

# Mindfulness of the Body (2 of 5) Calmness Surfaces Goodness

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

*samatha*, *vipassana*, *śamatha*, *vipaśyanā*, relax, tension, holding, tranquility, attuned, vipassana, clarity, to see clearly, peace, greedy, friendliness, ethical, Buddha, peace, food, protects, react, contract, grounded, signals, self-harm, generosity, love, kindness, care, forgiveness, receptive, cool

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The topic this week is mindfulness of the body. As an introduction to this, there is a teaching that there are two wings or two sides of Buddhist meditation practice. They're called "*samatha*" and "*vipassana*" (*śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* in Sanskrit). Here *samatha* means tranquility, being peaceful and calm. Vipassana can mean "clarity," or "to see." The word "*vipassana*" comes from the word for "to see; "v" is emphatic: it means "to see well, to see clearly." The combination of tranquility and clarity is the real balancing, magic ingredient in this practice.

One of the purposes of being mindful of and paying attention to your body is to notice the tensions and holding patterns in the body and to spend some time letting them relax. The direction we're going is toward relaxation with clarity, a kind of relaxed alertness, but not relaxing to the point of going to sleep. The art of mindfulness of the body is allowing a calming, peaceful movement in the body and having clarity at the same time.

Some people might feel that meditation is not supposed to be just about relaxing the body. But the body and the mind are not that separate from each other. The tensions of the body are there because of the activities of the mind. As we relax the body, the mind has a chance to relax, and as we relax the mind, the body has a chance to relax. These two work closely together. If we really want to drop deeply into ourselves, then we need to calm ourselves and become more tranquil.

Wherever we can feel, sense, or smell the tranquility, that's the door to greater tranquility. The Buddha describes tranquility as "the food for tranquility." In other words, tranquility is the very thing that promotes more tranquility. Peace promotes more peace within us.

So we don't only relax and become calm. We also need to really appreciate the value of tranquility and rest in the afterglow of relaxation and peace. We allow ourselves to receive it and feel it, so tranquility can be a kind of conditioning force. Even if we only feel a tiny little bit of peacefulness or tranquility, feel that fully, and receive it. Let it be a guide to how to grow that peace in a gentle, calm way. Don't be in a hurry. Don't be greedy. Don't push for it.

As the body becomes more tranquil and as we develop more clarity and more mindfulness of the body and see what's happening, the body brings us a lot of benefits. One of them is that the body protects us. The primary thing it protects us against is ourselves. When we're really sensitive and attuned to how we react, contract, and pull back, and how we build up tension in the body, if we really pay attention to that, we get the early warning signs of the danger of going into some of the mind states and motivations that require us to be tense.

These could be getting angry or greedy, or spinning out in fear in ways that aren't really useful for us. If we stay grounded in the body and read the signals about how we're reacting, then we maybe don't have to react that way – we can relax.

Also, the more familiar and at peace we can be with our body, the more stability there can be in the body. Then we're less likely to be pushed over by our reactions to what people do, and we can stay grounded. And that's a protection.

The Buddha talked about how the body protects us from being unethical. I think he didn't exactly say this, but I think that he implied it. When the body is not calm and at ease, and we're not clear and mindful of what's going on in the body, we don't notice when we get more tense, and being unethical involves tension. Something gets contracted and tight when we want to hurt someone. So if we take refuge in a relaxed, peaceful body and mind, when we start feeling tension, that is the early warning sign that something is off.

But more importantly, we start feeling the kind of self-harm in unethical behavior – the tension, the way we close up. It's kind of grating and painful to be angry, greedy, or hostile. The more sensitive the system becomes, the more clearly we experience that we're harming ourselves as well.

On the other end, the more we're connected to the body in a sensitive, calm way, the more we also become attuned to the good qualities within. These things need more room to show themselves. Generosity, love, kindness, friendliness, care, and forgiveness need a receptive feeling – an open, receptive, calm, non-conceited, non-aggressive stance. Then there is more chance for us to recognize and be attuned to all these beautiful interpersonal qualities.

Sometimes it can be scary to have them. But when we feel the fear, we start feeling tense. If we learn to really trust the tranquil, relaxed body, we find that this is a fantastic support for living what we would call in English “an ethical life” – a life that is for the welfare of others and ourselves, where we naturally want to avoid causing harm because that's the nature of this clear, relaxed, open state.

So the movement of relaxing, calming, and settling the body and mind has ethical consequences. It makes us better, more careful and conscientious people. It's a beautiful thing to do.

One of the aspects of practicing mindfulness of the body is not simply to be aware of the body, but to take the time to calm and settle the body – bring some peace, let go, and relax the body. This instruction goes all the way back to the Buddha. The Buddha talked about settling into the body, feeling the whole body, and then relaxing and calming the bodily activities – the tensions, the active ways in which the body is tense and tight. I like the expression “cool the body.” If it is overheated, let it become cooler, calmer, more peaceful, more settled, and more at ease.

It's a beautiful, profound thing to really center one's practice in this body. And perhaps there is no real deepening into the path of harmlessness and liberation without being well-attuned and connected to the body – a body that has learned slowly how to relax deeply, how to be peaceful, and how to be at ease.

May you enjoy your body. If you want to do a little bit of reflection during the next day, you might reflect on what I said: that things like anger, hostility, greed, craving, being perplexed, confused, and deluded all involve some kind of tension, tightening up, or contraction. Emotions like love, generosity, kindness, and friendliness don't involve tension. They arise from a place where there is no tension. So why don't you reflect on this topic? See how it might be true for you, and look at the implications. Maybe talk to some friends about this distinction. What does it imply that some things arise with tension, and some things arise without it? What do you learn from that? That might be an interesting topic to reflect on.

Be well and take good care of yourselves. May these reflections help you help the best part of you to come forth for the world. Thank you.