

# 2019-02-18: Foundations of Mindfulness

## Part 5 - Mindfulness of Body Parts

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### SPEAKERS

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So, so good evening, and I think that this little should be probably a little louder. So how's it now since good volume? Good? Okay. So as some of you know many of you know that I'm doing a series now of talks on the classic teachings on Buddhist teachings on mindfulness. It's from a particular discourse, a text that is called, usually in English is called the four foundations of mindfulness. And the first of the foundations first to the ways in which we establish this very strong mindful awareness that we call mindfulness is on the body. And the word for body is kāya. And it is Text opens up with talking about in order to establish a strong heightened sense of awareness. We have to turn we have to kind of turn away from having desire and aversion towards the world. And the word for world is loka. What's very interesting about the Buddhist teachings is that the word loka that in this case is used with the external world. desire and aversion for the world is also used sometimes explicitly to refer that to the world of our body, the world of our senses, the world, it's right here. And the world that we actually can have contact with is always through the contact in our body, through our body and kind of, in some ways, the whole world at that as we know it occurs in our senses and how we experience everything. So he had this kind of reverse kind of shifting way in which the Buddha talked about the local world. Sometimes he talked about the external world and sometimes the internal work the world of you know who we are. And now if we go through our external world and pay it, notice what people are doing. It's a lot of people are not really connected to their world. I mean, they're connected to their phone. And, and to that world of the World Wide Web. They're connected to their fantasies and dreams and ideas about the past and the future. And it's very easy to go through the world and be disconnected. I have friends who are a little bit lament that what a difference it is nowadays to walk through the cities and towns And there's much, much less contact between people that you're used to, partly because people are looking at their phones. When you go, you know, it's interesting to go in different places where people would have some kind of contact with each other. And they're all kind of alone looking at their device. It's kind of remarkable. And coffee shops used to be a place people went to hang out together.

And we walked by the window big window of Starbucks recently. And there was a lot of people not together. It was full. But it was hard to find people who were together and they all had their computer and their device and kind of like solitary world, connecting to the world through electronics. So, in the ancient world, people talked about teachers talk about people being asleep, and not connected to the world.

So the practice of mindfulness is a practice of beginning to connect to this world. Certainly to the world of ourselves here, but also through that to be able to be connected more fully in the world. And it begins by understanding, we have to give up a little bit, investing ourselves in wanting things in the world, or wanting to get rid of something in the world. Those things can be useful, but it's not the way forward, the way forward, at least in the mindfulness practice, is to come into the world that's here, the world of us. And it begins then with a simple exercise on breathing. To connect with ourselves. It's so hard to be connected and stop the busy mind. And many religious traditions focus on breathing as a way to do that. Breathe, come back to the breath, be with a breath. And then as we're, as we're kind of meditating on the breath, become a heightened sensitivity to this body, this world that's the body, this body which is our world, and then to relax it To soften when people are disconnected from the world and they tend to also be disconnected from themselves. And so to begin waking up the body, and then learning how to be connected directly to the world, through our senses. And this process of waking up and feeling our senses alive and feeling connected to the inner world and the outer world, is a wonderful process. Some people marvel at how well this goes, if they go on a residential meditation retreat, that sense of coming home and being connected to themselves and being in their body, and then be able to walk out and look at anything and just kind of marvel at what we're seeing what we're touching, what we're eating, what we're encountering, and really feel the vividness of being alive.

Now it's so satisfying. And we lose it so quickly. Even though it might be intriguing to be in the electronic world, there is a loss of a different kind of connection to the world that goes on there. So there's Sati putana. This practice of mindfulness is, very importantly, a practice of reconnecting to ourselves and through that, through being connected to ourselves, have the capacity then to have present moment connection to the physical sense world around us. After this exercise in breathing, what I talked about last week, there are these two exercises in being attentive to what you're actually what you're actually doing. It's kind of radical idea that you have been heightened sensitivity, that to the fact that you're sitting or standing or walking or lying down. And then heightened sensitivity to the different activities, the eating, to picking something up to putting on your clothes to showering to using the bathroom, to use those as times to connect to be present. You don't have no one has to raise their hands. But I wonder, you know, used to be that people had these magazine racks next to their toilets if you're old enough to remember those magazine racks. I haven't seen a magazine rack in a bathroom in a very long time. So the question is, what are people reading? And on what are they reading? So, you know, this is why, you know, one has to raise their hands but how many of you read your phone sitting on the toilet? Is that like it's taken taken over? So that's nice. It's probably comfortable and you kind of helps you waiting for things something to happen but But the Buddha wouldn't have done that. That was a time to be mindful to be present. To the Buddha, everything we're doing was a time to be

present to be connected to wake up. And maybe had a lot easier because he lived 2500 years ago. And life was a lot simpler, supposedly. And so it was me it was more natural, you know, to be present and attentive. Even so, he felt the need to teach this long text to help people get more connected. So now we come to the fourth exercise, which is it's a exercise on paying attention or noticing or reflecting on body parts. And the question is, what is it that reflecting on different body parts? How does that support us to wake up to be here to be attentive and being in cultivating this height sense of present moment awareness that for the Buddha leads to liberation leads to the freedom from clinging leads to ability to be independent from all the kind of ways in which work gets sticky to the world. So this idea of the body parts is interesting. The verb for what the exercise involves, is to reflect or to review some translators translate translated. So it's actually a more cognitive process than pure awareness. Because you'll see as we go through it, that some of this, you know, has to be done as a kind of review or kind of contemplation or kind of imagining, in order for this to work. It's to review or contemplate or focus on 31 different body parts systematically one after the other.

This is such an important exercise in, in in terabyte and Buddhism that it's the it's the many times the first exercise meditation exercise that are given to monastics when they're ordained. They get her day and say here, here's what Here's your first practice, contemplate these 31 parts of the body. And I have known people who spent years, there's a wonderful teacher in Santa Cruz, a vipassana teacher named Bob stall. And he's been doing this 31 parts of the body, actually, for him. It's 32 parts of the body meditation for about 40 years, almost 40 years now. He's been teaching for 26 years. And he's a friend. I don't see him that often. But we see each other at least once a year. Because it turns out that he brings his has a class that teaches people's meditation on the 32 parts of the body. And halfway through the year, it's a year long class. He takes people To the community college in Santa Cruz to the anatomy lab to see the human bodies that have been cut open for the anatomy students to study in the same evening that I bring the chaplaincy students there. So we overlap and for the kind of different purposes and he takes his students so they can really go inside a body see a real physical human body. It's been cut open and see the spleen and the lungs, the stomach and the intestines all these things that are part of the piece of interest that went through persons reviewing. And I bring chaplaincy students because chaplaincy people have to become comfortable with death. They have to be familiar with it because people who are offering spiritual care like chaplains will end up being with people who are dying, and will be sometimes the old the primary caregivers of the situation when people have died. And so to be able to enter into the world of dying and be familiar with in all kinds of ways and there relationship to it all is a very important part of their practice. So above stalling, I've had our two groups kind of meet the anatomy lab and once a year, it's kind of a wonderful thing. And so the body, the body parts. So, some people in this world of ours, it happens from time to time, are actually already very focused on body parts. Many people are very focused on physical looks and attract attractive phlex or not attractive look. So whatever kind of books they're, you know, and people are concerned with their own looks. The physical appearance of people is a hugely big deal. For many human beings. People spend an inordinate amount of time I mean, the number of beauty salons then downtown Redwood City. I'm just amazed. Maybe, you know, maybe I can I belong to a different world. Do you know the present moment? I don't go. Don't think but I'm amazed that all these beauty

salons down there. It must be a lot of money being spent at beauty beauty salons. And so you know looks the hair some body parts The face is the body parts skin is a body part. And then we talk then there's pornography, right? I mean probably none of you but it's a big deal in our society. body parts. Sex, keep few people think about sex, body parts. body parts are a big deal in our society, and people do a cause a lot of suffering around focusing on body parts and thinking about body parts and criticizing body parts and feeling to have the wrong body parts and the whole body part thing is a kind of a mess for many people. Not everyone luckily. But you know 98 percent of its high percentage. And it's very sad what people do to themselves. And it's a way of being connected to the body parts. But it's also a way of being very disconnected from ourselves. It's very easy. It's kind of like being you know, some of you will say skin deep, or just be on the surface of things. And the more people fantasize and think about, you know, skin and hair and body parts, the more we're kind of more connected to, not to the depth of life and depth of who the people are, but kind of just a surface appearance of things. It's not a particularly deep spiritual way of being connected to the world or to ourselves. It's not a liberating work path, if that's what you're primarily focused on. So, with that as a reference point, people are already doing body parts contemplation, reviewing.

The Buddha does it. He does it for various purpose, exactly what the purpose is. The text doesn't say except it's it. You know, it's in the context of a text that wants people to develop a heightened sense of present moment awareness. So is there something about contemplating the body in a deep way that heightens present moment awareness? For the monks who are monastics who are taught it after their ordain, it's partly taught as a concentration practice. And they memorize the 31 words for different parts. And it's not exactly like a mantra, but it is kind of like a guide to stay focused, stay focused, stay focused, head here, body here, skin, flesh, bones marrow, they just go through all these things. And each time they say a word, they visualize it or imagine it or feel at the best they can. And it's a way they get very, very concentrated. It's but it's not just a concentration practice. There's something about the contemplation of the body. That changes our relationship to the present moment. Which is what I see when I bring my chaplaincy students to the anatomy lab. It's quite something to see the reverence, the care, the silence, that attention, the focus the concentration that people have, when they have a chance to be introduced, sometimes for the first time ever, to the gift that someone has made of their body. They're all always gifted these bodies gifted for this purpose. And when we're taken into the anatomy lab, the anatomist talks about this as a gift and how we're going in with reverence with care and gratitude for what we're being being offered a chance to do. And then with the most respectful kind of way, the these bodies are opened up there, they've been cut open, and we get to look at hearts and lungs and spleens and intestines and diaphragms. And it's fascinating to see. And the students kept very focused very concentrated. Last time we went a few weeks ago, there were four different bodies on the beds that we're looking at. And, and then, you know, we were studying parts and studying all this and then it was time to leave. And I said, Let's, before we leave, let's all just stand here in silence for a while, with respect to these gifts to these people in this event, and kind of meditate and be present. So we stood silently for about two minutes or so. And just, I think most people had their eyes open, just sit very quietly, still a whole different atmosphere, descended on the room. And then I was inspired, and this came out of me. These are people that were training to

offer spiritual care, in a way in hospitals and places are called chaplains. And I said, What is not in what we what is not present in these bodies. The domain of chaplaincy is a domain of spiritual care, which is not in these bodies, these corpses, that's the domain of spiritual care. And what is it that's not in these bodies? What is it that animates it the consciousness and the vitality? What is that? And you know, and to have it gone You know, so that there's like the presence or absence of this conscious of vitality, what is that? And to feel that, and then to feel it in ourselves, well, I still have it. Right now we're conscious. Right now there's a vitality. It's a blink of the eye in terms of, you know, cosmic time. But this is the time that we have to be aware, this amazing, precious thing. To be aware, to be attentive to know we're alive. Not to be lost in Facebook. Here are alive. So the Buddha talks about these, this reviewing these, he has 31 parts that he lists. And it starts on the surface. And some of the writers talk about how it starts to surface and then it goes in deeper and deeper and deeper. And it's kind of a path or a journey to get us really connected here and attentive, maybe. So I'll read it to you, and these 31 parts and maybe you can imagine what it's like to you might even close your eyes to actually what let's do the deal differently. Let's do a little exercise. So first, we'll do an exercise that I like, which is with your hand. So kind of look at one of your hands.

And, and some of you have had a long history together. And you might have had all kinds of thoughts about your hands, that their fingers are too short, they're too long or too stubby, they're too thin. The hand is maybe too wrinkled or it's too this or that or maybe your hands never been thought about and it's just your hand. So you're gonna have your you have your relationship, your thought and you can think about it. Now, close your eyes and with your eyes closed, feel that hand. Feel the sensations of the hand. Feel the sensations in the back of the hand. The palm of the hand, the fingers feel the tingling and more than the coolness The vibration the hardness and the softness, await heavy or light. Maybe there's little movements that you can feel and if you hold your hands really still just feel your sense with the idea that you're going to feel sense, the bodies the hands experience of itself, not your idea of it. Not your history with it, your concepts of it, your judgments of it, but how does the hand experience itself you're really quiet. The hand doesn't even feel like it's a hand. It just feels tingling and warm and cold and tautness tightness looseness Heavy, all these sensations are swirling around jumping around moving around to very different relationship. Open your eyes. So it's a very different relationship, the relationship between the thoughts ideas we have about the judgments we might have about something like a hand and feeling it directly for itself. So in this regard, you have all kinds of ideas about yourself, your body, who you are, your bodies to this to that, not enough this not enough that in all kinds of ideas people have, you know, their bodies. But what's but what if we deconstruct a little bit and step away from the thoughts and ideas, judgments, we have? The grand picture, we have that idea. We have the body, the concepts, what if we step away from all those and really allow ourselves to connect in a deeper way from the almost like from the inside. laid out for the body itself. So now close your eyes again.

And I'll read this passage slowly. And as we get to these 31 parts of the body, kinda like we did for the hand, but maybe it was from imagination. So ability kind of imagine or feel or sense. This particular body part, in and of itself as if it stands alone. Just it's the experience of it, the reality of it by itself,

standing out in the highlight. And the Buddha said, a practitioner reviews the body, from the soles of the feet, from the source of the feet, all the way to the top of the hair. held together by skin is filled with many kinds of unappetizing parts. This body in this body, their head, here's here's the head. Here's the body, nails. T skin flesh, sinews, bone bones, bone marrow. kidneys heart, liver, diaphragm,

spleen,

lungs, large intestines, small intestines, stomach and the contents of the stomach. PCs bile phlegm, pus blood

Tears, grease, saliva, mucus, oil of the joints and you're in

before you open your eyes, what is it to contemplate consider the body from this point of view. It's made up of many different parts. And when would you would you could you imagine would be like to every day to spend a period of time really connecting and reviewing and reflecting that this is what makes up the body

What impact do you think that might have? on you?

Okay, so you can open your eyes. So that's the simple exercise that Buddha gives preview it was called reviewing a 31 parts of the body. And he doesn't really explain here too much about why to do this or what the purpose is. But now that we've kind of done this little exercise, what do you think some of the useful purposes are of spending time reviewing these, these body parts are just going through them and could you anything that happened to you here that you could imagine? It points to some benefits from doing this.

When I was doing it, I just thought that my mind I sometimes think of my mind and body as a sort of entangled singular piece. And I guess what went through my mind is that I, I'm not aware of a lot of my body and that my mind only extends through very few parts as a very superficial idea

of the body. So it filled it out.

Yeah, all right, simplifies it simplify kind of covers over parts of, you know, the, I think my mind thinks it's in touch with the body but it actually is very ignorant of of all of the parts of the body.

My house, please

It has a humbling effect.

Thank you The humbling effect



I think it begins to point to the fact that we're often made up of different pieces, and that we're not just a single whole thing.

So so deconstructs the idea that we're just not a singularity. We're made up of all these different parts. And what do you think the advantages to realize are made up of many parts rather than one single thing?

Well, I think ultimately, it points towards a Nata and the realization that our concept itself is not a single coherent entity, but rather it's a collection of different parts and systems that work together.

So you're suggesting it's very easy to have a singular idea who we are. And we're kind of which is often a concept or idea. And that it's interesting to break that singular idea apart and see that actually made up or constructed of all kinds of little different parts. So the back quarter

You know, one of the important goals is detachment. And so it helps us detach very by trying to investigate the body in terms of where the attachments might be. So you know, so you're going through their bodies to really start noting where notice where you where you get stuck, where the attachments are,

you might, for instance, very

much

about appearances. He might be like really attached to your face. Okay, and I think Ananda has something about that. He says that it's a very important exercise to do, because it helps liberate great, helps liberate

So, the other mic there, close by. It's over on the stage. Let's make it bring it over here. All the way.

Well, first I was really, I was thinking about those corpses and how, without, as you said, without the animation without the spirit, we're kind of just piles of flesh and meat and everything, but when you were doing the, when I was listening to the 31 parts and really thinking about each part, and realizing, well, right now, each and every one of those parts, has is embodying some of that animation, some of that spirit and I was realizing, I don't often you know, think about is my spleen talking to me today. You know, I, you know, I definitely, you know, work on my hair, you know, but not too well, but, but I don't I realized, oh my gosh, there's probably All kinds of messages that are within me and all this body parts that that made me want to, you know, kind of say hello to say hello to my liver more gallbladder Oh, that one's gone. Anyway, some of them, you know,

sounds like sounds like a wonderful appreciation of this.

I enjoyed that free might.

Nice, nice.

Okay, so so I believe that one of the purposes of this exercise that Taylor was kind of pointing to is that it's one of those ways that we can cut through the abstract concepts we live in. And we live in a lot of abstract concepts about ourselves as as who we are singularities and we're caught up or cut up and you know Pretty good up prettying up or defending or doing something with this singular thing we think we are. And, and it sometimes it's appropriate, sometimes it's reasonable enough. But sometimes it's living in a world of very superficial or even delusion, to live in it. And it's okay sometimes, from time to time to be superficial and diluted. It's not like a sin. It's like a crime in Buddhism. But it's not so connected. It's not connected in some kind of deeper way. And so if we want to kind of wake up and really feel and be attentive and be present, it helps to be able to cut through some of the delusions and preoccupations that we have. And that and one of the preoccupations we have is the attracted at attractiveness of the body. The preoccupation with the body so attractive and, and the strong desire for sensuality sensual pleasure that comes around, you know bodies. And that's the classic, at least in the tradition, a class and one of the classic reasons for this meditation is to, is to cut through excessive fixation on sensual pleasure, physical pleasure, that young monastics might have. And, and so here the word here that's I translated as unattractive. In bigger bodies, translation he calls it foul review the body as full of many kinds of he uses impurity here of impurity, thus and so, you know, not many people, a lot of people in the West don't want to consider that their body body parts are impure, it's kind of like that doesn't quite compute to works, right? The word that's a synonym for this is non beautiful. And you know, maybe that's where a teeny bit better but when they did a colonoscopy, I got to watch me on TV monitor. And I thought that was quite beautiful in there it was all clean and shiny it was like looking down. I was like wow, just like looking in the Grand Canyon. I was kind of in awe. So that, you know, this idea of, you know, non beautiful doesn't work either. But, but so that's why I came up with idea of unappetizing. You know, some of these things mucus and urine, urine and its contents of your stomach, you know, you know, So that's one of the classic uses of this kind of meditation is to If, if people are excessively preoccupied with sex and that kind of physical pleasure, the theory is that this is supposed to kind of cut through that. And, and so you can try it if you ever becomes an issue and see what it does for you. But I think it has a lot of different functions to do this. And one of the functions is what we talked about already is starting to break down the gross or the general concepts we tend to live in. And, and so this is about, you know, seeing the body is not just a singularity, but it's also made up all these parts and be able to consider each part in its own kind of by itself is emphasized by the simile that this text then gives. And here's a simile for it for this. Just so when it reviews all these different parts of the body just as



they were a bag with an opening at both ends. So it's kind of like the human body opening both ends. A body open at both ends with 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 the bag and review with us. This is Hilary rice, this is red rice. These are beans, these are keys. This is millet. This is white rice. So before you open the bag, it just feels inside just feels like a lot of seeds, I suppose. But if you look at it, each of those different pieces of grain is distinct for itself. You see them as being their own thing. So with that kind of clarity and to distinguish each of these body parts is part of this exercise in the teachings on the four foundations of mindfulness This classic text that I'm going through slowly there are 13 exercises for cultivating this heightened awareness. And generally most teachers will pick a few these exercises to focus on most teachers that I know this is their least popular one, the one that's discussed the least. And, and certainly for me also, as a teacher, I know that I think I've talked about this very, very little and I've done very little of this practice myself. So that's something I speak with speak with with a lot of experience. But as we go through the text, I thought it was interesting to go through this piece as well and see what it says. And then we'll see next time I guess, next Monday, that text moves on to another quite different way of breaking through the uniformity or the state. singularity of the body and the Unity deconstructed to down to the building blocks of our experience. And there's something about being able to kind of drop out of the concepts and ideas and get down to the kind of building blocks of how our senses pick up our experience before it begins creating its concepts. That's very powerful. And, and the essence of Vipassana practice in specially in Burma, the way it's taught there has to do with this next exercise we're going to do on the, what's called the four elements. And so whereas this one is kind of not very popular, as far as I know, and much of the world doesn't, you know, all these exercises, probably one of the least popular. The next one is actually sometimes one of the more popular ones, and we'll do that I think next week. So care for yourself and Be more connected to your world inside. Your world is precious. You have this world of yourself for only a few short years.

Be there.

And the wonderful thing is that if you really become grounded and centered and aware and awake in your body, it's magical. The connection we have the world around you. And it's so much richer, to be connected and alive in a three dimensional world than it is to be in the two dimensional world of your device. Spend more time in the three dimensional world. It's a great thing. Thank you