

# 2016-02-01 Four Foundations of Mindfulness

## Body Parts Elemen...

Fri, 9/25 2:55PM • 40:19

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

sensations, body, mindfulness, awareness, exercise, hand, concepts, people, parts, buddhism, buddha, ideas, element, feel, practice, conceptual, develop, aware, head, movement

### SPEAKERS

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loud, loud today, I wonder if you could maybe turn the volume down? A little bit better. So how's that? Okay, anybody knows about these equipment can imagine where that's coming from. Nice to know.

So Good evening. And this evening, I'm going to continue the series of talks on the four foundations of mindfulness, which is a series of exercises that the Buddha taught a series of practices that was used to develop awareness to heightened our awareness. And you might ask, why heightened awareness, why develop awareness, since all of us are aware already, and all our waking hours, were aware, in some fashion or other. And I'll give you an example from my life, I'll give you one reason why. When I was a student, I would sit in the Zen monasteries, Zen temple, meditation hall, and you would sit facing the wall, everyone's going around the perimeters of the hall facing the wall, and you sit very straight and proper posture. And the head, teachers would sometimes come around, and they would adjust your posture to in the middle of the meditation session, you'd be sitting there, and you'd feel this gentle hand go on the shoulder. And when you felt that gentle hand, touch your shoulder, that meant they probably are going to straighten your back, or straighten you up a little bit. And so if I was lost in thoughts and preoccupation, then when they came in, they touched my shoulder, I'd be startled if I was kind of clearly aware of the present moment, aware of what's happening, not preoccupied, the awareness was, was strong and clear. And that wasn't lost. If they came and touched my shoulder. It was just like, it was just kind of nice, it was kind of like, I just would receive it, I would be like kind of like, grass blade in the wind, it's just a breeze, just gently bend over, or semi touch to just kind of like just very, very nice there was was no startle effect at all. And when awareness is clear, and established, and they're not preoccupied, then it's kind of like we've become more and more a clear channel, in which experiences just come and go through us. And they know that they don't hit anything, they don't get blocked by anything. Whereas if we're more preoccupied We are the more attached to something more, we're stubborn or resisting something tightly, the more likely that whatever, that events in the world experiences in the world have something to hit inside of us. And it might be much worse than the startle effect that happens that day when that happens. So it's kind of like if you are preoccupied with what people think about you, it's really important that people think about you a certain way. And then people come into your view, and they say something, they say that, you know, men with green shirts are inadequate. And so because I'm preoccupied by what people think about me, that statement kind of hits something inside of me and I get it gets stuck there, get caught there, I pick it up, I get involved. And I get all kind of tense and ready to defend men with green shirts. The but if I'm not really particularly concerned about that, but I'm just clear and open and kind of free, then that statement might just travel right through me like Clear Channel open channel. So the more developed the awareness is, the stronger it becomes, the less preoccupied we are. And the less we'll have any of these things inside

operating. That are the wall which what people say what happens in the life strikes, it hits, it's kind of like kind of like it goes right through. It has no place to land. And we might still, you know, take care of things responsibly isn't likely just completely aloof. But there's not the startle effect or the resistant effect or they're tightening up just things go right through. So this is one one reason why developing a are unnecessarily useful and why it's connected in Buddhism toward to inner freedom, spiritual freedom.

So one of the ways that this is emphasized or developed in Buddhism is practicing mindfulness, and he's sick, these 13 exercises. And the first six exercises are, have to do with mindfulness of the body. And this is extremely important in our values are very important, maybe it's maybe the wrong word to use. It's extremely valued. In Buddhism, the idea that you would be connected to your body embodied. There's a story. It's a poem from the very ancient times in Buddhism of a monk at the time of the Buddha, who wrote that, if he had could have one wish, he his wishes that everyone in the world got to practice mindfulness of the body. It's so important that that's his one wish, because so much, so much wisdom, so much of the best qualities of human being come out, when we're when we're really centered and centered in our body connected to our body. Or another dramatic story, as soon after the Buddha died, a man getting a maybe I said this, before someone came, man came to Ananda, the Buddha's main attendant have been 40 20 years with a Buddha, memorize many of his teachings, and said to Ananda, now that the Buddha is dead, who is your teacher, or who is your spiritual friend? And the Ananda said, Now that the Buddha is dead, mindfulness of the body is our teacher is our spiritual friend. So rather than a point in oh six, when I didn't, I did not appoint a successor. And since there is no successor, who's who's the teacher, and to say the body is the mindfulness of the body is is to put the body up mindfulness of the body up at a very high level, like the great teacher right himself. And there is it's so important, this mindfulness of the body, that there's actually a whole discourse very, very detailed instructions that Buddha gave, called discourse on mindfulness of the body. And in this discourse, one of the emphasis is on practicing mindfulness to the body is to practice in such a way that you develop deep, deep states of calm and deep states of calm, that come along with beautiful experiences of pleasure or delight or joy. That saturate, pervade, grip through the body. That's the kind of ancient language they have, saturate and pervade. And I like to think of it is, when you sit down and get into his deeper states of calm and well being, that your body feels beautiful. from the inside out, there's a tremendous feeling of beauty, kind of, of radiance, that happens. And you know, what you look like from the outside, it doesn't really matter whatsoever. When you have this kind of radiance, or its beauty that kind of was welling up kind of flowing through you glowing from the inside the inside out. And this kind of sense of beauty or sense of well being that can come through developing meditation practice, is one of the important reference points for practice in the ancient Buddhist tradition. So the body was greatly valued, and an appreciating jati at the body enjoying it being with being present in the body. And so that insight inside out the body sounds really good, is part of the whole enterprise here. And so in this 13 exercises that we're covering over these weeks, the fourth and fifth one, have to do with the beginning to look at the body in a deeper way. That the development of this process of becoming aware, starts with movement, the things that move when we move, that's kind of relatively coarse activity. And so we can kind of track the movements better. So one of the movements is the movements of breathing, the movements of our posture we talked about last week, and the simple movements of lifting your hand putting on your clothes, sitting you know, the different kind of basic movements we do, to know and you're aware and use that as a place to develop awareness. To go deeper, we sit still. And as we sit still, we begin looking into our body and seeing it in deeper ways. And the first way the Buddha talked about is conceptual dualism or conceptual that we use that we, and the second is more non conceptual.

And so we go again, from a grocer, a coarser state of mind, to a more refined or quieter state of mind, to be living in the world of concepts is, takes brain power takes brain energy and an activity of the brain

to go to drop the conceptual level, and drop into what's called the sensory level sensation level, it requires less activity, the brain and the brain, the mind can get calmer still. But on the way there, the way that this These exercises are described, the first one is conceptual. And it's done this way, I'll read it to you. It's called the sometimes it's called Mindfulness of the end attack, anatomical parts, parts of our body. And as with all this stuff, it's very interesting to see that there's so many ways that when the Buddha gave instructions, he did it sequentially from that which is coarser to more subtle and more refined, or more inner, my inward outside to the inside. And here, you'll look there, there's three different kinds of layers going inward, the first is being coming wherever the body from the outside, which you can see from the outside, and then to become aware of the organs and then to become aware of the fluids that flow inside the organs and all the way around. So it kind of this progressive step, inward, deeper kind of ideas. And it's, uh, you know, somewhat conceptual to have these different parts, you think about them, some of them, you know, some of us probably have never actually seen some parts of our inner body, you know, maybe you've been to an anatomy lab, and maybe you've seen some of it and, or seen an animal but, but to imagine, you know, where your body where these parts are, and to see them is part of the exercise. So it's kind of using your concepts using your imagination, to evoke and see different parts of your body. So, this is how the instructions are giving, given. Every person reviews, this very body, up from the soles of the feet, down from the top of the, of the hair, bounded by skin, as full, as full of many kinds of them hear the word is impurity or uncleanness. Thus, in this body, there are head hairs, body hairs nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidney, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mess, sindri, I don't know what missing three years, so I can't imagine contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, that tears, grease, spittle, not oil of the joints, and urine. So I usually say they say there's 32 of these parts to pay attention to. And in Thailand, in some of the plastic traditions, this is the first meditation practice they're given to new monks, and new monks and nuns. And they're, they're taught to memorize this list. And then to go through that list kind of cut like a little bit like a memorization thing, you repeat them to yourself over and over again. And you get pretty focused, you know, you really remember all those parts, and recite it to yourself over and over again, it's like a mantra or like a little liturgy that you repeat. But you're not supposed to do it. Just like a mantra liturgy is supposed to actually go through them. And then focus your attention or your imagination on that part of your body. And it's possible to get very concentrated. If you really get into it. Your mind's not going to wander, your mind's not going to be concerned with how are you going to get oil in a new oil change in your car, you know, or you know, what happened at work or what you're doing tomorrow or whatever your distracted mind does. You're kind of kind of honing the mind to be really present for something you're concentrating on. And it's you know, it's using concepts and ideas to do it to get the to get concentrated, and it's using concepts that have to do with one's own body. So we're bringing the attention here and coming inward and really imagining are connected here.

One of the functions this has this kind of focus is to begin breaking the habit, the strong habit we have of taking ourselves as a whole unit, you know me myself in mind, and to think you just think in terms of I would rather think of rather than I, we think we're made up of these different parts. And as we realize we're made up of different parts, it tends to kind of loosen up the hard grip, we might have of thinking only in terms of me, myself and mine. And this is one of the enterprises of Buddhism is to try to loosen up the grip of those strong attachments to self. The and the classic, the old texts talk about this exercise is an exercise that helps free us from conceit. And it is also your own ancient text talks about this exercise, as an exercise that also is supposed to help certain people who need it, not those who don't need it. To help them be free of overly overly preoccupation with sensual lust. And it is you supposed to do the same imagine all these parts of the person you're attracted to. And so it's not like a policy, you're supposed to always be thinking people go that way. But it does happen from time to time that someone had been, I'm sure none of you, but it happens time to time that that people sit down to meditate. And it's hard to get focused in meditation, because they have thoughts about sexual attraction, sexual interest, sexual fantasies. And so and I think I actually not a few people, quite a few

people will sooner or later come to sexual fantasies and sit there and, and as a teacher, I've heard some, you know, wonderful stories of people, but not I didn't hear the details, but people will come and tell me you know, that, you know, I can't get rid of these, I can't stop I keep going there. And so some so the people who find they're too caught up in thoughts of sex and sexuality. Then this exercise is given. You know, imagine him imagine her, you know, go through the list. Or your also the joints, grease, spittle urine. So maybe it works. And then it has an interesting simile to describe this exercise. Just as though they were a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grain, such as Hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millet, and white rice. And a person with good eyes were to open it and review with us. This is Hill rice, this is right red rice, this is beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice. So to a person reviews one's body for all these different body parts was listed. And I love this analogy and you know, the bag with opening on both ends, it's is kind of, you know, like us, we're open in both ends, the mouth and the other end. And food goes through. So I think that's supposed to be kind of a simile for the human body. And if you open the bag at one end, and look at those beans, you know, a lot of these beans beans and grains are quite beautiful you know if you've gone to some kind of open market where the grains are being sold in baskets and beautiful colors, you know and beautiful to see the shapes and smoothness and all these things. It's kind of I think it's quite nice. So, so, the idea of looking at this bag I think I like jewel so special to kind of look in but you clearly see the distinction between different parts, if the bag is closed is just a bag, but if you open it is a bag of all these individually different things. So in the same way one sees these different parts of one's oneself and it gets the mind focused, it gets the mind orienting oriented towards oneself in different ways in how we usually think about ourselves. The strong strong habits begin to weaken the strong habits of conceit the strong habits of seeing us you know, as you know, a solitary way single way. So, become a matter of fact, just so I think I'll go through the list again.

And, and there's a wonderful colleague, the Vipassana teacher in Santa Cruz named Bob Stahl, who for years has been teaching mindfulness based stress reduction in El Camino Hospital in Mountain View, some of you probably here took his MBSR class. So that's true. Anybody here taking this class? Yeah, thank you, thank you. So, and in his kind of other guys, he's a Buddhist teacher. And then we need to Buddhist teacher, one of his favorite practices he likes to teach is a 32 parts of the body. He's done this practice a lot for himself. And then he's teaching people and he does like I don't know, I don't know how long it is maybe a 30, week 32 week course or something. And he goes through each each part and the people learn to meditate on and get focused, then somewhere about two thirds the way through the course, he takes people to the anatomy lab, at the local college and they get to look at you know, what it looks like under the skin, and that to help them in their practice of 32 parts of the body. So, here it is, again. A person reviews this same body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the head, bounded by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity Thus, in this body, there are head hairs body hairs nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, messagerie, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, that tears, grease, spittle, not oil of the joints, and urine. You realize you had all the stuff in there. And so that's doing this repeatedly as a practice. Then, one of the byproducts or one of the results of this is that your ability to be aware in this clear, open way and be really present without being any preoccupation or agitation kind of mucking up your awareness becomes stronger awareness becomes stronger. To develop the practice further and deeper, to develop deeper states of calm and greater states greater clarity, you want to then drop the conceptual level, these ideas of hair and teeth and all that, because these those are concepts we have. And rather than focusing on the concepts, we want to switch to focusing on this sensation level of what we can feel we don't really need concepts to to feel it, maybe we need concepts to understand what we're feeling, but the feelings themselves directly are not conceptual. So to give you an example, to lead you in an example, I'd like to do a very simple exercise with you, of practicing mindfulness of your hand.

And so what I like to ask you to do is as you are from close your eyes, not this not a long thing, just close your eyes and bring your attention into your right hand and begin feeling the sensations that are in your hand. They're the sensations in the palm of your hand. The top of the hand, the fingers, you might be aware of pulsing, tingling, vibration, pressure. If your hand is touching something, the sensations of contact against your leg if I the other hand. You might feel temperature warm coolness. A very gentle breeze.

Now as you feel the sensations in and of themselves in a certain kind of way, there is no hand. There, in the world of sensations, there's just sensations, surrounded by space. Maybe we have no clear boundary between the sensations and the space around it.

And it's possible to feel the sensations of the hand without actively involved involving yourself in thoughts, this is a hand just sensations.

And then you can open your eyes. And now you can look at your hand. And you can think about your right hand or both hands. And you might think about, you know, where these hands have been over your lifetime and what they've done for you. And you might think about your ideas about your hand. Some people don't like their hands, some people like their Hands, fingers are too short, too long, too fat, the fingernails, they're not behaving properly. And we get into the world of ideas and concepts, what it means to have a hand and what it's done. And someone the other day told me that they spent some time looking at their hand and they felt so grateful that they felt somehow I never, I never think my hands for they've been along all along for the ride. And they've been doing so much. So then we get involved in concepts and memory and histories and comparing hands to ideal hands and all this stuff. And it gets complicated. And some of you as possible, some of you suffer because of your hands, you know, the fingers are too short or too long, or this or that. And it's just not, it's not that, you know, you know what fashion model hands should really look like or something, you know, have this idea. So, once we get into the world of concepts and ideas, it can get complicated. But if we stay with our eyes closed, and don't think of the ideas, but just feel the sensations, the sensations themselves, or the hand, chances are most of those sensations were independent of the concepts and ideas we have and the judgments we might have about the hand or the gratitude we have, it just sensations. So in this way, if we rest attention in the sensations of the hand, the mind can get quiet. If we look at the hands are thinking about it, and what the hand is done, and when we think about hands and how my hand compares to my neighbor's hands, and then it gets complicated, the mind can easily start spinning out and thinking and getting involved and doing all kinds of things. So if you want the mind get quiet, then you want to be able to put to rest for a short while that conceptual side, and just stay with the direct sensations. And the way that this exercise in direct sensations is described, it's exercise in the, what's called the four elements. And in the ancient world of India, they had the idea that the world is made up of four primary elements, earth, water, fire and air, or sometimes it's a sea or sometimes it's called the wind. See, how does it say it here, the here they call it air, earth, water, fire and air. And when it says apply to our body, it refers to a way of classifying the sensations of our body that the watch the earth elements of our body are felt as sensations of hardness and softness, solidity. The water element is fluidity. So if you like feeling the spit in your mouth, and you take your tongue and wash it around, you feel that liquid. That's the water element that we feel if if you tear up By okino, by some reason, you feel the water element in your eyes, the feeling of wetness. And then the fire element is temperature. And so hot and cold anytime you feel hot and cold and cotton cold or anything in between, that's the called the fire element. So sensations of temperature. And the fourth one is air element is any sensation of movement that you have the body. So you know, since it's air, the obvious one would be gas in the field, the movement of gas or something in your body, but any movement at all. So they say even though it's



we think of it as liquid, if you feel the movement of the blood going through that that would be classified as the air element. Exactly, what's the sensei how these sensations fit into these fourfold classification is not that important, which what he's trying to do is, is drop into what the sensory level of experience is sensate level, this sensation level of experience, and feel it there.

And in fact, the way that I was trained in this Vipassana practice that we do, trained in Burma and Thailand, was primarily meditation on these four elements are primarily a meditation on the staying present for the sensations in and of themselves in the body. And, and, nominally, it looks like they were teaching us breath meditation, because we were told to pay attention to the rising and falling of the belly, as we breathing. And I did that, and in my Zen training that was called, you know, breath meditation. But in fact, in fact, that what we're really focusing on breathing, but rather using the movement of the belly, as a way of tuning into the these four elements that were there, the movement that was happened, the pressure, the hardness, the softness, the temperature, all these different things that went on there, and getting more and more attuned to the simple sensation level. Now, some of you know that there's much more pleasure in life, sometimes essential, essential pleasure, if you're present for it. Right, you know, you go and buy a very nice ice cream, or chocolate or something. And, but then, you know, you're talking with a friend, and they tell you a scintillating fascinating story about something. And you're just like, eating, you know, like, but you know, not really paying attention to eating. And you're so interested in the story, and then the story ends, and you look at your bag, or your cone of ice cream, or your bag of chocolate, and it's empty, it's gone. And so, you know, I didn't I didn't taste it, I just like was so preoccupied by the story that I just ate without, really, versus, you know, you, you take the chocolate and you close your eyes, and you put it in your mouth, and you let it melt there. And just like the ooze is around your mouth, you feel so sensual, and rich, and the sweetness and the chocolateness. And it's like, you know, you could just like linger there for a long time, and you're so glad when you swallow it to the flavor just lingers there and you, you don't want anyone to disturb it for a while. Or, you know, a friend of yours comes along to offer you a massage, or you know, she'd rub your shoulders or something. And, you know, and, you know, you're, you know, really busy doing a crossword puzzle, and you know, you're thinking about, you know, you know, during your present, you're really getting close to finishing it all and you don't have much time. So you can't really focus on anything else, you know, and they're massaging your shoulders. And it's very different than like, just not thinking about anything, and just Oh, just really being present for it. So, this sensory level is of attention is more deeper and more primary and more intimate, more connected to ourselves than anything that we can, we can be involved in the conceptual level. And so as this development of mindfulness continues, that is to move to this more subtle area, and develop concentration, develop mindfulness, on the physical sensations, sensations of the body. And this is one of the great things to do. Because as we become more attuned to our body, more aware of what goes on in the body, the information that is in the body, becomes available to our intelligence to how we understand ourselves, understand the world around us. There's a tremendous amount of information in the body about How the world affects us what's going on inside of us, our psychological states, our emotional states, our impulses, our attitudes, our intuitions, our, our, you know, so much, you know, is processed through our body. And so to learn how to be centered in the body, there's a number of things, it helps us to be not so caught up in our head. And all the ideas we have in our head, which for some people, is a labyrinth, or not a labyrinth, but a maze, that they'll never get out of, if they only stay in their head. So it gets us out of our head. And then it helps us become aware of a much richer aspects of our life, our emotional life becomes a richer and more free, when we're centered around body, we have access, access to much more information. And so we can be wiser about what goes on, we can respond more effectively to the world and know how to take care of ourselves much better.

And awareness doesn't only remain thoughtfulness, thinking, it isn't only awareness and not on doesn't only stay something that's in the head, closely connected to concepts and ideas. But awareness becomes something that kind of glows throughout the body, or, you know, it's not, it's not located in the head, it's not. When I was probably before I started Buddhism, if someone had asked me, where's awareness for you, I probably would have pointed to my head, my brain. After I practiced for some time, if someone had asked me, where are awarenesses, I would have pointed to my chest. And then now if someone asked me where awarenesses I don't point to anything, I would just open my eyes really wide and kind of make a big arc and open up, it's, it's here, it's everything. There's not enough, awareness is not located anywhere anymore. But it's all inclusive. And part of the reason for that, that I can feel that is because of the it's supported by this more expanded or more richer or more wider capacity for awareness that is available if we're centered in our body connected to our body, that is not available if we are, you know, the primary way we're processing the world is through our thoughts and ideas and stories that we have. So this particular exercise, the exercise and the elements is, is really, very deeply connected to the classic the vipassana tradition, the classic mindfulness tradition, is kind of like one of the core practices to do that. Some more core and then some ways in mindfulness other than just mindfulness of breathing, and, and beginning to kind of things begin to open up, sometimes much more effectively for people in meditation practice, when they really learn to center themselves in their body and start tuning into this sensory level. For people who do you use breathing, it becomes not following the air or just the movement, but start tuning into the rich Kaleidoscope flow of sensations that arise and pass that occur. As we take a breath. As you breathe in it's bring it bring it out, there's actually a dozens of sensations that come into play that ripple through. And so begin to arrest the attention in the parts of the body where we experience breathing, and feel the four elements is part of the centering, focusing, concentrating way of cultivating a heightened sense of awareness. So in In conclusion, I'd like to say that what we're seeing in these 13 exercises, now we've gone through five of them is a progression from from what's supposed to be more obvious and available to us. Paying attention to that, and then start as we get more calm and centered. To begin progressively begin looking deeper and deeper into ourselves to what's more intimate and connected. And here we've now seen into your sensate level of our life. And next week we'll take a little bit of a detour from this route to look at. The sixth exercise which has to do with death and how certain particular contemplation to death, it can be in the service of developing a heightened awareness, this heightened free clear awareness that that we're looking for in this mindfulness tradition. Okay. So thank you