

Guided Meditation: Embodying

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January 17, 2026

Keywords: Dharma, mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of breathing, embodiment, awareness, attunement, torso, IMC, sensations, thinking mind

One of the major shifts that we're looking to make when we do mindfulness practice is this shift from our thinking, our world of ideas and opinions and stories, judgments, commentary of things, to something that's more intimate and personal and deeper within us.

And that is our embodiment.

And I use the word carefully rather than saying body.

Sometimes people treat their body as just a hunk of flesh or inert.

That's not very interesting.

What's interesting is from the mind up.

But embodiment means this wonderful interaction, this wonderful meeting place between our awareness, our inner life, our mind, and our physical body.

And the only way we can experience our body is through the nerve endings we have in our body.

And those nerve endings are spread out throughout the body.

And I like to think of wherever the nerves are, that's where the mind is.

And so embodiment is to enter, not just the body, inhabit the body, but it's also a very profound way of inhabiting the mind.

These two are not so separate.

And there's a lot of benefit from being embodied, have the mindfulness awareness be centered on the body.

There's a lot of information.

The reason why we have the capacity to sense sensations, feel feelings, perceive perceptions, is that it's the way that we're gathering all the information we need to be successful surviving, to find our way in this life.

We were designed for this, to be attentive, to have all our senses awake and open.

And it made maybe more sense or was more obvious when we lived 100, 200,000 years ago in the plains of Africa without any of the technology that we have now.

And you couldn't just go to the store to pick up stuff on the way home or ask to have it delivered.

You had to kind of just, your whole life was dependent on being very attuned to the environment.

We have this amazing capacity for attunement that we lose in the modern world.

We spend so much time on a screen or so much time in our thoughts.

Right?

And the benefit of a deep attunement, deep embodiment, is it isn't just simply we experience more, but in that embodiment, there's so much intelligence.

There's so much information about life, about ourselves, that's not available if we stay in the stories.

But we often believe the stories are fascinating, rich, deep, sophisticated, and so on.

And that's where the drama is.

And there's no drama in the body usually.

But that doesn't mean that it isn't invaluable for what it opens up to.

And the whole gateway into the *Dharma*, into deeper experience of Buddhism, is through the doorway of the body.

And so to provisionally put aside your thoughts, put aside your beliefs.

So you can create a different context, a different orientation, eventually to bring the thoughts and ideas back in.

But from a very different perspective than the perspective of the stories themselves.

And some people find that mindfulness of the body works better for them than mindfulness of thinking.

Some people think, not thinking, mindfulness of breathing.

For some people, breathing is challenging.

There might be some trauma that makes it difficult or something.

And some people find that it's more useful to begin with the body than with breathing.

But I'll start with the breathing here, and then we'll move into including mindfulness of the body as part of that.

And in a way it's meant to be kind of a opening up.

So there's a kind of more general, more opening, open awareness, open attentiveness, open presence that gently is broader, wider.

But still, maybe with the breathing at the center.

So to maybe sit up a little bit more alertly.

So the body itself is in a posture of attention.

And for some people, that means the chest is a little bit more open.

For some people, it means the spine is a little bit more upright.

For some people, it means placing your hands in a way where the hands too feel like they're expressing, now I'm going to be here attentive and clear.

And then to gently familiarize yourself with, from the inside out, the alternating sensations of breathing.

Maybe wandering around to notice the different kinds of sensations.

The front rib cage, maybe the back rib cage.

Much more subtle there.

Maybe in the belly, maybe softening the belly, and softening it again, and feeling the sensations of movement in the belly if they're there, and sometimes very, very subtly.

As you breathe in, you might feel an increased weight or pressure on your sitting bones against your chair or your cushion.

There might be sensations connected to breathing in your lower back and the curve for your lower back.

Maybe very subtle movement, change.

And calmly letting your attention travel up your torso.

And maybe as you breathe in, you can feel there's kind of a lifting of the upper torso, chest, maybe even the shoulders as you breathe in, and then a lowering of it all as you exhale.

Sometimes it's nice to have a global awareness of all of that together, kind of gently, relaxedly open, kind of like the whole torso is like a jellyfish that expands and contracts, in slow movements.

And as you exhale and relax, relax the thinking mind too, like thought bubbles that float away.

Let go of your thoughts.

As you exhale, let go of your thoughts, and let go into the exhale.

Let go with the exhale.

Letting go into the center of your torso to feel the expanding movements of breathing in.

Maybe aware of the edges of breathing, the edges of the sensations, the outer sensations of breathing.

And maybe you can also be aware, quietly, subtly, the influence of the massage of breathing, the influence that the movements of breathing have beyond its edges into your body.

And as you breathe in, follow the expanding movements in your body as you breathe in and let your awareness, attention, expand out to a global awareness of your body.

And as you exhale, let that awareness settle back maybe to a single point at the end of the exhale.

And if there are uncomfortable sensations in your body, it's okay.

As you, in the inhale, you expand outward, global experience of your body.

Gently, lightly, let that discomfort be touched, be felt, just for a few moments to be acknowledged with as little reactivity or judgment as possible, as if it has permission to be there.

And then on the exhale, you can let go of it and follow the exhale back to the end of the exhale.

The thinking mind is sometimes preoccupied by certain sensations in the body, but maybe there's an alternative to being preoccupied.

One of them is to, as you breathe in and breathe out, let that experience of breathing move through the humming, vibrating, aliveness of the body, following the experience of breathing

in, following the expansion and growth of sensations, out into the wider humming of the body, vibrating of the body, briefly touching anything in the body that is strong, that is of concern.

And then on the exhale, relaxing and returning all the way to the end of the exhale.

If you find yourself thinking, gently recognize that that's the fact, and see if you cannot be troubled by that, while at the same time shifting your interest back into your body, your body breathing, letting go of your thoughts, and letting go into the body, the global body, in which the sensations of breathing come and go, expand and return.

If there is some way your thinking mind is activated, energized, or some way that your heart or emotional activities of your body are activated or energized, maybe tight, or as you inhale with the expanding inhalation, gently touch that, gently acknowledge it, see it, know it, not to fix it or change it, just to know how it is in the body.

And then as you exhale, invite a softening, a relaxing, invite what is activated to settle.

Okay.

As we come towards the end of the sitting, can you let whatever experience you're having right now, whatever it might be, to be present in a wider field of awareness, almost like a wider field of silence or spaciousness, allow things to be the way they are, appreciating the space between them, the stillness between them.

And then coming to the end of the sitting, gently take some fuller breaths so you can more fully experience your body from the inside out, feeling the contact of your body against the cushion in the chair.

Remembering you're sitting here at IMC and when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

Yes.