

Four Foundations of Mindfulness - Week 2: Mindfulness of Body

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The particular set of instructions from a particular discourse of the Buddha, which is considered to be the foundational discourse for our particular meditation tradition. And it's a way of establishing or developing awareness to the point where it helps us become free, become a certain kind of spiritual liberation of the heart. And the text is made up of thirteen exercises, all towards this idea, developing awareness, attention, mindfulness, and that these thirteen exercises can be understood as a progressive path of going more deeply, using a metaphor more deeply, into ourselves, into a world of awareness, into what really kind of makes us operate. One of the underlying operating systems, or the depth of the heart where things are really a kind of really important about what happens there, and what we do, and how we respond, and how we live our lives. And it starts, as the text of first exercise, which I talked about last week, it's a simple meditation practice on mindfulness of breathing. And it's relatively simple, and that's our simplicity is one of the hallmarks of this practice.

In fact, there was one of our early teachers in our particular tradition, an Indian man named Minindrajī, and he was famous for saying that if it's not simple, it's not vipassanā. And so even though it's thirteen different exercises, and it's possible to explain practice in Buddhism in increasingly complex ways, the actual practice is meant to be very simple, just to be aware. To be aware of what's happening as it's happening doesn't require analysis. It doesn't require detailed teachings to hold it up. Everything that you need to learn can be learned by just paying careful attention to what's happening here and now. Simple Attention.

And so it begins with a simple meditation practice that you would sit down and establish yourself here in the present moment, which is probably one of the more challenging things to do, to establish yourself here in the present moment. The idea is simple, but to somehow

be able to put aside the distracted mind, a mind that's caught up in preoccupations, and really be rooted here, be rooted in the present moment. Have your whole being, your body, your mind, centered here, established here, so that your mind is not wandering off or preoccupied. But you feel like there's a stability here. So it says you begin by establishing yourself here, and then to help you in that process, then there's instructions becoming aware of your breathing.

It's a remarkable thing to be aware of a breath. The more you can be aware of each breath, one breath after the other, the less your mind is going to be invested in your thoughts, in your preoccupations, in your feelings, and what's going on in the world. And to stop that very expensive investment, which has usually poor returns, it's part of the task of breath meditation. Can it come back? Just be here. Just be in the present moment.

Come back to this very simple thing. And one of the most important forms of wealth that all of us have is the ability, our ability to direct our attention someplace, to pay, to give attention to something, and you'll get much better returns on your investment. If you invest your attention into your breathing, then you invested into fantasy, and arguments, and repeating conversations, and planning for the future, and justifying, Whose right? You're right, all these things. So just very simple. Come back to the present, to the breathing.

And one of the reasons why there's such a good return in the investment of the effort and time to do so is that it's a wonderful way to get out of your own way. And if you have too many cooks in the kitchen, it messes up the dinner, they say. If there's too many cooks in your mind, it messes up the mind. If you have too much going on, too many preoccupations, too much worry, too much resentment, too much fear, too much anxiety. All these things that go on whirl around. And then if we constantly want things and not wanting things, wanting things to be different than they are, wanting to keep what's here as when they start slipping away, constantly involved in kind of manipulating working system, trying to make it, you know, work for us, then we're not. We haven't left things alone. We're not leaving ourselves alone. And it's a hard lesson to learn that the inner system, our mind, our hearts, our bodies have a capacity to reach, come to harmony, to come equilibrium, to come to balance, to come to healing, to come to release and freedom. A remarkable degree, if we get out of our own way, if we're not constantly involved in making and doing and trying to make things happen.

And so one of the ways to leave ourselves alone and not kind of mucking up the water is to just come back to the breathing. And every time the mind wants to do something, you come back to the breathing, come back to the breathing and get familiar with the breathing, develop your awareness with the breath. And then, as that meditation practice goes along,

then the idea, as I said last week, is to start becoming aware of your lived experience of your body. You keep breathing, but start to become aware of what's happening in your body. A kind of wake up, a certain kind of awareness in your body. What's happening in your chest? What's happening in your belly and your stomach? What's happening in your face and in your head and your arms and legs? And what are the sensations? What are the tensions? What are the joys? What are the pleasures that come in the body as you sit here?

Maybe tuning into some of the pleasure that's here. And then the instructions are that you sit centering yourself in the present, be with your breathing, feel yourself, what's happening in your body, and then relax the body. Relax the holding. The tension might be there. And a very important part of meditation is the ability to begin relaxing, letting go, to become calmer. So that's the basic, simple meditation practice that's offered in the text.

And in a way, it could be seen as the only instruction, which is specifically for meditation. All the rest of the instructions may or may not pertain to meditation, but can equally pertain to daily life and how we live our lives. And in fact, the second set of instructions in the text is about what we do in our daily life much, much more, I think. And I'll read it for you, for in a moment, what the instruction is. And you'll see that how simple this mindfulness practice can be, and how simple the instructions are. It's almost so simple that, you know, maybe we won't feel it's important at all. Why bother doing this? This is so obvious and so nothing and the A. But sometimes the simplest exercises of practice, the simplest ways of showing up, waking up, being here, are the ones that are most effective for helping us not be distracted, not caught up in the world around us.

Some of us may pride ourselves on being very sophisticated beings, and so we have a lot of important things to think about and figure out and to do something so rudimentary. What I am going to read to you just might not, you know, be up to your Stanford PhD or something. And so here, so this is the That's a come. Maybe you think of this coming out of meditation also. So how do you bring, continue, the attentiveness, the centeredness, the calm of meditation into your daily life?

So here, when walking, one understands, I am walking. When standing, one understands, I am standing. When sitting, one understands, I am sitting. When lying down, one understands, I am lying down. And one understands accordingly. However one's body is disposed, whatever way one's body is positioned, one understands. And pretty basic stuff. You know, just you're sitting. I think all of you currently are sitting, and so if you just could reckon, I take a moment to recognize your sitting, you've succeeded in being mindful for a moment. Now, in some situations in life, paying attention to what's going on with your posture is really

helpful.

You know, then, we have this wonderful expression in English about posturing. They were posturing. He was posturing or something. You know, it means you kind of position yourselves socially in relation to other people. But it's using this word that's most commonly used in reference to physical posture, because often how we posture ourselves socially with how we hold ourselves up. We puff our chest up. We stand up straight. We take a power pose. We do something. And a lot gets expressed in our postures.

And the more you can be aware of the times details of your posture, the more you get information about how you are emotionally, how you are, intentionally, what you want. I saw that on my first retreat in Thailand. Now, my first retreat, but one, it's one of my early retreats in Thailand, where the emphasis was a lot on being present for your body, being mindful of the body. And so I was, you know, practising somewhat, but then it would be. The bell would ring for lunch, and we didn't eat much in the monastery, so lunch was a major attraction. And the place for lunch was, you know, the other side of this very large monastery, through the woods. We had to go, and as kind of a monastery in the forest to go through, and I started because I was paying more attention to my body than I usually do. I noticed that as I walked to lunch, I was always in front of myself. If you know, it was like I was like one foot and two feet in front of me, my sense of gravity in my attention. So many as often noticing that I was leaning, you know?

I was kind of OK with myself, and because I was so focused on where I was going to get for this very important thing, the lunch. And then I would bring my attention back, straighten up a little bit, and kind of bring my kind of psychic energy or attention here in this body and I, and that felt better. But then, after some steps, I noticed I was again going for that lunch come back. So as an indication of how I was involved, I was relatively innocent maybe to be interested in lunch, but, you know, I kind of lost myself, and that my posture revealed that to me how I did. Or I've been angry at people and kind of lean forward a lot, and only because I noticed my posture that I finally noticed that I was angry. You think that, you know, I would have noticed the anger first, but the anger itself was so compelling. I was right and they were wrong, and we had to kind of duke it out. But when I noticed my posture. Then I noticed again that I was contracted and tight, and way I was very uncomfortable, and only then did I really understand that I was being angry. So there's a lot of, a lot can be revealed. Pay attention to your posture.

I've told this story a few times, but it hasn't happened now for some twenty years. But there was a time when there have been a series of different people. We'd be standing facing each

other. I was initially able to stand there and face them, and maybe I'm an intimidating person, but I very like to. I like to face people when I talk to them, usually, and the person would turn around ninety degrees to me a kind of look conduct to the side like this. Not that it was kind of I didn't think about it much at first, except I wanted to face them. So I turned around and went around and you not to be there, and then they would do it again. And literally, I walked a hundred, three, and sixty degrees all the way around them. And what was, I think, more remarkable than that was I don't think they had a clue. They were not aware. They were so unconscious about what they were doing with their body and their relating to me.

And because people have very different attitudes about, you know, different cultures, different ways of eye contact, of how to face people, body distance between people. And so maybe we had very different kind of parameters for that or ways of being, but things were expressed, you know? So to understand people, to understand yourself by their posture, I think, is a great thing. But in terms of the simplicity of it all, there's something very simple about knowing that when you're standing, you're standing. And you know, it seems like it's such a simple thing to know that you can kind of check that off quickly and go on to more important things. You know, I know I'm standing you now. What's this big deal? But I think as a serious exercise for developing a heightened sense of awareness, a heightened connection to here in the present, moment. It's not a matter of just shaking off the mindfulness check box. It's a matter of really knowing repeatedly and fully, Yes, here I am.

And it's so simple. I'm standing. I'm sitting. I'm walking. This is where I am now. And it's a way of grounding oneself. It's a way of interrupting the usual flow maybe of distracted thinking and waking up being here. And I've found that a tremendous benefit from having the ability not to be lost in my thoughts, not to be caught up, not have my thinking kind of run the show. And something as simple as just knowing where you're standing and knowing that you're sitting is effective because it's so simple. I've met people who say that mindfulness is too difficult for them. I'm standing. Is that difficult? To realize you're standing. I'm sitting. It's not really difficult. It's meant to be simple. And this kind of this little exercise here represents how simple it can be. Here I'm standing. I'm walking. I'm sitting. It also speaks to the idea that we can bring the practice into our daily life. It's not just about sitting in meditation, but wherever we are, we can just tune in. Nowhere here ground ourselves in the present moment in this simple act of standing, sitting, walking.

Then the third exercise continues in this theme about being mindful in our daily life. And this is a little bit more involved, because our life activity is a little more complicated at times. And but here the verb is to clearly comprehend, to clearly recognize or clearly know what's

happening. Not just to kind of know something general like standing, but to recognize the activity we're doing, to really kind of be present in a fuller way to what's happening. And this is the description. So a person who practises is a person who acts in full awareness. When walking forward and coming back, walking forwards and backwards, one acts in full awareness. When looking ahead and looking away, one acts in full awareness. When flexing and extending one's limbs, one acts in full awareness. When one wears, one puts on one's clothes, wears one's clothes, and carry hearts for monks and nuns, and one carries one's robe and bowl.

One acts in full awareness when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting. One acts in full awareness when defecating and urinating. One acts in full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent. Probably if the Buddha was alive today, he'd say you add a few things like full awareness when you're driving, or full awareness when you're using your phone, you know, to the common activities we do. And here it's engaging in the world, and very simple activities that we all do. And to do it not just with a general awareness that I'm doing these things, but then it's a little heightened where there's a clear recognition, a clear understanding, clear comprehension that this would really I'm doing this now. And one of the ways this was trained in us when I was in Burma was that we would do things in the monastery on that context slowly. And so when you were going to open a door, you would actually be so attentive that you would know that you were lifting your hand up and touching the door, you would clearly know that. And it wasn't a subconscious act. It wasn't a kind of, you know, automatic pilot act. I reach out and hold the door, and then open the door. It was, you know, because you have important things to do, the door's just an obstacle, right? So just get out of the way as quickly as you can and move on to important things. But the opening of the door became the full meditation practice those few instances, and you would just really feel and be present for that, for that opening the door.

And as if there's no hurry, you're not trying to finish it. You're not trying to get through the door at that moment. You're only opening the door and you're fully present for that experience, knowing what that is. Again, this is a way of interrupting the thought streams of mind which are often keeping us distracted from ourselves. We're not really present and my mind is rushing off. You might have important things to think about than do, and might seem like it's the hindrance to stop and really be present for the door, but the ability to develop a heightened sense of really being alive and present, an alive kind of awareness and presence that can take in so much more of the information, can take in so much more of the living situation we're in. I think everyone benefits then if we're kind of living on automatic pilot, and most of

things we do, and we're, you know, thinking about something abstract or something distant or what we want or something. So again, mindfulness is not meant to be so difficult. It's what can be practiced and cultivated in the ordinary, daily, detailed activities of everyday life.

And it's very interesting to look at. One of the fascinating things to pay attention to is on all the thoughts and ideas that you have that these simple exercises are not enough, or there are more important things to do, or it can't be that simple. There has to be more going on or something. And part of the value of being mindful for very simple things is it can sometimes highlight to us all the centrifugal forces that take us away from that. So it might be, it might be that we notice how much we're distracted, how much we're thinking about, you know, particular themes, and so the reference point to catch ourselves. Because if we don't have a reference point to notice what's going on, it's. I think it's very easy for people to spend hours involved in thought without really understanding what's going on. When we people do this on retreat where people are practising mindfulness throughout the day, for some people it's only then that they see how repetitive certain thoughts and emotions are, because in daily life somehow we're not tracking it that well. And it's not uncommon for people to come to talk to a teacher and say, I had no idea how pervasive my fear is. There's always fear there in the background, always these kind of ideas. I had no idea. Now I see it's always there. But because of the kind of heightened attention to what's going on, we see this much more clearly.

So the simple act of knowing what we're doing, when we're doing it in the simple activities of daily life, builds some kind of momentum, builds a kind of habit of being present, and hopefully an appreciation of being present in order to do that, in order to really get the benefit or really feel appreciation. So you want to do. It is not just a duty in exercise by itself. One of the little tricks of the trade, one of the things that's very useful, is to spend some time when you are in the present moment doing the simple things to notice the pleasure of it, notice the enjoyment of it. And so it might be sounds silly maybe, but you're opening the door, and you feel the pleasure of the smoothness, the coolness or whatever of the handle of the door. Or you open the door, and you feel, you know, the pleasantness of looking through a door and seeing the colours of the room you're walking into. Or more valuable is that there's a lot of pleasure in our bodies that we often don't pay attention to. Sometimes we prioritize what's uncomfortable in our lives. Sometimes we use simply not giving much attention to our body at all. But if you can use this present moment awareness when you're standing, nobody knows you're standing. And as you're standing, is there anything that's pleasant in this standing. Even if there's some pain and aching involved. Is there something pleasant and en-

joyable about just being there? It is when you're eating. Is there something enjoyable about the food, drinking, something enjoyable about it? Because if you can start including the enjoyment over the pleasure of it, it isn't just that's hedonistic, but it makes it more interesting for the mind to be in the present moment. But more important, there's a certain kind of pleasure that is not, is not exactly sensual pleasure that comes from the senses being stimulated. But there's a certain kind of deeper and more satisfying pleasure that is the pleasure of our vitality, or just a kind of life, or the nerves firing, or just a kind of vitality of being present here. That might be very subtle initially, but that the joy or the delight of a being, of just kind of just letting them, the energies of the body kind of course through them, and be here in a kind of the aliveness to be here and move through us, and then kind of tune into that and let it grow and develop. Is it a wonderful antidote to the way we prioritize our thoughts, our judgments, our worries, our self pity, our fears, and all these other things where the mind tends to go? And is there pleasure in the simple actions that we do?

So the mindfulness in the simple activities of daily life, and to do it often whenever you have the opportunity. Maybe you would benefit from doing it more often, you know. It could be that you're standing in line, maybe in the market, waiting for the checkout counter to be free, or maybe in a situation where you have to wait. You could wait. That's fine. But waiting is a lost opportunity. Goes waiting. What is waiting? You know, waiting is a pretty abstract idea. It means your mind is expecting something in the future, and it's not happening now, and you're evaluating that. You have to be patient, or you have to wait, and all you're doing is waiting. I mean, what is like that? Notes Nothing. I think waiting is basically a waste of time, you know? I think I hope you have much better things to do than to wait. I mean, you could just sit. You can, er, you know, close your eyes and meditate, and when the thing finally starts, it's done. They'll tell you, you know. Or, you know, you can. Then you can do it. But don't just sit there and wait, meditate.

Or if you're standing in the grocery check out line, don't wait to get to the front. You don't crowd the person in front of you. Just stand there and you standing meditation. Look, I know I'm standing. This is ridiculous. I'm a sophisticated person. Just know I'm standing. But to really know you're standing, really be in the standing, see if the pleasure of standing, see the vitality, really gets really dropped into just fully there. And then, you know, if the people around you say, Hey, it's your turn, no thank you, and then you go up, and you know, you needn't wait. Waiting is, you know, if you spend two you can kind of conventionally wait, just say, I'm waiting, and then meditate or do something. But if you're caught up in waiting, you're, you know, playing with your fingers, tapping your fingers, and looking at your watch,

and you know you're just wasting your time. No waiting.

So there could be, in the simple moments of the day, throughout the day, there'll probably be lots of opportunities to drop in and be present for yourself in a simple, very ordinary way. And I hope that over time you'll come to really appreciate the power of that, the value of that, how it really supports a much more greater sense of well being, greater wisdom, greater self understanding, greater ease. As we go through our lives. And it starts with these simple things: walking, standing, sitting, lying down, your posture, moving your arm forward, bending it, drinking, eating, defecating, urinating. This pleasure is there, too. So those arts. Now we have covered the first three exercises, and one of the purposes of all these exercises is to establish *sati*. *Sati* is the word for awareness, to develop it and heighten it, so that your awareness becomes a living presence in your life. That awareness becomes something that is really a receives or holds or opens to what is going on for us, our lives. Awareness is one of the great things, and these simple exercises a way to heighten that awareness and develop it.

So it's probably enough for me for this evening. So do you have any questions or comments you'd like to make? Any of this or testimonials? But how the simple act of mindfulness can be helpful? I turned to on the wrong one and out works. That's a real simple question. It's easy to talk about this when you feel like it's really easy to talk about. That's why my job is easy. It's doing it, which is, you know, when you have the flu, yeah, in a lot of pain. Yeah, you're in a lot of pain. Yeah, you worry about what are you going to make it a part of your kids? Yeah, then how do you do or make it? Well, it helps a lot if you're fully, if you learn. If you've learned, if you trained yourself to know yourself well, you're familiar with the process and develop skill and how to be present for what's happening. Then you can do in to be present for the worry in such a way the worry doesn't have the upper hand. It that's a lot harder. It's right on said again. It's easy to say that. It's a lot harder, yes, but it takes a while. That's why we have to get doing this over and over again: the mindfulness in the practice.

If you wait to practice until you have a crisis, you're not going to have much support for yourself. It's Practising in Peace is a one practising under a lot of tension. If you wait to be mindful in when there's a big crisis, then you might not have the strength of mind to be present. You might understand how you react to challenges. You might understand how not to buy into the reactions, how to be swept away by them. And so practising in times when a pre crisis and developing a self understanding that will support you through it is really important. Is that address your concern, or at not quite to the point?

My question is, let's assume you do all that practice. Yes, and winning around here, you are

in pretty good touch. Does that mean it's directly useful, and other kinds of practice won't help you feel better when you're in a crisis? Sounds like there's a crisis management that's different, and just daily management. I think it's just a variation of the same. I think that it might be more intense, but the it's the same mind. It's the same kind of reactions we have. It's just more stronger. And so the attachment, the drive, the concerns are much more powerful. The emotions can be more powerful. And I think it's all the human condition is not that much different, though. Sometimes what I've seen is that some people, when there's a crisis, maybe because a dwindling goes, or because it's so much more important that their mindfulness gets, my attention becomes much more acute, and it supports them much more. They can never have imagined how much they learned how much they were present, how much they were able to step beyond themselves, because they have developed a little bit a sense of what it takes, and then it all gets channeled in a very powerful way, and they can stay very present in the middle of it.

We had I'm teaching a retreat right now, and we had a person at the retreat in the middle of one of the sittings fainted and fell over and looked like maybe was having a seizure. And so they were. Luckily, we had some doctors and nurses there, and we attended to him, and he went to the hospital to get checked out, and he's fine. But later we talked about other retreatants, and some of them talked about what a remarkable experience it was for them to stay calm and equanimous in the middle of this crisis because they knew they couldn't do anything about it. It wasn't their job. There were forty people there, right? And they people taking care of them. So we had a room, and so people that hadn't had the experience of staying calm and settled in their life. And in the middle of a crisis, usually they were running around and trying to take care of it. And that was, you know, a real learning experience, because if everyone had run around, I would have had a real crisis. And so I think, I know, I would say that this practice that we're doing here was designed to redress some of the biggest challenges of our life. This is not meant just to be a stress reduction. This is meant to deal with issues like sickness, old age, and death real, real, important issues. But you can't expect it to do too much for you if you haven't trained and developed the capacity and just wait for the crisis is not in our work.

One more here. So one of the things you mentioned was the energy being more free when you're more aware of the breath. I'm or many are more aware that the mind is not taking a set of energy. So I was just wanting to understand a little bit more from you on what you feel the relationship is between the mind, the body, the awareness, and the breath. Like all these, like how do they kind of form? In fact, each mind, awareness, body, and breath. We

don't have to separate them from each other. They all sit there, all as a whole. They work together. And so when they're harmonized, when they work together, or say differently that the, when with the mind, creates a very sharp separation or holds on to some things more than other things, then it creates then there is not a flow between them. They're working harmoniously together.

And so if we're preoccupied with our thoughts, then we're kind of locked sometimes locked in our thoughts, and there's less attention, a less connection to our body and our breath. If we're locked into parts of our body, say we're having some kind of pain, and we're really worried about and preoccupied it, we can lock in. And then in that lockedness, in that kind of contracted contraction around it, there is not a lot of movement or in or flow of energy or blood or nerve. I don't know what goes on in there, whether it all kind of works together, but I think that a psychophysical being as a whole, and as we begin to relax and not create boundaries, or have an awareness which is open to it all, then it all can flow. See, awareness is a The cultivation of awareness is a phenomenal thing, because it's kind of like making space, or tying together, bringing together, unifying all the different parts of our being, so they're operating together in harmony. In fact, one of the words for one of those kind of understandings of concentration, concentrated awareness is it's a unified awareness, and this idea of being unified. So our thoughts, our emotions, our body sensations, our intentions, our feelings. You know, all these things that we have are working together rather than cross purposes to each other or fragmented from each other. Is one of things that can happen when we have the awareness that holds it all. I have space for it.

I don't know what a good analogy would be in ordinary life, but a uttha comes to mind at the moment, I know, is a good example. But back when my son was in preschool, it was remarkable to watch these great, wonderful teachers. They were like my heroes, the great profession preschool people under appreciated, I think, how important they are. And I'd sometimes I'd be there in the classroom and would be all chaos you know, the kids are running around doing all kinds of stuff. And then something different had to happen. So sometimes I'd watch the teachers stand right in the middle of the room, upright, and then all just talk very, very softly, so no one could really hear. And then you'd watch the kids notice and get curious, and all the kids would start settling down, and eventually sat down and face and look towards the teacher. They all got unified. There's something about the teacher holding the presence, being centered, and that the angel may be having a span of all everyone that brought everyone together into harmony and peace. So the same thing with our whole being. And so the mindfulness is a little bit like that. Mindfulness is the quiet whisper that says, Here, let's pay

attention to what's here. And then all the things that then show themselves to us, they our whole, all the different aspects of life, have a chance to show themselves and wake up and be present, and then they have a chance to come to harmony. It's when you're standing know you're standing, and then all this other stuff can happen.

Okay, so I can plan is to continue this series next week. And actually next week there's more about the body, and going deeper into the body and our experience. So I hope that this is something you find useful. Thank you.