

Friday Morning Guided Meditation

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As many of you know, I sometimes discuss the value of shifting from the control tower to the body: to not spend too much time directing practice from up in the head, to not have the practice be thinkfulness rather than mindfulness, bodyfulness. To feel and sense the body, the experience, in a spacious, relaxed way. In a way that, when you feel something, it is kind of like you are opening it up to feel it fully. When you know something, it is like you are expanding the mind to know it more fully. It is not a narrowing of attention, a tightening of attention, but there is a simplification of attention. When the control tower is not busy thinking, things can get simpler and simpler.

In this process of magnifications of ten, coming in closer, settling here, it is a lot of mental work to think about your body as a whole. Your body image is a lot of exhausting thoughts that people are concerned with. But to drop deeper than the body image, the idea of the body, to feel the parts of the body that are speaking, that are active, that have sensations. Sometimes the mind gets even simpler: less thoughts, less ideas. Even the idea of body parts falls away, and it is just sensations.

As the Buddha talks about this, he gives two images. Images can be evocative of aspects of the practice that an explanation will not provide. What is interesting about the images of the rice, the bag full of rice, and beans and sesame, and the images of the pieces of meat that have been laid out by the butcher, is that in the ancient world this was food that people were going to eat. Before you can eat the mung beans, the garbanzo beans, it is good to soak them. Before eating meat, for people who eat meat, it needs to be cooked.

So, as you feel the sensations in your body, give some of them time to soak in your body. The solidity of the body, the substance of the body, maybe is like a loving pot in which things can soak. The fluidity of the body is, you know, made up mostly of water. One of the primary

sensations for the water element is cohesion and elasticity. When the chest, belly expands and contracts, there is movement there, but there is also elasticity: stretching, coming back. The elasticity of the body holds it all together.

The water element, the body as a whole, lets the beans soak, lets sensations be nurtured, nourished. Let them be warmed by the heat element. Parts of our body inside maybe are warm. When you feel sensations in your body, it is not simply a task of knowing them and moving on. It is not to be quick, just to feel them and move on, but to give time to what is there to be known, to be felt, so it can soak. Grow, expand like a mung bean, maybe, or maybe allow it to cook quietly in a low-temperature oven of your body.

When we sense sensations, when we know sensations, that is not a singular, unique activity that is independent of everything else. Sensing and knowing are part of a wide network of nerves and senses and forms of intelligence, forms of awareness that exist in us. To allow what is here to cook, to soak, allows these different connections to grow and develop. Something else begins to occur. The richness of our life has a chance to come forth.

The pleasure of practice. The pleasure of peaceful awareness. Calm awareness, awareness which is not in a hurry, does not have a project, but is allowing the natural process of soaking and cooking, connecting, networking, and informing the deep mind deep inside. So, as you sit here, take some time now to feel your body as a whole. What is the broadest, widest way that you can feel your body? In a way that maybe feels the warmth of the body, the softness of the body, or the spaciousness of the body. Or maybe the strength of the body.

Maybe, for some of you, in the broad panoramic view of the body, you feel the hum of the body. Feel the warmth. Feel a gentle movement of sensations. Within this wider sense of the body, there might be particular sensations that stand out more clearly, or a particular area where you feel your deep breathing and where the sensations change with the in-breath and out-breath. To sense, feel, know these particular sensations, as if you are giving them time to soak, giving them time to get warm, time to spread and grow, time to feel the edges of the sensation. That might be indistinct because it is continuous with the rest of your body.

If feeling sensations of your body seems boring or dry, the issue is not with the sensations. The issue is with the mind—it is probably thinking about things. A mind which keeps us separate. A thinking which is dry. Or it might be we are starting to feel the tension of thinking, the discomfort of a lot of thinking. The weariness of thinking that will not be felt if you stay preoccupied in your thoughts.

The very tension and weariness, discomfort of thinking, is just another sensation that you

can feel and let soak. Let it be felt in the body. Maybe, as you exhale, let your thinking, your thoughts, float away. So the sensations have more room to be felt, to be known, with a quiet mind. If there is a lot of thinking, remember the quiet mind is there too. Deeper in the mind, there is also peace. There is also quiet silence, right next to the chatter.

Maybe it is the quiet mind that can better allow the sensations to soak, to be felt, to be held by the warmth of the body. To go along with the idea that sensations are like food, the Buddha said that sense contact can be nourishing, can be a nutriment. Is there some way, in this quiet, broad, soft body, that some of your sensations you feel, in the way the mind awareness receives, contacts sensations, the meeting of sensations and awareness, is nourishing? Is wholesome—not the sensation itself, but something about the softness of where their contact is made?

Some sensations can soak in the goodness of the body, the warmth, the softness. Some sensations, the pleasant ones, can help soak the body more. The pleasantness in the body can both soak in the body and help with the soaking, the cooking, the warmth. If there is pleasure in the body that feels *dharmic*, that feels like it comes from the goodness of the practice, allow yourself to be soaked by it. Then, yeah, sometimes what we soak in is the silence around us, within us. A soaking that allows us to sense more gently, fully, just the sensations.

Maybe just the sensations of breathing. Sometimes it all soaks in the stillness that is around us, within us. Sometimes it is the spaciousness. These are all qualities that can be there with awareness, with presence. They can be felt, but not thought about. Thinking is not where they are found. They are found beyond the edges of thinking.

One of the ingredients in the soup that we soak in is time. Give everything its time. Be in time with what is happening. The expression “in time” has different meanings. It is also a musical term. Be in time with, be attuned with, the right time for being aware of what is here, giving time for the sensations to be known and felt. With no hurry, maybe with no idea that there is something else you are supposed to be doing, just this, and maybe the sensing of sensations.

Staying in the knowing of the present has very little to do with making effort. It has a lot to do with letting go of the effort to keep thinking. That is where the work is. As you go through the day today, if it is nourishing for you, if it is peaceful for you, if it is nice for you, stay close to the world of sensations. Live in your sensations, almost like you are becoming them. Participating in the soaking of the goodness that is here.