

2015-07-06 Mindfulness of The Body

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SPEAKERS

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I asked someone today which of two topics Should I teach tonight? And I said, should I teach about kindness, or teach about mindfulness of the body? And she said, teach about mindfulness of the body. And my hope is that they become the same thing. Some point, but there are different. I was the kindness theme was inspired a little bit by reading about the last Grateful Dead concert. And I don't know if you read it, those of you who didn't read it, apparently the last thing they said, on stage, these are not people who don't speak on stage very much. They've been playing for 50 years. And after 50 years of playing music, the last thing they said as they went off the stage was they said, Be kind. Isn't that nice? And all that LSD helped.

So mindfulness of the body. A nice little slogan that I that I have about mindfulness of the body is two parts. The first is come home. And the second is stay home. And I think of the mindfulness of the body as a kind of coming home homecoming, and I think it's hard to really feel at home in one set. At home in this world without being centered or grounded in your body. And then once you once you're there even just a little bit, stay there. In order to do this, it helps to understand where you are when you're not in your body. Where are you? Do you know? They have signs I've heard them told they have signs in some stores. Keep your children within sight at all times. Keep your mind in sight at all times. Keep your body in sight at all times. Sometimes if you really watch where are you? Where are you living? Where do you take up residency in the present moment. Many times you'll find that you're lost in thought caught up in thought thinking taking up residency in the future taking up residency in the past. Taking residency in your resentments and your regrets and your fears.

And you know in those involvement taking up residence there rynok residing in our body and residing here in this wonderful body we have and there are some people who don't know how valuable it is to have a body. How valuable is to be mindful of the body or to quote the Zen master Dogen, famous Zen master in Japan. He said, mindfulness of the body is the body's mindfulness. And I think this is very profound. Because mindfulness of the body implies that you're maybe you're happily up in the control tower. Watching the body being mindful of the body as if the body is separate from you. But the body's mindfulness is not so dualistic. It's not so subject object oriented. It's the awareness that emanates from the body. And so to be paying attention to your body is a great thing to do. But to relaxed, center yourself in your body and allow mindfulness, the body's mindfulness to manifest itself as a great thing. The Zen Master Dogen also said in distinction and difference from how it's many times said in Buddhism, he said that enlightenment happens in the body. Some people Buddhist teachers say enlightenment is an issue of the mind. But there's tremendous importance, you know, of the body. The Buddha said didn't say it exactly that way but the Buddha had as many many statements about how important it is to be present in your body. He said that mindfulness of the body culminates in the deathless culminates in awakening. There's no more there's no awakening is no liberation without

mindfulness of the body. Some people would like to get it, you know, liberated as a mental trip. But the thing is that it's all in our body. It's all here. Without the body coming along, and being part of it. It's actually hard to negotiate this path of practice. And many years ago, I went through the index of a whole bunch of Buddhist books, maybe whatever I could find on my bookshelf or something I forget. And to see in the index, they said they had reference to the body. And I was surprised Half you did it because of the reason I did that I got the impression that if you were introduced to Buddhism only through books, you would not realize how important the body is. It's all about it. And a lot of you know there's there like great Buddhist books out there that are mostly moving ideas around. And if you move too many ideas around, it's a little bit like moving around the deck chairs on the Titanic. You know the ideas are nice deck chairs are good they should be arranged just right as you go down. Get all the ideas lined up. You know, just get him all right. take a long time get a PhD in Philosophy and Religion all kinds of wonderful things and get all your ideas but the existential ideas lined up just right. Down you go. least you have those lined up. Isn't that nice? And but in contrast to the books, my experience of training in Buddhism. The years I lived as a monastic in this country and practicing in Japan, practicing in Burma and Thailand, tremendous emphasis on being present for your body of being, paying attention to your body, feeling your body, negotiating the world, through your body, living in your body, and a lot of what you do that's not written about in Buddhism, in the monasteries, you do with your body to physical training. And, you know, it's probably not written about enough. The rhetoric that you read about is often in Buddhism is often different from what you actually do when you do like, you know, serious training. And I don't know why that is, but the but it practices often involves doing all kinds of things with your body. bowing for example, is a physical thing.

If you've spent a lot of time bowing, which you do in monasteries, it changes you, in a whole psychological shift that happens us keep putting your hands together in front of you and bowing. sitting up straight with your body, walking in particular ways relating to other people. Those things, things begin to shift, because there's a very powerful relationship between our body and our minds. And Buddhism doesn't posit a strong separation for them. But they do distinguish them that ended distinguishing them say that there are very strong mutual interaction between them. They're a system that work together. If you really want to understand your mind. If you study your body, be aware of your body. The body is slower in the mind, so you have a half a chance to see what's going on. In the mind, it's kind of hard to catch everything. Also, they the body never lies. The mind is can be tricky. Maybe your mind's not tricky. And but the mind is tricky with the messages. It gives you the information it gives you. And so, but if you come down in your body you get there's a source of information in your body, about what's going on for you what's going on in the world around you. And as you kind of learn to recognize that information to recognize where the subtle tensions are, the holdings are what parts of the body feel hard and soft. If you feel what parts of your body get activated different times where the energy seems to be in your body at different times. Is it in your stomach? Is it in your heart? Is it in your forehead is in your jaws? What do you know what's in your spine? You know, is it in your feet where Where's the energy Where's what's activity where's the center of sensations going on in your body. And because our physical body is not just a, you know, a hunk of rock, you know insensate rock, our bodies are completely sensate through and through full of nerves that can pick up a tremendous amount of information about ourselves, the environment, it's not such a strong separation self and the environment. And what we pick up through our body is the sense data that the body has the mind has to use anyway, in order to make sense of this world. The only way that we could you know, live in the world if we're actually here in this world, which is not always the case. It was Lily Tomlin who said, At the present moment is the leading cause of in sanity for people who are in touch with it.

Maybe so. But if you're not in touch with it, I don't know why that is the so the, the everything that we experienced in the world or we know about the world, we have to take in through our sense data. So we

get to see it, hear it, touch it, smell it, hear it, you know, it all comes in. And from all that stuff that comes in, we gather together in the brain and reconstruct it into our picture of the world, what's going on and our interpretation of it. So they're a creative act, the act of seeing we think we see things you know, it's so simple to, you know, people can see or people can hear so simple. But it's a very complicated event. And we take in all this information. And if we have blinders on if we have preferences or selective process by what we take in, we only pick up a narrow window there a piece of what's going on in this in this world right now. As we can relax and settle into the body and the body wakes up the body becomes more aware body becomes more something that we're in touch with. Then all the sensory apparatus apparatus in the in the body, all the ways in which we pick up sense data becomes available, gets registered gets taken in, and we become aware of so much more. that some of the subtle little shifts and changes in social situations sometimes are picked up faster in the body. Then in the mind, you might be thinking about the conversation a little bit.

First mind my We do what we know is what your mind is doing socially. But if you're centered and present in your body, you start feeling some of these shifts. A very interesting shift socially or any situation is you can be aware of if you pay attention to your posture and to watch what goes on your posture, your posture, posture is I love we call it posture, you know, the way in which we hold our torso, our body, because in English, we talk about posturing. And, you know, which is an attitude right. And so, our posturing the week we what we do with our body is seldom innocent. Meaning that meaning that our posture often expresses some mood, some attitude, some feeling, some desire or what's going on, and sometimes it's you without your if you're not really in touch with your posture. You can't see some of the shifts. One of my favorites posture stories. And this is a long time ago now, but there was a period of time where this happened a few times with people. Maybe coming out of my Zen training, sometimes I was little, maybe a little bit too much once just be really present for people just there somehow. So I would stand in front of them just be there fully present. And as I did that, they would turn 90 degrees to me, and they still look at me kind of carry the conversation by no slide. So I follow them around and face them. And they would turn an outfall and literally we went around 360 degrees I guess I'm kind of intense. And but what was more was more interesting was most interesting. I'm very convinced that they didn't have a clue. They didn't know what was happening. They weren't they weren't tracking their body that was part of the what was going on was kind of unconscious subconscious or something. And if they had known what would they have done what they would they've seen what what they've learned about themselves if they pay attention Do what they're putting your body on it does. Does your body Express fear does Express disappointment does it Express, you know, all kinds of subtle things go on. You know? So what happens to you? What do you learn about yourself if you pay attention to what goes on in your body.

So the Buddha, one of the first meditation instructions that he get gave when he gave us when he gave kind of progressive instructions for meditation practice. One of the first instructions he gave was breathing in, experienced the whole body. Breathing out experienced the whole body. So as you breathe in, be present for the breath experience of breathing, know your breathing, but then feel your body kind of relax into your bodies settled into it. Or like for me the image of being on the inside of my body And then kind of like kind of like, like having my hands to class together and then opening my hands up wide. That's a feeling of kind of becoming mindful of the body. experiencing the bodies. For me that's an image of is something that just kind of, at the center of my physical being kind of opens up and spreads out and just kind of takes in the sensations and feeling in my body. Kind of, you know, or you know, it starts in my torso, in my chest, my stomach spreads outwards, into my shoulders down into with my hips and my legs and my arms, kind of opening up and feeling that's works for me that kind of image. Experiencing what goes on in the body, feel the whole body and then relaxing into it.

Relaxing of the body, letting the body soften. The body can carry a tremendous amount of tension. And one of the One of the issues around tension is that the more tension is a kind of way of becoming numb. The parts that become hard, don't operate so fully as you know, they're not they're sensitive they don't the full range of sensations that can be taken in and that part of the body aren't really available. People who are really chronically tense those parts of the body, go numb, go numb, it takes a while for them to wake up, to open up and to be present. But to relax, to relax the body, the body then begins to show itself more fully relaxed the body stay aware and be here in the body. As as we do this, one of the benefits of it is the body is a locus of a tremendous amount of pleasure. And the kind of meditative pleasure that the path of meditation can include a time it's sooner or later supposed to include this Physical. First, first and foremost, there can be strong a strong feelings of joy or sometimes people experience it as rapture. There could be more sublime and peaceful feelings of happiness, contentment that can kind of pervade the body. And in fact, the classic instructions from the Buddha is to take some of the pleasure that can come from meditation practice and suffuse it pervaded through your body. So if you know how to be in your body and are grounded and settled in your body, then you could start taking this pleasure that arises out of a relaxed, concentrated body, and then begin to suffused, let it spread throughout the body, as it does so it gets stronger, Fuller, and it's quite something to have a body that the body feels content, or the body feels inspired and happy, or feels joyful or a light present. it what it does is it begins it does a number of things, but it can start shifting our identity. If our identity is tied up in ideas, thoughts of who we are concepts of self and other, we can have all kinds of them. Some of them are quite painful, some weather, self concepts, we have way we represent ourselves to ourselves. And we're swimming and living in these thoughts and ideas, to have the body become so full of contentment and happiness or subtleness or peace. That it's that it's almost captivating. It's so interesting, like, Wow, this is so nice. This is so much nicer to be here living here than it is to be living in those thoughts. I think I've been thinking about how I'm so crummy for years. I know how to do that. I don't think I need to do that anymore. This is really good. This is nice, but you don't deserve it. deserves one of my great pleasures and as a teacher was also many years ago, you know, some religions don't really like the body so much. You know, and, and, and the body, you know, especially bad is sensuality and joy and, you know, good feelings in your body like is kind of the kind of mistrustful of it. So this woman on retreat came to me and said, I come from one of those religions where, you know, this is kind of really bad the body and you're not supposed to feel any pleasure. And I didn't grow up with that way. So I kind of like was kind of amazed to hear this. So, every once in a while doesn't happen very often. As a teacher, I sit up straight, really tall, you know, to take my full authority as a Buddhist teacher. And then I sit up straight and I look someone in the eye and I said, Sorry, no Tell them something. So I said, let me tell you something. It's okay to have joy in your body. It's okay to have pleasure, physical pleasure. And she said, Thank you. Not great. To have this kind of role, you get to tell someone, they can enjoy themselves.

And so and so it kind of what it does is clutch can shift. Now a lot of things, he can shift the identity because it's more interesting to be there than those other kind of thoughts. We have an experience of ourselves which feels holistic, whole, feels contented, feels healthy, that's very different than what happens when we're spinning around in our thoughts. And that shift gives us kind of spin shifting our priorities shifting where the center of gravity is shifting where the reference point shifting where the lenses through which we see our life. So much so that Many people report that it feels very healing to do that. It's very healing to go into this kind of integrated sense of a body and having the awareness rise up through the body and be kind of permeating the body being settled in it. It kind of very strong. Some people haven't had the experience. I don't know if everyone will have this, but a very strong healing energies coursing through the body. I've had this you know, I was amazed the first time this happened to me, where I just kind of feel this kind of healing energy healing sensations kind of just kind of vibrating through the body. It helps. I don't know if it was he was healing, but it sure felt like it that

was the experience of it. So some people have very painful emotional states that they carry with them sometimes for years and years. And to relax into the body and let the body kind of hold whatever is there. Some people find it very, very healing. It's not always easy to do this, because the body is a repository for a lot of what we're resisting a lot of stuff we've frozen around. And so the idea of coming into the body for some people means they have to go through a period of meeting what they have not attended to what they have been avoiding for a long time. There might be long buried grief, that's been sitting there. And it's not uncommon as it was for me when I started meditating, of needing to cry. I was sobbing some because I had no idea that what was buried in me and came up kids that came out of the blue, I started crying, but it rose up through my body. And it's kind of very strong, compelling feeling, kind of physical feeling of my body. You know, like, you have to cry. And, and, but you know, it's not something I usually do and in My culture that I grew up with, it's not something that you do. You know, I only grew up in some of these more expressive cultures but so what I did was I went to my teacher at the center where I was practicing and he said, he said, I feel all this despair welling up inside. And he just said it, all he said to me was, sooner or later it has to come out. And that was all it took to pull the cork. And that I solved when you're a kid rose up out of the body because I was becoming in touch, relaxing, settling into it. And as we relax and settle in the present moment, some of the ways in which we hold things in check, often for good reason. You know, it's too difficult some of the emotions you know, as a small childhood. Some of the things that children have to experience are just hard Breaking because for all kinds of reasons. Remember one of the first times where I, someone went through something difficult like this on retreat with their body and their motions and opening to it was they, as a boy, I don't know how old he was. He was present in a car accident where his father died. You know, when he was a boy, right? So he didn't have the ability really to handle it or be with it. And so that became compartmentalised. And so, but that path of healing path of being caught a hole, we can't compartmentalize ourselves anymore. And so this mindfulness of body because so much is stored in the body, to become whole have to go through this. So even though there can be a lot of pleasure in the meditation path, sometimes it involves having to go through a period of being present for what's often been ignored. And in wedding giving that space, and this is where mindfulness of body is very helpful as well. Because the body sometimes can be a much better support for feeling and being present for difficult emotions, then our minds, our minds might freak out.

Our minds might have all kinds of judgments, all kinds of fears, all kinds of, you know, in relationship to what's happening, but the body is the body in and of itself generally is much less judgmental than the mind. The body is much more, much less, will not make up huge imaginary scenarios of what it means, or the body is not going to make up a story about about what this means about you who you are. The body is just there. So much so that I think the body is just their competitors. It's your compassionate friend. It's just there. It'll be present for it, it'll stay. And if you can stay present for your body, the body like the body Hold it, that the body kind of just feel it, you're less likely to spin off into the thoughts. And also there's, it's almost like there's more space to let things unravel, unfold. There's often very little space in the mind. Remember, the brain is smaller than the rest of the body. So there's very little space in there. No, those nerves, you know, for little brain are so tight, everything has to do a lot of stuff in that little brain. And so there's not much space. And, but the body has lots of space, infinite for holding all this. So there's something remarkable can happen. Just trust your body, come home to your body, trust it, open to it. It can be hard. It can be like a rodeo sometimes, but stay and feel it and be present. It's a remarkable path to go through.

I talked about some of the benefits of the mindfulness of the body are that you become more ethical, that you're less likely tempted by some of the strong forces of the mind to for hate, for greed, for desire, for a conceit, for arrogance for all kinds of things. And he had some analogies he used, he said, if your awareness of your body is poor, it's kind of like a big kind of wet ball of clay. So soft ball of clay, and you

take a big stone, you throw it at it, it'll continue, it'll somehow just make an imprint to just kind of, you know, break up that you know, but have a strong sense of the body, then the stone will take an impact at all. Or another example was that that was strong sense. A bit If you have a strong sense of your body, then a lot of the fears the strong breeds the desires that and also the impact the world has of you what goes on around you and your world what other people say and do. He said it will be like a ball of thread that's thrown against a really heavy, solid wooden door. So you know, you're not it's not gonna, it's not gonna hurt the door. So if you have a lot of very strong sense of being present in your body, that all kinds of things are gonna be thrown at you. And it's not going to impact you as much because you kind of can't bounce right off. That's what his analogy I don't know if my analogies maybe you know, I should probably not as good as the Buddha I'm sure. But but the, the, I think everyone's different people have different metaphors, different images at work and the image for me that work And is that as I'm more and more present my body, rather than feeling solid like a solid door, I actually feel more porous. And as in this wonderful combination of being a feeling very sensuous or sense sensation is feeling a lot what goes on my body. But at the same time feeling that's completely porous, it's almost like it's empty. So if someone throws a ball of thread at me, it just goes right through. I like that image that works better for me at this big solid door. But you can choose yours if you like. So how do you practice mindfulness of the body? I think it's helpful not to think of it as being a difficult task. It mostly mostly a simple thing, of noticing what your body is feeling. What are the sensations in your body when what's happening in your chest? In your torso, what's happening in your face? What's happening? And what are you doing with your hands? What's happening in your hands? What's happening in your body? Just asking that question and checking in what's going on with the body. It can be so simple I did it for I used to do a lot. In the old days when we had, you know, real phones, when the phone would ring, I would let it ring for a while. And while you know, while means, you know, four or five rings, nowadays, you know, people don't have patience. But for a while and during that time, I would check in with my body check in with myself. And I would get information about how I was they would support me in the conversation on the phone, because I was more aware of myself. So it's not like difficult, it can be a complicated thing. It just means but it's complex. What's difficult is doing it What it is is not difficult to do just checking in, where do you feel here? What do you feel here. And then if you can, once you start feeling what goes on your body, take the time to relax. recognize what's happening, feel what's happening, and relax those three steps. recognize what's happening your body, then that's more mental, then feel it. That's physical. And don't feel it as if you're feeling it from the head. See if you can feel it from the body. So I did a little expression that I like.

It is how is your body experiencing What's happening? sooner rather than later? If you say how I say how are you experiencing it, then you may be too easy to easily give priority to your minds, ideas, your thoughts. But if I ask how is your body experiencing it, then you know my body? That's the difference? into my mind, and then you maybe kind of tune into what's there. So, these are the three steps that I like to think about for coming home to the body, practicing with the body is recognize what's happening, feel what's happening, and then relax. It's a great thing to do.

And finally, I'd like to say that two things quoting quotes from the Buddha, he said, to simply learn a lot about the Dharma and speak, it doesn't count for much. But even if you don't learn much about the Dharma, but you see the Dharma in your body, that's what counts. So the body is the locus, that location for understanding the Dharma. The other quote, there's not from the action from the Buddha. But after the Buddha died, someone went to his right hand disciple, a monk named Ananda has spent many, many years with him as his attendant, heard all his teachings. And this person asked Ananda, Well now that the master is dead, Buddha's dead, who's going to be our teacher now? that's reasonable, right? And nunda said, Now that the Buddha is dead, your teacher our teacher is mindfulness of the body is not quite as powerful statement. And mindfulness of the body is equivalent to

the Buddha, your body. That's the goodness Do you want to find that meet the Buddha. Go inside, it's right here. So those are my thoughts. I hope Little bit of that didn't just bounce off you're outdoors and little bit of it and maybe has encouraged you to spend some time maybe this may be it can be a theme that you use as you go through this week. Is your body just think Body Body Body? What's going on in the body come back to your body? What happens? What do you learn about yourself? If for a week, you just whenever you can, you know, put a note on your mirror body, put a note on your steering wheel body. You know, wherever you can just remind, just come back. What do you learn about yourself? What are you discover? And for me, mindfulness of the body has opened up riches tremendously. I've just it's one of the best things that happened to me in practices, because they're discovering being being more and more present in my body. So we have a couple of minutes any comments, questions? clarifications.

I'm a massage therapist and I spent today massaging retired Catholic priests. And I've been doing this for five years. And at first I thought, Oh my gosh, these gentlemen have never been touched. How am I going to do this? And one by one, once they try it, you know, there's all this hesitation and then once they have the experience, and they let themselves feel the pleasure, then they come back. I haven't lost.

Nice, straight back behind you.

I think I know what mindfulness of the body means. But I have a chronic condition like neuropathy, and I'm mindful of it and have it progressing. And I'm mindful of you know, the pinpricks in my feet. I'm mindful of it shift, you know, now in my left leg I'm mindful of, of a certain terror in my heart. Not really my thoughts but just a collapsing of

hope around it.

And, and it's, you know, it's, it's a very mindful activity to be noticing. And I don't find that a place of pleasure or healing at all.

Getting Yes, I can understand that. But can it be it? Can you? Does it protect you? What does to be aware of the terror in your heart? Is it is it better for you in the big long term to know that or to let it operate, unknown and attended to?

I'm thinking of fat

because on one hand,

there is a certain Buddhist thing where you say and this too will pass, or just like you say, it's going to be okay. It's okay. Now, you know, and all the conditions are here for your happiness. And they're met already. You know, and yet I have that, you know, ache and fear of this is getting worse.

Yeah, yeah, I can understand that making it makes sense. And you want to be a little bit careful not to use Some of the Buddhist little slogans and teachings as a way to kind of cover it over or kind of step aside from it. There's something very profound about not having some idea of, it's gonna be okay it'll pass, but really trust and open up to what's really going on for you the fear and the terror and learn how to go through it. Rather than kind of cover it over or kind of make it nice or something. What you're going through is very difficult. And sometimes it's a very important to get a break from the body, get a break from all that and not always be in it, for sure. It's why sometimes tubes wise actually, occasionally

the check out from the body. The Buddha did that. He says he did that when he was very old. He said when he was he was 80 years old. He said he was in a lot of pain. He said his body was barely held together. And the only time he got relief from his physical challenges was in deep meditation. You know, really deep meditation. So sometimes it's important to have that And sometimes it's really important when you go through some of life's biggest challenges, to, to really be able to track what's going on. So that your fear, your anger, your despair doesn't get the upper hand. And you'll learn to kind of open to open to those, and then relax and find a way through them to the other side. And, yes, your body should you know, everything you're feeling in your body is impermanent, it's gonna change. That doesn't mean it changes for the better. I mean, it's, you know, it just is, but what, what can really change what really makes a difference? is there's a way of finding peace, even with physical pain and difficulty. And so how, what's the path of peace with it? And what role does mindfulness the body have for you in it, and how does it work way to support you in what way? Doesn't it support you? The first thing that I thought of when you spoke when you talked about the neuropathy, I guess a little Legs is I've known people who've had physical, tremendous physical difficulties. And they found that by having been very mindful, attentive in the present moment for it, that they learned to make a subtle adjustments, so they can better keep their balance better kind of find their way make the step that keeps supported them. And they really depended on that mindfulness to kind of kind of live their, you know, more balanced life. And I know for me that I've had some strong physical challenges at times a lot of pain. And I had to think I had to be very present my body for those experiences, because I found that if I didn't, that where my mind took me made it worse. And so this kind of helped me. So I'm sorry that you have to go through this. And if there's some way that this practice And what we do here, and we can be supportive of you please come and ask. And, you know, you don't have to necessarily do it alone if you're interested in seeing how the mindfulness can help you. Thank you. So, thank you all. And I hope that your body becomes your friend. And if your body has been your stranger, please be friend. It's. It's been waiting for you for a long time then. Thank you