

Natural mindfulness

It is very important for us to understand the difference between the mindfulness that requires effort to create or sustain; and a natural, effortless mindfulness. The first one is like the act of forcefully throwing a ball up in the air; the second one is like effortlessly dropping it and seeing it bounce. The result can look the same but actually the two are quite different. One can lead us into juggling to try to keep the various factors of our practice in the air, the other to relaxation, ease and openness of mind. The first can be a useful addition to a worldly life, it can give us our first taste of the present moment. The second is in the opposite direction to the worldly life, it can be what we relax into when we can't keep up the juggling any more or when we see the suffering entailed.

Even if we understand and accept the difference between these two we can still go wrong if we take natural mindfulness to be simply a state of passivity – of letting things be rather than letting things go. This mistake is more subtle. It means finding a false refuge in stillness rather than a real refuge in emptiness and transcendence. We have to make an effort in our practice for the letting go to really happen, but this is not an added effort or a burden, it is a different kind of effort. We take our lives in a new spiritual direction – towards simplicity and peace, and this does the letting go for us. We naturally let go as we leave home, so to speak, and go forth into a spiritual life.

I offer this for your reflection.

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