm leaning forward, but sometimes I'm into the future slightly. That's not a, you know, is that how you want to live your life? How do you want to be?

And it's possible to the degree to which you can, In this practice, you're allowed to do something more than just be mindful. You're allowed to adjust how you're mindful. You're allowed to adjust how you are doing whatever you're doing. And if you have to do it anyway, then do it in a good way. Do it so that maybe you're aware of your breathing as you do it, and do it with your breathing. Breathe with the activity.

Because what often happens is that if we're really stressed, really something, the breathing will get tight, constricted, tight. And I think one of the most, I used to take yoga many years ago, and probably the most common things the yoga teachers would say was remember to breathe because we'd get in these funny postures and it's kind of like we're trying so hard, and we forget to breathe because we're trying to hold it. That happens, all kinds of things happen with our breathing, that we interfere with it too much if we get caught in what we're, the point of doing or trying to do something. And so to stay close to the breathing, that's a how. Be here. Be with the breathing as you do it.

Not dramatically, but is there some way of staying close, breathing with the activity you're doing? It can make a huge difference. You probably won't get tight. Be with your body as you do things. That we get caught up in a lot of things, wanting to be in stress, stressed, afraid, ambitious, all kinds of things. We tend to lose touch with our body.

But if the body is a ballast, if the body is a centering place, if the body is the home, if the body

is where your wisdom resides, what if your body was a place that most of your intelligence lived. Wouldn't that be a radical? If someone says, use your intelligence, I bet a lot of people go right up to the cerebral cortex, thinking that's where it lives. But how are we? How about being centered in the body as you do things? Have the body be balanced, be embodied as you do things.

And if you become embodied, then you might notice... if you've given up on your body. You might notice if you've collapsed in your body. It's one thing to be, to grieve, like this. It's another thing to grieve, like this. Collapsing and falling into your knee and your head over your forehead and like, oh, poor me. It's a world of difference how you are. You don't have to collapse. You don't have to collapse. The body is a wonderful protector, wonderful support, wonderful companion for all of your life, and to be embodied with a good posture.

If you are, you know, so maybe you, you know, it's possible to focus too much on being relaxed and just fall back and be a couch potato, all curled up. But if you feel your body, the embodied body, you'll feel the constriction of it, you feel the limitations of it. You'll probably feel that something deep in the body might not want to be this way. Many years ago, I read a study where they claimed that maybe they studied the muscles, tone, or tensions, or whatever of the body. And they came to the conclusion that there's two human postures where the body can be most relaxed. And one was the corpse position in yoga. So that's nice to know, that kind of makes some sense. But the one that was a surprise was sitting cross-legged in meditation upright. That, you know, so that allows for the deepest relaxation. What doesn't allow for deep relaxation is sitting like this, curled over, your shoulders kind of begin slumping down towards your knees.

And the reason it doesn't, it looks like you're relaxed. Oh, I'm so relaxed, you know, that way. Why it doesn't allow for relaxation? Because when the shoulders are curled forward, their natural ability to relax is limited. They're held in check. They're constructed to be upright like this. And one of the wonderful feelings that occasionally can happen is you can feel your shoulder blades begin relaxing down the back rib cage. And just shh. But if you're tense, if you're leaning over, you can't. So there's something about if you're really embodied, the body will help you understand how to be present in a nice way.

Okay. And then all this applies to awareness itself. If you ask yourself, how am I being aware? How am I attending to my breathing? How am I attending to my walking? How am I attending to my eating?

How am I attending to my conversations with people? And you might learn all kinds of things about yourself because we're not innocent observers. We're not innocent observers. in our

mindfulness, in our awareness. We carry a lot of baggage, a lot of judgments, a lot of beliefs, a lot of emotions, a lot of shoulds, a lot of agendas, a lot of preconceived ideas with ourselves when we're aware. And so to the self, how am I aware? How am I attending to this? Is it simple or is it complicated? complicated because I'm not just aware of the person, I'm aware of the person and our history. I'm aware of the person and what I want.

I'm aware of the history of the person and what I think is going to happen. And what it should happen shouldn't happen. And I'm aware of the person, but how I'm aware is I'm very cautious, I'm very afraid, because I don't want to be judged. I don't want to be seen a certain way. I hope they don't see. that really that, you know, you know, I'm not such a great person after all. And so it's, so to begin asking, how are we present for things? How are we aware? How are we mindful? Is a powerful way to do mindfulness practice.

And then to slowly, appropriately, without stressing, can you adjust how you're aware? To make it simpler, to make it softer, to make it more open, to do it to be aware without agenda, to be aware without condemnation or fear. Can you be aware without overlaying a lot of things on the experience? And all these together, the breathing, the embodiment, and the, you know, being centered in a easy, relaxed, clear awareness of the present moment. Those three things are can make life a lot easier. And you'll be surprised what begins to flow and move through you and arise out of you, the wholesomeness, the goodness that's there.

If you begin practicing those three things, staying with your breathing, breathing with your life. Let the breathing not become tight, constricted. Breathe, keep a soft breath. Be embodied more. And be careful with... how you're aware, how you attend to any of the things that you're doing, and see how you can adjust it so that it nourishes you rather than denourishes you. So I hope that all makes sense, and may you all be nourished by this practice. Thank you.