

2011-03-07 Mindfulness of The Body

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Last week I gave a talk on mindfulness coming out of the important discourse of the Buddha gave on the four foundations of mindfulness. I talked about the beginning of it. I'd like to continue a little bit more today on this topic coming out of this famous teaching instructions of the Buddha. So in the teachings of mindfulness that the Buddha gave, he talked about four areas of applying mindfulness or four foundations in which mindfulness is applied or centers stabilized. And these are the body something called feeling tones. Maybe we'll talk about some point, the mind and then particular factors of the mind functionings of the mind processes of the mind. And it starts with the body and the way it talks about the body. It says a person is mindful of the body in the body. straw sauce also been translated as mindful, mindful of the body in and of itself. And this is a very important expression. And it means it means it's not exactly clear what it means. But interpreted usually as meaning that it's being aware of your body, for example, directly immediately without the filter of interpretations, bias, reactions, identifications. So there's a lot of ways we identify with our body, this is my body. Even just that simple identification, this is my body isn't identification. And so the remarkable thing is, it's possible to be aware of the body very, very simply, in and of itself, without any layer of comparative thinking. And one of the places to see this power of comparative thinking is how Some people compare themselves to others in their bodies. I know that I was 13 I lived in Italy, it was 1967. Those of you old enough to remember was I was living in Italy that summer but you know, I had the longest hair of any boy in Italy, or at least in that city I was in and I had only one had blue jeans was like a cutting edge thing and Italy. And so I knew I was pretty cool. And so as a 13 year old, I was kind of energized by this very nicely, thank you walking around Italy. And then at end of the summer, I came back to California, and a lot happened in California summer of 67. And when I came back, I was no longer the one with the longest here like my favorite short and I spent the junior high school track pulled my hair out, make it longer, faster. And then I I in my blue jeans, which is regular blue jeans, and everyone else had figured out how to wash them, to bleach them. And some people even put them on the streets and cars would run over them. You know, they they really hated the art of making your jeans look worn out and torn. And it was it was the beginning of that era. Now you buy them for \$200. But back then we had to do it ourselves. So I came back and I just had regular blue jeans and I had this short here. And what was interesting was how it affected my energy. And now I didn't feel so cool anymore. I didn't fill up Boyd up with a beer. And now I feel kind of deflated, like oh no, this is embarrassing. And so my sense of vitality and my sense of kind of happiness in myself, was being based on comparing myself to other people. My hair was longer than others were shorter than others. And depending on the comparison, I felt good or bad. The hair was just a hair. So it'd be aware of the hair in itself to be aware of the hair and the hair. It's just to be aware of the hairs there without any that identification, that interpretation, there's comparative thinking we have. And, and so that's, you know, maybe kind of, you know, you know, kind of simple look at the hair, but we do that a lot. You know, I'm taller, I'm shorter, I'm bigger. I'm smaller, and, you know, all these categories that people have. And okay, Ruth. Oh, okay. So,

so the beginning of mindfulness involves training ourselves, to be present, to be aware of the body in of itself, very simple. And the simplicity of mindfulness is a really remarkable thing. It's probably one of the some for some people weren't. The hardest thing to learn to do when you do mindfulness practice, is to keep it really, really simple. Sometimes we have such powerful habits of mind to be interpreting and judging and evaluating and fixing and seeing a certain way. And sometimes it's not a problem to do that. But more often than not, it causes stress, it causes suffering, it causes problems, and it's often not so accurate. Our way we interpret our world even interpret ourselves is often a generalization, which is not actually so accurate to what the evidence actually is. So the idea is to kind of, in a sense, become an empirical observer, or a naturalist of yourself. And a naturalist doesn't impose his or her views on nature, but sits there and watches and sees how is it actually there. So the first training in mindfulness is to learn to train to keep it really simple. And that involves a lot of letting go involves having enough presence of mind to know when the mind is spinning out when the mind is categorizing, or judging or comparing, and learning to let go of it to come back, just witness this experience. And it helps if you're interested in this question to what is this really, what is the experience of the body really in and of itself. Generally, the body in and of itself doesn't have a problem, generally, much more often than we realize. Many of human problems arise out of comparative thinking, in one form or other. And if we can learn to train ourselves, at least for a few minutes not to be involved in comparative thinking, things can settle down become peaceful, pretty quickly. One of the things that happens in one of the things I've learned to love, mindfulness of the body, the body is the feeling that comes when we're settled deeply in the body kind of rooted in the body. It's sometimes it's, you know, it's a bit different, feels different ways, but to really be at home. Home, hear comfortable in the body. The kind of like your body's an easy chair, and you're sitting inside of it. You kind of they're just there and at ease and the soft, soft, safe, comfortable place. And it's very difficult to have that kind of experience. If we're spinning out in our thoughts and thoughts spin us out in a way and keep us kind of not grounded, not centered, not rooted, not at home. And so this process of letting go of the thoughts letting go of our comparative thinking, letting go of judgments, interpretations, many people find very satisfying because it becomes kind of because it lets go the stress of all that and helps us to feel at ease here peaceful here. Even people who are ill have sicknesses, and their body is uncomfortable, can find a lot of relief from their suffering by not having a leg interpretations judgment, future thinking, prediction thinking, all these kinds of meaning making that we add to it, a place that I occasionally get to practice with interesting place. I've talked about this before. I'm reminded of it because last night I woke up. I don't know. I think I woke up at three in the morning. And, and so I think, Oh, this, I shouldn't be awake now. I should be sleeping. And so and so. It's very interesting to watch my mind. Because my mind will make it a problem. My body has no problem at all. And my mind makes it problems. Oh, then tomorrow when I go, I'll be tired. And if I'm tired, you know, I'll give a Dharma talk them tired. And it's not going to go over well, it's been a disaster. And, you know, tomorrow is gonna be a disaster, you know, and, and I can go out and this you know what it means what's gonna implies that I'm not getting enough sleep. I don't know what tomorrow is gonna bring. But if I just pay attention to what's happening in and of itself in the moment, independent of my predictions and my concerns, I find when I have insomnia in the middle of the night, I'm quite happy. I'm comfortable, I'm warm, I'm usually well fed, I'm content to save. No one wants anything from me.

And I'm just nicely there. And, and, and so if I make that shift from my thinking, to how I'm actually feeling, you know, I feel quite good. So then, you know, eventually, usually I fall asleep. But if I don't fall asleep, then I feel I just do mindfulness, just stay there and I feel good. As long as I don't let the duck thinking come in again, creep in. So same thing with singing Some people are ill. I mean, it's difficult to be Oh, there's all kinds of physical pains and struggles that people have. But it can those struggles and pains can be a lot easier if we don't have that overlay on top of our interpretation and judgment and

imperative thinking and meaning making and prediction making that sometimes wraps you know, tightens up the mind around it. So the beginning of mindfulness has a lot to do with letting go of certain kind of activity that keeps us from being present for our experience in a simple way. One of the ways I believe the text talks about this, it talks about mentions putting away greed and distress for the world. So you can't put it away that easily your grief and distress. But what I how I interpret this is that you put away your your your devotion, of focusing on your distress and your greed If you put off your foot fixation on focusing and thinking about the things of the world, in the world, they think so called your relationship, your job, your house, your bank account, your recreation opportunities, your health, you know, all these things that you can think about. And you use for the time being, you put it that aside, you put it away, you turn away from it, not because it's bad, but because that's not where you discover how to be present in a very simple way, and the peace that comes from that simplicity. So, a lot of mindfulness practices is training in simplicity. So in the in the instructions of the Buddha they gave for this. He says, How do you practice mindfulness of the body in and of itself. Here, a monastic goes to the, to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut. So, in my mind, that's implies You go someplace where it's simple, there's not a lot of business, you don't go to meditate at Macy's. You know, you go someplace where things can be simple. So, the empty room so IMC is meant to be like an empty room, right? supposed to be simple here. And, or in a forest or a tree or an empty place, go someplace where things are simple. So you supported in this process of coming in and not focusing and thinking about all these different things that you could be thinking about. And again, I want to emphasize and I think it's wrong to think about things, but

maybe this is a wrong thing to say. But I think there was a Groucho Marx movie many years ago, where some woman comes to Groucho and says something like Explain so I have 24 kids you know I love my husband are 24 kids. Groucho says I love my my cigar too but I take it out sometimes

was wrong you have a cigar keep it in. So you know it's good to take a break you know so it's fine to think sometimes but you know sometimes take it out. Sometimes Give yourself a break. take them with you give yourself a break doesn't mean that we're judging it as being bad. It just means that it's really healthy, take a break. So, and then the monastic sits down and having folded his or her legs crosswise, sits with body erect and establishes mindfulness in front of oneself or establish Is mindfulness here, just kind of establishing this is, it's not like I'm here. This is where I'm going to be. So it's establishing a mindfulness here. It Again, it takes a choice and the choices, I'm not going to let my mind Well, I can stop it from going that way. But I'm making a choice to try to be here, centered in this place in this time, not in what's happening tomorrow, not in a conversation I had yesterday, not in planning my food, not in worrying about my taxes, not these, all these other things, I'm going to be here that was not easy to do that necessarily, the mind has powerful momentum to think about these things. But there's no hope to give up that momentum, unless you actually have some understanding that what you're trying to do is to be here. And that's valuable to do that. And so this movement, so I think it can actually no actually be a physical movement when you sit down whether it's in a chair or on a cushion, cross legged is to actually take time to remind yourself, you're here. In zen, they sway back and forth when they sit down to meditate. And this swaying back and forth, you get into your body and like kind of like a kind of rocking yourself, then people need to be soothed. And so they come in the column and it gets closer and closer and get more into the body centered. And then finally, they sit completely still. And it's a kind of reminder, show up, be balanced and be centered. Find some little ritual some little way. Yes, here. I'm going to be here. This is important. And, and a clear kind of acknowledgement. Here. I'm going to be this is why I'm going to do. There's unfortunately too many times in my life where I sat down to meditate, where I didn't really clearly sit down and make a commitment or acknowledgement, hey, I'm here to do this meditation. I kind of sat down and I'm here You didn't even think I was here. I just sat down and my mind just continues business as usual, you know, and after 10 1520 minutes, I thought,

Oh, I'm meditating that's supposed to be doing so it's a little embarrassing to tell you, but that has happened in the past. And, and but to sit down and actually take time to remind yourself, I'm here, this is one but here's what's important. In this brief period of time, I'm going to try to put aside life as usually lived, usually thought about to try to discover what the experience now really is like. That's really the task is to discover, to understand to see what is really happening now. Not what we think is going to happen tomorrow, or we expect to happen yesterday or whatever. But what's really happening now. So this establishing one's mindfulness here. Again, it's not meant to be rocket science was to be a very simple thing, in principle, and it's helpful to remember it's trying to be simple. Joseph Goldstein, teacher Mahindra, his mantra was, it's not simple, it's not mindfulness. And so sometimes people want to learn all this destructive they listened to me too much. They get All these instructions and they make it sound so complicated all the things to do, but it's really meant to be simple, here be present. So it starts with the body. And when it starts with the body, the instance actually the instructions here begins with your breathing. The breathing is a, for many, many different cultures and religions a very central piece of religious practice. The breath is often seen as being very important for access to spiritual RAM, spiritual experiences, spiritual feelings. And the body is wonderful mediator between the mind our feelings, our unconscious mind, and our living mind or intentional life, the world around us. And so this verse instructions to tune into your breathing and the way that it's explained here and then I kind of find that this site What I'm about to read all of this was composed 2500 years ago, a long time ago. And I think it reads as contemporary as some was written yesterday, for the most part, you know, you go to an empty room, you go to a forest, sit down, cross your legs, establish your attention here. You know, I hope it's relevant in 2000 years from now.

And then, when breathes So, ever mindful, when breathe in, mindful when breathe out. So here we start becoming aware of the fact that you're breathing in and breathing out. And here's the breath is a wonderful place to train. In this process of letting go of our thoughts and showing up for hear what's going on. Now. The breathing generally always happening as a nice rhythm to it, too has a rhythm to it, sometimes easier to be present for something if it has a rhythm. So we tune into that tune into that room. And, and if you're paying attention to your breathing, you're probably not going to be paying attention as passionately to your thoughts. And it's easier to let go of your thoughts. If you bring yourself into the breath. Not a guarantee, you can do it automatically, but you helps. Generally what happens is be tuned into your breath. And keep coming back to your breath, your mind will wander away and you come back and your mind wanders away. And slowly the mind quiets down and settles down. Not always. But generally, if you meditate for 20 minutes, 30 minutes, 40 minutes, things quiet down. And as quiet as they quiet down, the thinking gets a lighter and thinner and the head tends to have less of a grab or hold at us. And so then it's easier to stay with a breath to sit down and expect people to stay with the breath cold. Just do it. Zero to breath and zero seconds. It's impossible. It doesn't really work that way generally, but but the idea that you're kind of working yourself working the rhythm, working kind Come back to the breath, and slowly building and relaxing and letting go. So that over time, you're able to stay present more and more. So we start by just tuning into the breath, where the in breath where the out breath, training the mind to stay there, more and more breaths in a row. Then breathe. Then we started understanding something about what the experience of breath is like. And in this instructions for mindfulness, one of the most common words that appears in the text is the word understand. When understands on the other side, common words to see when sees and understands, when begins to actually understand what's happening here and now in a deeper, clear, useful way. So then it goes on. So breathing in having a long breath, breathing in long, one understands I breathe in long, breathing out long one understands I breathe out long. So here you begin to understand the nature of the breath. I interpret this to mean Don't just pay attention to the fact that breath is long in breath as long without breath as long, but you can begin paying attention to the characteristics of the breathing, the quality of it, where your breathing your body that shallow is a deep is a tightness or

looseness. So contraction is the release of contraction. There's a lot of different sensations that come into play. When you're breathing, a lot of different things happen. And in a very relaxed way, we begin tuning into that and has to be relaxed, but you kind of tune in and feel and be present. So it's not just simply following the breath. But it's beginning to train the mind to see what's there. And this is the hallmark of mindfulness practice is training the mind to see what's there. Not just to keep the mind still, not just to keep the mind concentrated on the breath. So it's very simple training. So breathing in long when understands I breathe in long, breathing out long one understands I breathe out long breathing and short one understands I breathe in short Breathing out short when understands I breathe out short. So that's just paying attention to the breath knowing it as it is, then it goes on.

When trains as far as then when trains as follows, I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body shall breathe out experience the whole body. There are different interpretations of what this means. But some people say it means that you start training yourself to feel the whole experience of breathing from the beginning of the end breath to the end of the out breath, the beginning of the outbreath to the beginning of the end breath to the end of the end breath to the beginning of the outbreath to the end of the outbreath. Some people take it to mean that you experience the whole breath body you know if you tune into the how your body breathes, and your breathing in a relaxed open way. You can feel the whole torso the whole ribcage moving and expanding. You know it's easy to it's relatively easy to feel it in the front ribcage, expansion and contraction you Feel the belly move. But it's also possible to feel the back rib cage move, you can feel the space between the ribs opening up a little bit. You feel the lungs of the air kind of pushing the ribs out and stretching and opening little bit. You can also feel the spine move, you breathe in and in the spine expands or opens up a little bit, probably a little more space is created between the vertebrae and then when you breathe out, it comes back. You can feel movement in your shoulders, you can feel going up into your head, you can feel movement, you're very careful down into your groin, sometimes into your, into your upper legs. There's a lot of mix this rhythm, a movement that goes on. And so some people for some people this instructions to feel experienced the whole body breathing is to feel that whole bellows sense the hotel is kind of growing and expanding and contracting and moving and you feel as a big massage happening and some people who like to stay focused Just a particular area, not just the whole place, like just just pay attention to the breath that the tip of the nostrils or pay attention to a spot in your belly is the belly moves. Feel that say that this whole body experience means, you know the whole experience of the breath in that one place, the continuity of breath the whole time. Either way, it's pretty great. But then the next one is also very interesting. This is the last breathing exercise. When trains is following also, I should breathe in calming the bodily formation, I should breathe out calming the bodily formation. So calming the bodily formation is an interesting expression. The formation means it's translation of some Sankara. So it's a Pali word. And it means that which is formed, created and current means like make and some means With the biscuits, like, conditioned, are formed together with something. And it's that part of our, our, the bodily sunkara is, is, is that part of our physical body which we experience it's the experiences we have in our body, that are conditioned by what our mind does. The intentions the activity of our mind. So like if if you know mountain line, let's imagine let's say that I see this bill here in front of me. And I like this bill. And I think this is a beautiful bill. And I want this bill for myself. You know, I really want my if I had if I could only have this bill at home when I meditate my meditation would be so good. And so I might desire for this bell starts moving for chewing. And so what happens is I think about the spell that I want, I started leaning towards it little contraction and tightening, tightening up and my eyes get a little bit kind of fixated and my belly gets a little bit tight and, and my mind starts spinning a little bit with how can I get this bell and you know, maybe I can go down to the five and 10 store and buy a cheap one and change it no notice or I don't know what you know, and so there's an as an effect on me. And that effect, if I'm sensitive, I can feel the effect in my body that tightening up my body as I lean towards it and wanted to think about it. That tightening up that's a formation that's a physical it's a physical experience in the

body that I'm creating by what my mind is doing what my intention desires is doing. So if I'm always going around angry

and and I have my mind my stomach or not, or my jaws are all tight, then those muscles might get more and more tired or more tense. And that tension we feel is a Sankara. That's something that's created, that's formed by our intentions or desires or the activities of the mind. So the bodily formations are those formation. So bodily experiences that we can feel that have its origin in the behaviors of our mind, our desires, our intentions, the ways habits, we build up, the maximum sense. It's like, Abraham Lincoln was supposed to have said, by tying a person's 40 I think he said, but time is 40 the persons responsible for his or her face. And it's interesting to go to different cultures. Maybe some of you have done this. And, and, like I've been, I've been in a country where someone moved from another country when they're a baby. Their parents came from another country. And so they're kind of of that nationality, but they came to the new country. As a baby, and they live in that new new country speaking only language of the new country. And it's my impression, you can see in the, in the shape of their face, how that culture, not language has shaped their face a little bit different than if had been speaking their original language from the country they came from. Because they said, you have to use different muscles that speak different languages. Same thing, you know, certain kinds of feelings or attitudes or impressions, you know, they carry their weight, they, they they kind of create a conditioning in her body in certain kind of way. Some of these are really deeply embedded, and some are not so embedded. Some of the, I'm sure all of you have had the experience of being tense, and feeling how tense it can be, and, you know, done something to kind of relax and get a massage or go for a run or take a nap or do anything to kind of reduce all that tension. That tension is the bodily formation. And so there's a whole slew of things that the In fact, what the Buddha's intends to say is that almost everything you experience in your body as an experience is a bodily experience or feeling is a bodily formation, that the mental impact on our body is so huge. That that is, you know, primarily that's kind of the origin of it. whether that's true or not, I don't want to speculate, but there's a theory. So here the instruction is you. So if you follow along, first you follow your breath, then you start looking more carefully at the experience of breath, which means you're honing your capacity to see more clearly to recognize what's happening. Then you become aware of your whole body. The whole breath, body may perhaps, and now you're more sensitive to feel it more. The greater sensitivity is greater heightened awareness because you're calm, you're centered, you're greater aware, and then you because of that, you can take in more information you experience your body more fully. If you do that, you'll feel the tension in your body. And here are the instructions. Don't just feel it to know it is talking is to relax, to calm, settle down. So you don't do it immediately. First you've practiced knowing what's there. Once you know it's there, then as you breathe out, relax is the one with a wonderful mantra. Breathe. Relax, see if you can relax it soften, let go. And some of some of the tensions we hold in our body can be relaxed, some of it kind of locked in and it takes a long time. We can't relax it just because we tell it to relax. But we can soften around and we can create some softening and not be so gripped around it. And that's true in the body. It's also true in the mind, in the heart. In the mind, it's particularly interesting, I think, because sometimes it's possible to feel the tension In the mind, from how we're engaged in thinking, it's almost like the mind is a muscle that can get really tense. If we're are contracted, if we're really preoccupied in our thoughts, and if you let go of your thoughts for a moment for a little bit, but don't relax that tension, the tension is there and will keep kicking up new thoughts. So rather than letting go of thoughts, pay attention to that physical physical tension, the physical pressure that seems to be associated with thinking and then see if you can relax that. Or just as you find that the breathing out is a good tight place to relax to soften, to even out the thinking mind.

Aaron emotions are attitudes also can be held tension and holding patterns in our body. And unless we begin to softening and relaxing the body, it's very hard to overcome the habits of mind. It's almost as if,

if we tighten up and then say relax, you know, tell the mind, relax your mind. If the body is tense, it's almost like there's a feedback loop, where the body's telling the say you're afraid, and you're tense, because you're afraid. There's a feedback loop where the body is kind of instructing the mind, you're scared. And so you might kind of try to soften and relax the mind, but the body, the body holds the fear, it's hard for the mind to believe it. So sometimes, it's very powerful to go through the body and reassure the body, relax the body, settle the body. So that's one of the reasons why for some people, it's extremely important to go meditate if you're doing this to meditation, and a place where you feel safe, so that the empty room or the forest or the under the tree, maybe that's safe. Place some someplace it's safe. So it feels okay for you to lower your guard. So it feels okay for you not to be defended, and bracing yourself against life that some people are. So we tune into the breath, sensitive to the breathing, just training ourselves to be with a breath, show up for the breath. Let letting go of things to take us away from the breath just to be here. And so training of concentration, practice being with the breath, being with the breath. And then as we are able to stay with the breath better, then we start getting interested in what is his experience of breathing. That's the mindfulness to see clearly what this is. And then as we get to see it, we can try to see the whole show much more the whole show what's happening as we breathe. See the fullness of that experience with that sensitivity. And part of that one of the things you'll become aware of if you do that is become aware of that is what's called the bodily formations, the ways in which our body host you know, in shorthand in western lingo right for now, by the way, the body host tension and then it's instructed Relax, let go. You don't want to set yourself up, that you're supposed to be super successful at relaxing, then you just get tense. Have to relax. There's only so much that you can consciously do and relax, let go of, there's a lot of tension that just kind of has takes take this time to soften, let go. But if you can, when you can let go of do some people make it a project to relax and relaxing. You know, you make too much of a project and you make it too complicated. They do if it's not simple, it's not mindfulness. So, it when it's simple to soften the shoulders, simple to soften the belly. It's simple to relax the jaw or the muscles in the face. To really relax. Try to try to, but don't relax in such a way that you become a couch potato. You know, hear the instruction to relax. Well, I think I'll just do my meditation in bed. I remember I was sitting the three months 333 For three months on retreat, that IMS and I was, you know, relatively unknown what disciplines meditator so I went to all the sittings. So I was sitting, you know, so I was sitting this way and you know, cross legged on the mat for about six weeks or so just every sitting, I was sitting there, and my back was hurting some. And I was kind of a little bit tired. And so one day I said, you know, I've been sitting for a long time, you know, it's probably good to not always be sitting in the same way. It's probably a good to give my body a little bit of a break. So I think I'll go and sit in this little living room they had with had a couch, you know, just take a little break, you know, and just to give my body a chance to kind of cool down a little bit. Well, so I sat down on the couch to meditate on the couch leaning into the couch. And that was a fastest meditation I've ever done. I mean, I couldn't believe how fast it was. I mean, I just sat down for noodles over the bell rang. I fell asleep. But I was out in so you know that's sleeping is some people need sleep more than meditation but that wasn't the point just you know, to you. So if you hear the instruction relax, it means I'll just go and you know, in the couch and look at all my pillows, you know, you know it's good to sit up straight and relax with the uprightness.

So that's probably enough for today. That covers a lot, maybe it's encouraging for you to show up, sit down with some intention and commitment to establish yourself here. Remind yourself that here is not work here is not the conversation you had earlier here is not solving your problems with your parents or your children or here is here. And so begin to to to turn the mind to really to hear A really good place to begin is with the breathing. It's not easy, but then we keep coming back to the breath, keep coming back to the breath, keep coming back. And then we start tuning into the breath more and more fully. And what is the experience of breath and as you get interested in experience of breath more fully, less of your attention is available for all your erotic thoughts. And so then it tends to be more peaceful. And

then you become more aware and more aware and some point you become aware of the places of holding you have, and then you maybe relax, soften or calm the bodily formations. And that should go a long way to help you at some point to feel really at home or at peace or settled here. And it's a remarkable, really a remarkable thing. To be able to feel peaceful settled at home here without the need of TV. iPod, computer, iPad, drugs, food, sex. There's a lot of things people kind of engage in that in order to get happy in order to get some peace or feel joy or something, and it's quite an amazing thing, that if we start the spinning of the mind and the addiction to the mind, it's that all the goodness all this beautiful sense of peace is available right here, sitting under a tree or an empty room. So thank you very much.