

## **Excerpt from Insight Retreat Center's August 2015 Newsletter**

You may read the entire newsletter at:

[http://www.insightretreatcenter.org/newsletter/?mc\\_cid=52de978ebb&mc\\_eid=7e11c8a709](http://www.insightretreatcenter.org/newsletter/?mc_cid=52de978ebb&mc_eid=7e11c8a709)

### **Q & A with Gil Fronsdal**

#### *Question:*

I've heard meditation is supposed to be peaceful. But the idea of sitting with my busy mind without doing anything doesn't sound peaceful. And then when I do it, it's actually quite challenging. Could you speak to that?

#### *Gil Fronsdal responds:*

Practice can be challenging. I hope it's still valuable to sit with an agitated mind. I think more important than getting calm is to discover what is true, to really see what's happening. It's not so common for people to stop and see and recognize clearly what's going on with them, within themselves. This can be particularly true if you're not peaceful; the pull of mental agitation can distract you from what is actually going on. Ironically, sometimes trying to make yourself calm or becoming inspired by a Dharma talk or Dharma reading may also interfere with really getting to know yourself. It is really important to have a good overview of yourself and how you are. If you are not peaceful and your mind is busy, take the time to recognize and study this. Only after this might you know how to proceed.

I had a friend who was an athlete, with very tight muscles, almost muscle-bound, and when he did his first meditation session it was very painful, excruciating even, to sit still and not move for a whole meditation period. But after the meditation he felt real for the first time. He felt he'd never been real with himself before, never been connected with life. The pain forced him to finally meet himself and to be in touch with something true in a way he never had before. So he kept practicing. Years later he still meditates.

It's not that you should sit with agitation, pain and difficulty for its own sake. But I think it's more important to meditate as a way of meeting yourself and being honest about what's actually present than it is to be calm. It is helpful to discover what happens through such honesty. So if you are not peaceful, get to know this. Doing so is a path to peace.

### **Excerpt from Pema Chodron's book When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice For Difficult Times (2000) p. 11**

In practicing meditation, we're not trying to live up to some kind of ideal— quite the opposite. We're just being with our experience, whatever it is. If our experience is that sometimes we have some kind of perspective, and sometimes we have none, then that's our experience. If sometimes we can approach what scares us, and sometimes we absolutely can't, then that's our experience... Just seeing what's going on—that's the teaching right there. We can be with what's happening and not dissociate. Awakeness is found in our pleasure and our pain, our confusion and our wisdom, available in each moment of our weird, unfathomable, ordinary everyday lives.