



Being a Naturalist, by Gil Fronsdal

In mindfulness meditation we learn to be present for things as they are. In doing so, it can be useful to assume the attitude of a naturalist. A naturalist simply observes nature without interfering or imposing his or her views. If a wolf eats a deer, a naturalist watches without judgment. If a plant produces a stunningly beautiful blossom, a naturalist leaves it alone, not succumbing to the desire to take it home. In meditation, we observe ourselves much as a naturalist observes nature: without repressing, denying, grasping, or defending anything. This means that we observe our life with a non-interfering presence. We can see anger, depression, fear, happiness, joy, pain, and pleasure directly, as they are, without complications. The naturalist's perspective is one of respect for what is observed. The word .re-spect. is a nice synonym for mindfulness practice because it literally means to .look again.. Often we complicate our observation of ourselves by taking things personally. Of course we can't deny that our sorrows and joys, and blessings, emotions and thoughts are happening to us. But then we take them personally we let ourselves be defined by them: the presence of anger means I am an angry person. A generous act taken personally is proof that I am a generous person. While the common tendency of taking things personally may seem innocent, it often unnecessarily complicates our relationship with what is happening. We can easily become muddled in confusions regarding such issues as personal identity, image, and expectation. By cultivating a naturalist's perspective during meditation, it is possible to develop a capacity to be non-reactive. For this non-reactive perspective, we can more easily explore how to respond wisely to whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. Because of our wonderful powers of observation and reflection, human beings can be both observer and the observed. We can be both the naturalist and the nature. We are nature seeing itself. Through our capacity to see clearly, we can be nature freeing itself. -Gil Fronsdal