

Dharmette: Aware within the Whole Body-Mind

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So, can you hear me okay, everyone? So, it's possible I caused problems for you this morning by the little teaching I did, because I kind of set up a distinction between the mind and the body, and then the bridge between them. And so, you know, hopefully damage hasn't been too great, but hopefully it was beneficial, the way I presented it. But now, maybe now to heal that divide, any kind of divide between the mind and body, you have to be a little bit nuanced or careful about how to understand that.

It's a little bit louder. Can we turn it up a little bit, the volume? Yeah. Let's see. Is that going to be better now? Okay. Okay.

So, the distinction between mentality and physicality is a useful one at times in practice, and it can be overdone to have too strong a separation between the two. And one way to understand the human being is that there is no divide between the mind and body, that if anything, everything is mind, almost. Right? And what I mean by that is that every thing that you will ever experience, sense, and feel in your body is only being felt and experienced because there's a nerve ending there that picks up a sensation. If you put your big toe in cold water, you feel cold, and guess what? You have nerves there. They're picking up cold nerves, temperature nerves.

If you feel the wind blowing against your jacket and tickling your back, you have touch sensation, nerves there, and you pick it up. So everything. So if you feel your heart picking up, beating faster, you have nerves in your heart that experience that. So wherever there's, in a sense, wherever there's nerves, that's part of the brain. The brain just extends through the nervous system throughout the whole body. And it's one whole coordinated phenomenon.

And so, in Buddhism, in early Buddhism, the Buddha kind of uses two different ways of talking about the body. One way is, I call it the mind's body, the body that we can directly experience.

And then there's the cadaver body. You know, if you die, all that electricity that keeps the nervous system going is not there. And they actually use the language of like a log of wood when you're dead. The body is inert and not animate anymore.

And so sometimes they say in early Buddhism that really we're experiencing that cadaver body, the innate body, part of the body. Sometimes when there's a lot of very intense pain, they say that it's just part of the physical body that's speaking to you. And it belongs to that physical body, the physical world, and that's what you're experiencing. But a lot of what we experience when we experience our body is closely connected. It's part of the rich, rich world of the mind that extends out to every nerve ending.

And we were designed to take in a lot of sense data when we lived on the plains of Africa. Our mother home was Africa as human beings, and we were designed there. We evolved to be part of that natural world. And we developed, as human beings, very acute sensory apparatus that was to be able to really take in the environment there. We've learned, we're very sophisticated people, we can read, we know how to operate an iPhone or a cell phone, we know how to cruise the web.

We do things that even people now who are in their 90s have trouble with. I had a friend of mine calls her, I know someone who, a 92-year-old mother calls her daughter regularly or tells her mother, "My phone doesn't work anymore. It's broken," because she doesn't know how to navigate it. But 100,000 years ago, we knew how to read the natural world. We knew how to read and feel and sense and take in all this knowledge information, more information probably than you can even know of.

And the whole psychophysical system, you know, we went barefoot, we hardly had clothes on, we maybe lived outdoors 24-7. And so we were designed to absorb a lot of different information, not just information from the natural world outside, but also from the internal world. We had to be in touch. We had to know and be able to read all the different things that goes on in the inside as well in order to live in harmony with the inside, the outside, and to manage to survive in the ancient world. Okay.

When I was, about 30 years ago or so, I was on a tributary river, kind of, I guess. I don't know if that's the right language, but one of the offshoot rivers of the Amazon. And we went as far in as we were legally allowed to go, because in French Guiana, back away from the Atlantic, half of the country is kind of off-limits for the people who are not indigenous to that area. And so we went as far as we could go, and there we were hanging out, and a group of indigenous natives had just gone into town to get some supplies, and they had left their canoes right where we had stopped.

Yeah. And they were garden canoes and went back, canoed up the river. And what was really inspiring for me was they were just wearing like shorts or something, less than shorts, but something like that. And I'd never in my life seen human bodies that looked so healthy. They seemed the embodiment of physical health. They weren't buffed. They weren't, you know, but they were strong.

Every part of the body just oozed health in a way, wow, this is possible. I've never seen a human body this way. They had spent their life living in the natural world that way and using all their body and all their senses and everything in order to manage in the jungles where they lived. So we're designed this way. And many of us in our modern world have a very sharp, hard divide between the mind and the body. And so when Buddhism says mind and body, that reminds us of that divide, and maybe sometimes even reinforces it.

And a huge undertaking for many of us in this society, growing up in this world, is to learn to become embodied, to learn to, and one way to understand it, because we want to respect the poor insecure mind, is we're trying to grow the mind into the body. Right? Wake up the part of the mind that's in the body so it can participate in the whole mental processing, the whole source of information, the whole source of goodness, the whole source of inner health that needs the whole to operate.

And so a hugely important part of Buddhist practice in all the different schools of Buddhism that I've practiced is to become embodied, is to really live from your body, not from your mind. And living from your body is not leaving your mind out of the picture. Living from your body is actually living in a richer world of the mind, a fuller mind than you can if you're only in your mind, if you're only on your screen all the time. And so in a way, sitting in meditation is a return to a natural way of being that many of us, our unnatural world that we live in, has really disconnected many of us from.

And it's a marvelous thing to discover the degree to which we can be inwardly healthy that you probably could never imagine on your own in this world. The inner health that is natural, it's easeful, it's kind of a deep sense of being at home in yourself, a deep sense of being connected to something bigger than the small ideas you have about who you are. It's something bigger that's all inside of you, this wonderful, rich, healthy, natural world.

May you be as amazed at what you find in yourself as I was amazed seeing these native indigenous people of French Guiana, that's where they were from in the Amazon, as I saw that. So I was amazed by them at what was possible physically. So maybe that's a heal the divide from the morning and maybe also inspire you to find your way back in a deep way to this natural life inside. Thank you.