

Deep Sensing

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Especially with the eyes closed, we experience our body through the senses. Our senses pick up sensations, or maybe more accurately, create sensations with the sense data that comes in, and some of that is coming from outside of us. The sound of my my voice, the temperature of the room, the place you're in, maybe the contact of your body against some cushion or chair, holding it up from the pull of gravity. Then the sensations are such a big part of the Buddha's mindfulness teaching, and he distinguishes between two kinds of sensations that I'll, for now, call those which are skin deep and those which are deep within.

So, to taste some delicious dessert is pleasant, but it's only there at the level of the taste. But if it's a dessert that a friend or a family member made for you regularly, because of the relationship, because of care, love, there's a deeper sensation. Not just the taste, the sweetness, but the deeper feelings, emotions, warmth, love, maybe that you feel. So those are the deep. That's deep.

If someone praises you, and that brings brings brings pleasure, that can mostly be also just surface, skin deep. Sometimes it's very cheap to praise people. But if someone knows you really, really well, an important person in your life, and they appreciate you in some deep way, it might touch something deeper inside. Something deeper inside might relax. Something deeper inside might feel something's good here. Something's right. Maybe a deep sense of safety.

The opportunity that exists with staying close to your sensations is that you can start making the distinction between those which seem just on the surface, skin deep, they say, and those which have their connection to something deeper inside. The feeling of being whole, or that which is wholesome, belongs to this deeper world of sensations. To have a deep sense of inner integrity, and to feel that something you want to say or do feels unwholesome, that also

might come out of this deep place of feeling. If you want to do something called wholesome just to get that surface praise, then we're just living on the surface. But if we're feeling ourselves deep inside, to the place where wholesome and unwholesome, healthy and unhealthy, there is a deep resonance, a deep attunement, for the Buddha, this place of deep sensations, not surface sensations, is the domain, the realm of *samādhī*.

Many people try to unify the mind, concentrate the mind, enter into *samādhī* using that surface mind. That's the mind of stories, constructs, judgments, reactivity. And to try to get really deeply settled, unified from this surface mind, surface skin deep, it's not going to work very well. It's this deep place of sensitivity, deep, the deep mind, the deep sensations. The surface mind may or may not be in the present moment. It can produce sensations, but those sensations are born in this fragile world of thinking and stories, meaning-making.

The deep sensations are always in the present. And they flow, connected to intentions, desires, aspirations that belong to the deep mind, the deep heart, that belong to what keeps us here alive in a full way to this moment, where life emerges from deep within. The surface mind is often located up in the head. If there's a lot of thinking and the sensations of that, if you're able to feel the sensations of surface thinking, then you're starting to come deeper. And if you feel and sense the thinking mind up in the head, maybe you can imagine or allow it to sink quietly down into the belly, down into the torso, turning on the light in the torso so the sensations that are there can be felt and known.

And are there places in your torso that feel deep or intimate? That register the body breathing? Where the sensations of breathing, in whatever depth you can relax into, are the mung beans that are being soaked in the field of awareness, field of presence, in your body. Maybe there's some sensations in the body associated with breathing that have a softness to them. Maybe a few that have a gentleness to them. Look around the torso to see where the breathing is sensed and felt in the most softest, gentlest, tenderest way.

And around those sensations, is there anything in your torso that wants to relax or settle? And whether you know it or not, whether you're present for it or not, the body takes in the sensations of breathing for the entire length of the exhale. The nerve endings in the torso that feel the inhale are taking in those sensations the entire entire length of the inhale. You can be distracted from it, focusing on other things, and not recognize, not consciously feel, but the sensations are still there, ready to be felt and known.

Let yourself feel the exhale from the beginning all the way to the end, seeing one thing all the way through to the end, feeling all the way through to the end, the exhale. Receptive to the sensations of exhaling, the shifts and the changes. At the end of the exhale, the inhale

begins, and to see and to feel that all the way through to the end. Letting the thinking mind become quieter, so there's more bandwidth, more room to feel the inhales and exhales.

And what if your deep mind is communicating through the sensations of breathing, communicating presence, communicating a willingness, willingness to feel and be present, to accompany? And along the edges of your breathing, just beyond the edges of your sensations of breathing, and still in your body, what's the atmosphere like? What's the sensations there like? Might there be a receptivity? Might the breathing have a gentle influence beyond its own edges—an influence of relaxing, softening? Maybe there's a feeling of being in harmony.

And if you lose touch with your breathing deep inside, could it be because you're involved in the surface mind of stories, ideas, judgments, ideas of me, myself, and mine? Similar to how you've been having similar thoughts for maybe years and years, it's the old way. The new way is where something new gets born in the deep sensing body, where there can be a pleasure in gliding along with the full exhale from beginning to the end, receiving the gentle massage of the inhale. From the beginning to the end, there could be a pleasure, a well-being coming from this unification around breathing. Gathering oneself around the breathing, so that the world of sensations connected to breathing reveal themselves to you. Softly relaxing into the experience of breathing, so the sensations of breathing can have a radiance, an influence beyond themselves.

Maybe feeling the goodness of being settled and unified, even if it's only very partially so, even if it's just being in the area, in the domain where unification and wholeness, wholeness, have a chance to show themselves with every breath. If possible, give yourself over to the sensations of breathing. Trust them. Trust yourself to them. The deep sensations can be both comfortable and uncomfortable. Whatever they are, make room for them. Know them. Allow them to be felt without trying to do anything about them, except breathing with them, breathing through them.

Thank you.