Mindfulness Immersed in Body - Kāyagatā Sati

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 1:27:47

Tonight I want to speak about kāyagatā sati, mindfulness immersed in body. This obviously refers back to the first satipaṭṭhāna, the kāyānupassanā, the tracking of body. This is basically about the relationship with the body that we have as meditators, which I've come to realize is extremely important.

Actually, I realized it was important from the beginning. The first meditation retreat I went to was in Sri Lanka in 1977, sometime around then. It was at a place outside Colombo—I forget the name. We had these tiny little concrete cells to live in and a little bit of veranda. The bed was a cane mat on the concrete floor. Part of the concrete floor was raised up a bit, and they had a cane mat on it. That was pretty much it.

We were supposed to sit there for hours every day. I noticed a lot of people cheated and leaned against a wall. In fact, the wall was concrete and there was this black stain along it at about head height, if you leaned against it. So I did, of course. I had a little cushion, and I survived two weeks, and my knees hurt for two weeks thereafter. I spent most of the time wrestling and struggling with the body, and realized I had to take up yoga, get massaged, and so on.

Years later, I was at U Pandita's place in Rangoon, Panditarama. The interpreter was a relatively junior sayādaw named Vivekananda, and the teacher—the person who was giving the interviews—was not U Pandita but one of his underlings. He'd have to be in the running for the worst meditation teacher I've ever come across. He was just dreadful. He had no interest whatsoever in what was going on. I doubt that he really paid much attention to what anybody was saying to him, and he just kind of tossed off whatever standard response came to mind at the time.

So with me, I would go to an interview, and if something interesting was happening—and I had been doing the practice long enough to figure out what was interesting and what was not—then after the interviews, I'd go and see U Vivekananda, go to his hut, and we'd sit down and I'd say, "OK, what was that all about?" We'd have a discussion, we'd have a talk. He would be pulling down books and we'd be reading them and comparing notes and figuring it out. It was a very interesting process.

But in the course of this, one day I was complaining to him, as was my wont, about one of my major obsessions when I meditate, which is: I haven't got enough samādhi. My concentration is not good enough. So I was complaining about this, and he said, "There is nothing wrong with your samādhi. You would not be seeing the things you are seeing if you did not have samādhi. It's not samādhi you lack, it's passaddhi."

"It's what?"

"Passaddhi."

"What's passaddhi?"

And of course it's tranquility. It's one of the factors of awakening—does it come third? Is it number three? Four. Yes, it's four. And it's just next to samādhi, just next to concentration.

Passaddhi and samādhi—it's interesting, it's one of these pairs of terms that you come across in the Buddha's teaching where there's a body-mind connection built into them. That is, one term is predominantly physical but also influences mind; the other term is predominantly mental but also influences body. In this case, passaddhi, tranquility, is predominantly physical, but it influences the mind, while samādhi, concentration, is predominantly mental, but it influences the body.

In other words, my body was agitated. I was carrying chronic tension within the body, and the body was always tight. And if the body is agitated, it's quite difficult for the mind to settle. Not impossible.

And people do it. But it's like running with a handicap.

So one way into samādhi, concentration, is via the body. Calm the body down, bring ease to the body, and then concentration will develop. On the other hand, if the body is agitated, it will be difficult to calm the mind. This is the mind-body relationship. The body is important as part of the instrument with which we practice meditation.

When we begin intensive meditation practice, it's been my observation—and it's not just me—that a lot of people spend a great deal of energy fighting their bodies, trying to make them do what they think they're supposed to do. For example, to sit in a particular approved posture.

I mentioned that I spent a number of years practicing Zen. My introduction to it came about, oddly enough, through a kind of half-hearted attempt to make a connection with Tibetan Buddhism. I had returned from my first trip to India in late 1977, looking for an opportunity to continue meditation practice in Sydney while also needing yoga, massage, and so on. There was an advertisement for a public talk to be given by a visiting Tibetan Lama at a hall within walking distance of my house, so I went. I think it was Lama Zopa—he would have been very young in those days.

So there was this young lama on the stage. A good crowd turned up, and he had these gorgeous robes. He sat down and gave one of the most boring Dharma talks I've ever heard. So you see, definitely, lamas can be boring too. At the end, they handed around a little pamphlet advertising a weekend retreat with this teacher at a house or centre in the upper North Shore, so I went along.

It was a weekend of meditation, very good. I went through the whole thing but didn't connect with the teacher. I was sitting in this hall with this really crappy little cushion, trying to sit properly, when I happened to glance to my right. Beside me was this magnificent Rolls Royce of a cushion. I looked at it and thought, "I've got to get a cushion like that." Then I looked at the man sitting on it—he had a perfect full lotus, a totally straight back, and a perfect mudrā. I thought, "I've got to get a posture like that." Can you

get it at the same store?

I was too shy to actually go up and say hello to this fellow because he obviously knew what he was doing. But after that retreat, I put my name down on a mailing list, and the only thing that ever came was an advertisement for a yoga class run by a man called John Cooper. I went along, and there in the class, doing magnificent postures, was this same fellow with the cushion. I knew I had to pounce on him because my enlightenment depended upon it.

As it happened, at the end of the class he made an announcement saying he was running a little Zen group in Sydney and inviting people to come along. This was the Sydney Zen Group, so I joined up. The man was Lee Davidson, who currently lives on the North Coast and is the founder of Australian Zen.

I went along to Zen, attracted initially because they had the best cushions and only sat for thirty minutes. When Aitken Roshi came out later, he reduced it to twenty-five, and the Dharma has been declining ever since. But I only had to sit for thirty minutes, and the instructions were to follow the breathing down here in the belly, which was much better than what I had been doing up here in the head. I could sit facing a wall with the light blasting into my eyes, so I could keep awake.

I got into Zen. I used to read these Zen books—little "Zen for Beginners" books coming out of Japan—and they always talked about posture, the importance of posture. "Sit like Buddha and you will become Buddha." They always had photographs of these good-looking young Japanese men with shaved heads and black robes demonstrating perfect posture. Of course, I thought the job was to sit like them, and so that's what I tried to do. Years of struggle. And the struggle itself, of course, gets in the way of the meditation.

But the other strange thing is that the posture I was struggling to attain was nothing more than a product of my imagination. It existed only in this mental image I had of it. I was already alienated from the body. It was as if I was residing outside the body, and from there I was trying to make the body fit my image of what it was supposed to look like from the outside. Does that make sense? It's a completely alienated relationship. But I was so busy struggling to get the right posture that I never noticed.

At some point it occurred to me: how would the experience of sitting change if I abandoned this struggle and yet found ease in the posture? At the very least, it would improve samādhi, concentration. At the very least, it would do that. But it would also assist vipassanā, insight, because insight requires a subtlety and precision of awareness. If my relationship to the practice is so gross that what I'm trying to do is wrestle with the body to keep it still over the approved period of time, it's difficult for subtlety and precision to arise. Again, it's not impossible. With enough struggle, it can be done—slowly.

Painstakingly slowly—but it's not a very efficient way to practice.

So the simple fact, which we tend to lose sight of, is that we are bodies. That's what we are. But we need to be reminded of this from time to time because our minds have the capacity to separate us from our bodies. This is something about the human mind—perhaps no other species has this capacity. I don't

know; we may be the only one. But certainly in our species, our minds can separate us almost entirely from our bodies. In the ordinary everyday experience of this, our mind manages to persuade us that our drives, our desires, our fears, our hatreds, our anxieties are actually more real than the body.

Now from the Buddha's point of view, each of us is a sentient body. He calls it *satvijñānakāya*. *Kāya* is body, *vijñāna* is awareness or consciousness, and *sat* means "with." So a body with awareness, an aware body, a sentient body. Notice that he's saying our fundamental nature is not some esoteric mind state or spirit or whatever—our fundamental nature is this, physical, the body. But the body is sentient, and it knows, it is aware of, a world external to itself, which appears to be inhabited by other sentient bodies, shared by others. And there's another world, which is internal, known only to ourselves. We call this the mind, or the Buddha would call it the *citta*.

Now this awareness of the sentient body, as we mentioned before, is located. It has location. It's located here. *Here*. I am aware of this room—from where? Here. Where are my thoughts happening? Well, they're not happening over there. They're happening here, somehow. Even if I can't pinpoint the location, still I have this sense that it's here.

The power of the inner world, of *citta*, of the mind, enables us to escape from this sense of being located here. Have you ever had the experience of sitting in a meditation hall—let's say this one—being lost in imagination and thinking yourself to be somewhere else? Or has that only happened to me? Have you ever had the experience of being lost in thought and thinking yourself to be in the past or in the future, rather than now? Constantly? And when you consider this, it's seriously weird. But it shows us how powerful the mind is in its capacity to separate us from the body.

I can project myself into past or future, and it's more real to me than this. The classic example in meditation retreats is when we first arrive, and the past, the world we just left, is actually more real to us than here. Then we go through a period of time when we're actually here. And then once the mind starts to think, "Hey, wait a minute, it's coming to the end"—whammo—the post-retreat world is more real than here. It's so routine we don't notice it, but it is seriously strange. And similarly, situations other than here, somewhere else in the present, are more real than this.

Now these worlds are purely conceptual. They're just made up of concept. And it's within these conceptual worlds that I create an identity. I create myself in these worlds. And perhaps that's the only place I can create an identity. Maybe that's why I need these worlds.

The self, the identity that I create, can never actually escape its physicality. It's always here, even if it doesn't want to be. It still lives in this body—even though it would much prefer another.

It makes no difference. Here it is. It's inescapable. Everything happens here, and yet we live as if we are separated from here.

Consider walking meditation. If I'm walking up and down a path fully engaged with the practice, the

here-ness of this experience is quite clear. It's evident to me that this is happening here. But when I get lost in fantasy, while objectively I'm still here—people can see me—the felt sense of the here-ness of the experience is completely lost. And then I come back to here, I drop the world of fantasy, and I'm here again. So I find myself here, then somewhere else, then here again, then escaping somewhere else.

We get the same dynamic with emotion. When I'm sensitive to the feeling tone of the body, I find my emotion resides here as physicality, as body—basically as a set of physical sensations that might be quite disturbed, and they're here. The mind, from these sensations, creates a conceptual world. The body is disturbed, and the mind has to make sense of it. So it interprets it as a certain emotion: I'm grumpy, I'm upset. And then the mind, in that conceptual world, has to find reasons for being grumpy. There must be something happening in the conceptual world that's causing this.

So the mind goes through the files, picks out the appropriate one, makes that situation real—more real than this—and this confirms the disturbed sensations and feeds them. The sensations feed the emotion, and the whole thing perpetuates itself. The more I get lost in the immersion, the more my sense of reality drops away from this into the imagined conceptual world. Now this world may be located in the past, in the future, or in the present but away from me—triggered, for example, by other meditators. But the sense of the here-ness is gone.

When I'm intimate with the body, it's quite clear to me that this entire drama is occurring here. And when that perception is clear, I cannot sustain the emotion because I cannot sustain it without this imagined world being more real than this.

The mind is remarkably anxious to get away from the body. Sometimes because the physical world is painful. The body hurts. Everybody hurts. Sometimes you have just the normal physical pain of the body, but you can also have pain in the body that is actually created by the world of concepts. I think of something emotionally painful and I feel it in the body. The body then hurts. So of course I want to send the awareness away, perhaps to argue with that conceptual world. But again it's getting out from the body as much as possible.

So it's no wonder that we have a problematic relationship with the body. We get cut off from it, become strangers to our own body, and lose our sense of the body's language. We don't listen to it. We can't hear it. We can't understand what it's saying.

Most of the time we're in a world of language, of concept—what we normally call language, the blah blah blah. Language in this sense takes us into the world of concepts. The body also has a language, but its language is non-conceptual, restricted entirely to sensations. The body speaks in sensation. That's how it communicates.

We tend to be deaf to this language. We receive messages from the body only when these messages are very loud and very crude—such as, for example, that hurts. Or when we get sick, when we drive the body

so much because we're so caught up in the world of concept that we push the body beyond its limit. It's interesting how many people, when they go on holiday, fall ill. The body doubtlessly has been complaining for some considerable time, but we're completely, totally oblivious to it. The world of concept overrides it. No, I have to do this. But when the pressure is released, the body shouts out its message, and the message comes in the form of sickness.

So the body is always communicating, but it can only communicate in sensation. On the basis of the sensations we create perceptions, and on the basis of the perceptions we then create thoughts and so on. These perceptions are often false. The sensations are always true. The body never lies. The mind lies all the time, but the body never lies. Everything that it says is true—although the perceptions and thoughts and concepts that we create about that language may well be false. But the sensations themselves are always true.

This is one reason why in our practice we are urged to slow down. Because if we slow down, we have the opportunity to tune into these sensations. We're in the habit of blocking them out, and speed is one way that we do it. It's not just speed in itself—it's the speed which is triggered by the attempt to make real an image of the future.

Now, this can be quite mundane. Let's say there's a particularly nice lunch, and mindful of the body I scoop up a spoonful of this particularly nice lunch. I have an image of the satisfaction of eating it, and so the movement from here to here is as fast as I can manage it without actually hurling the food across the dining hall, which would be embarrassing. Basically what's going on is I've got an image of what I want within the body. The body is somewhere else, so I just have to move it as fast as possible from there to here.

Another example: if you're doing a strong stretch in the morning and you get the signal, "Okay, enough," how quickly do you back out of it? And why do you move that quickly? Isn't it because the mind rushes to the image—"this is over, so the body should no longer be like this, now it's supposed to be like that"—and it just goes, bang, there, as fast as possible? In that movement, what's real is not the body, in other words not the sensations, but the mental image. The body is racing to catch up with this. But we're not actually listening to the body; we're listening to the image, to the concept.

That's why we keep saying, when we go into a stretch and when we come out of a stretch, move slowly—to maximise the sensations, to listen to what the body is saying about this whole thing.

Similarly, the big mistake that we make when we're doing these stretches is to push too hard. When I'm pushing too hard, I'm trying to get the body from here to here. In that movement, what's the language I'm listening to? It's the concept. "The body's supposed to be there, so bloody well go there. And we'll talk about it afterwards." Scrunch. But if we're actually listening to the sensation, there's no way we're going to injure ourselves. Because the message will be loud and clear: "Stop here. This is far enough. Thank you very much."

So the whole business about slowing down is very largely to give us the opportunity to start tuning into the language of the body, which is the language of direct sensation.

When we do this, one thing we discover is the tension that we hold in the body. When the mind senses danger, the body defends itself. It defends itself by tightening, ready to ward off an attack or to launch into one. So tension always arises as a defense mechanism to a perceived threat, to a perception created by the mind.

Now, concept tends to last. I have a concept of something and that concept can last for a long time. I can make up my mind about something and ten years later I have exactly the same opinion. So the mind perceives a threat and then can believe that this threat remains, even when it's actually over. But the mind can be convinced that there's still a threat. This message is sent to the body, and so the body continues to hold the tension. These patterns of tension become habitual. They drop beneath awareness and we don't notice them anymore—except when we try to move the body and we discover that it won't move in the way that we wanted to, because suddenly it stops. I can't go any further.

Sometimes we sense these patterns of tension. Sometimes they're evident—we feel tightness in the shoulders, for example. Sometimes we experience them as areas of absence, the complete absence of sensation. In other words, the language here has been completely shut out. There's no sensation in this part of the body at all. And here, I suspect, is the deeper tension.

Sometimes, if you're doing a stretch, you start to move into an area, and it's not necessarily painful, but you get this message from the body: don't go there, back off. It's not necessarily a sensation—the sensation is still beneath awareness. But the message it's sending is so strong that even the mind can start to pick it up.

So we have these habits of tension held in the muscle and the fascia. These patterns of habitual tension create my sense of my body—my body that has these limitations, my body that can't sit comfortably. They condition the sense of reality, the sense of what's possible and what's not possible. All of this gets taken over by the world of concept and becomes absolutely fixed. And these concepts feed the body. And the body tenses because that's what it's told to do. So we find ourselves locked in.

This is the body that we struggle with when we try to do meditation practice. And of course this is why we do the body work as part of the meditation.

Now, if you're inclined to orthodoxy, you might be tempted to ask: did the Buddha and his students do body work? And if you're a learned scholar in these matters, you might say, "I've studied the suttas and I can find no reference to body work in there. So why are you doing it? This is heresy." Extending his arm, the monk extends his arm; bringing the arm back—it's certainly being mindful of the body, but is it doing body work as such? You could argue it is. You could certainly get a good lawyer and make a case for it.

But the Buddha didn't do body work, it seems—though he certainly walked a phenomenal amount of

distance. Thousands of kilometers. And this is extremely relevant to what we're coming to here.

There's certainly no explicit reference to body work in the suttas that I've come across. Strictly speaking, the answer is we don't know if the Buddha and his students did body work or not. And we cannot know. But we have to consider the context.

First of all, traditions do not transmit the blindingly obvious. This is the first thing. If we're looking back into the past, trying to work out what was going on—back during the Howard years, we had the history wars. And during that time, I remember reading a book on this, and there was a quote from the famous Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey, who wrote *The Tyranny of Distance*. He made the comment that if you are a historian, your job is to go back to the records left by people in the past and from those records work out what was going on for them in that world. And he said there is of course one thing that is never mentioned in historical records, and that is precisely that which for these people was blindingly obvious.

When we make a record, do we record the obvious? No. Why would we? It's obvious. So we don't make a record of it. In later times, when people are trying to work out what we were experiencing, what they will not have a record of is what we thought was completely obvious.

So the fact that the records don't mention certain things doesn't mean they weren't there.

They could mean that it's so obvious that there's no need to talk about them.

Was yoga being done at that time? Well, there's no reason to suppose it wasn't. The word was used. The kinds of practices we associate with yoga were being performed. So there's every reason to suppose that there would have been a yoga tradition there at the time.

The other thing, of course, is that the people of that time and place were far more physically relaxed, supple and robust than we are. Enormously so. They came from a non-mechanistic agricultural society where there were almost no machines. Everything was powered by human or animal muscle. They lived on the floor without furniture. In the case of the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, as Jane mentioned, they were used to walking long distances most days of their lives, in bare feet normally, in a very relaxed manner.

So these were people who were both extremely fit in our sense of the word, but also much more in their bodies than we are. Their relationship to the body would have been completely different from ours. Their bodies would have been much more open and relaxed than ours, and body awareness would have come much more easily and readily to them than it does for us.

Consider the contrast with how we treat our bodies. The body adapts to whatever posture it's forced to undergo over a period of time. And our basic posture is sitting in a chair—and if we're at work, hunched over, staring at a screen that's very close to us, maintaining that really artificial, out-of-balance posture for hours every day. And all the way through, it's associated with stress—in other words, threat. I'm at work. I've got to do this. Not much time. I have to be productive. My review is coming up in a couple of months'

time. And if I'm not productive, they'll sack me. This is what we're telling our bodies for years, even decades at a time.

So it's pretty obvious what happens. I come to a meditation retreat, I sit down on the floor, and what do I discover? I'm incredibly stiff and it hurts. Hardly surprising. Plus the world we live in—our minds will be spinning around a lot faster than the minds of people in simple village pre-literate cultures. And of course in material capitalism we live in a society in which social isolation and competition between individuals is endemic.

So we have a completely different relationship to the body. We bring this completely different relationship with us when we start doing meditation practice, and it is a long way from being helpful—as well as totally different from what the Buddha and his students would have experienced.

If we look at how the body was related to back in those days, I'd like to refer to one story that we find in the Chīvarasutta, the Robe Sutta. This is about the Buddha's disciple Mahā Kassapa, or Big Kassapa. "Mahā" could be translated as big, so Big Kassapa. Maybe he was a big guy. In Sanskrit, Mahākāśyapa. He was a senior disciple of the Buddha and was well known as an ascetic—one of the major ascetics. He lived in the forest. He devoted himself to practice. He avoided the kinds of social entanglements that were part of the Buddha's life and part of any monk's or nun's life who spent time with lay people.

He had a reputation as a very fierce disciplinarian. There are these wonderful stories about him absolutely putting the boot into Venerable Ānanda for being slack. And in the tradition, he's come to represent tough, macho Dharma. He was a bloke's bloke when it came to the Dharma. He's also the one the Zen tradition regarded as the first ancestral teacher—he was the one who received the transmission, the mind-to-mind transmission, from the Buddha.

So in the Chīvarasutta, Big Kassapa is an old man, and he's recounting his memories of his first encounter with the Buddha. Now, before he ordained, Kassapa was a wealthy farmer. One day during the harvest, he was supervising the workers in the field and he suddenly saw that in the process of harvesting the crop, innumerable small creatures were being killed. He was overcome by remorse and horror at this and decided he had to renounce the world. Which was a bit of a worry because he was married, and the couple were very fond of each other.

So he went home wondering how this was going to pan out. But as it happened, his wife, who was at home supervising the winnowing of the grain, had the same realisation, and with it the same determination to renounce the world. She was worried about how she was going to explain it to her husband. So when they met and discovered that they were on the same page, they were very pleased.

They ordained themselves and walked off together. At some point they came to a crossroads, and Kassapa turned to his wife and said, "Look, we're ascetics now. It's inappropriate for a man to be walking with a woman, so we should go in separate directions." And she said, "That's a very good idea." And they

separated. And Kassapa headed off in search of enlightenment.

Now, probably some of you would want to know what happened to his wife.

Her name was Bada Kapilani, and she went to Savatthi, which is the capital of the kingdom of Kosala, and she went to Jetavana monastery, which was the Buddha's headquarters. She hung out there and listened to the teachings. But this was quite early on, and there were no bhikkhunis in those days. So she actually joined a local nunnery of non-Buddhist female ascetics, because there were nuns in other traditions at the time. After five years, the bhikkhuni order was created and she was able to ordain as a bhikkhuni. Not long afterwards she became fully awakened, and thereafter she specialised in the education of younger bhikkhunis, particularly in Vinaya, the monastic discipline. The Buddha praised her as foremost among the bhikkhunis in her ability to remember previous lives. So presumably her mindfulness was pretty powerful to be able to do that. She was okay.

Kasapa, on the other hand, is walking down the road when he meets the Buddha. Actually, he doesn't quite meet him. The Buddha is coming down the road and decides it's time to sit down for a bit. So he leaves the road and sits underneath a tree, meditating. Kasapa comes down the opposite way and sees this ascetic sitting under a tree, and immediately knows: this is my teacher. He goes across and they have this encounter, and the Buddha promptly recognises him as a good quality student. So they get together and make a connection.

The Buddha gives him three practices that will define him the rest of his life. The first is all about the practice of ethics, sila. The second is his devotion to the study of Dharma. But it's the third one that I want to focus on here. The Buddha says, "Kasapa, you should train yourself in this way: I will not abandon mindfulness immersed in body, associated with joy."

The instruction here is first of all always be mindful of body, and secondly to do it in such a way that the pleasure of it is evident.

Whenever I've seen statues of Ananda, he looks quite calm and serene, but someone mentioned that every time they've seen a statue of Mahakasapa, he's grimacing—really, really grimacing. He's the fierce old forest ascetic, the tough guy. But apparently he was a very joyful tough guy.

That actually comes out in the Zen tradition, because when the transmission occurred, all the students were assembled for a Dharma talk. They're waiting for this learned Dharma talk, and the Buddha held up a flower. All the students are kind of staring at him, thinking, "What, has he found his inner hippie? I hope he didn't break Vinaya by picking that flower. When is he going to start talking?" And in the whole audience, only Mahakasapa—and the Chinese translates it as "cracked a smile"—it's like his whole face cracked open with a smile when he saw that flower. The Buddha saw the smile and said, "You're the only one who's recognised the Dharma." And Kasapa got the transmission.

So he's got both aspects. He's this fierce, uncompromising, macho ascetic, and he's got this joy about him.

It's one of the things that makes him so interesting.

When you're speaking about joy here, are you meaning the same joy that you talked about with rapture as a factor of awakening? Isn't rapture what comes before joy, before passaddhi?

Passaddhi is the fifth factor. But the word used here is not rapture. The Pali word is sukha.

Sāta. S-long-A-T-A—pleasure, joy. This is apparently a standard word for joy. It's not a technical term like rapture; it's just joy, pleasure.

So always be mindful of the body in such a way that a pleasurable connection with it is evident. The verb translated here as "not abandoned" is *vijahati*, which can also mean "to give up"—in other words, to not give up. So even when you go through periods where you forget the body or you cannot feel any joy associated with it, still make this relationship central to your practice. Learn to recognize what disconnects you from the body and the joy associated with the body. What gets in the way of the pleasure? Learn to recognize that when it's not there.

Also, similarly, *vijahati* can be taken as "to dismiss." So do not dismiss the role of the body in your awakening. Do not think that you've somehow transcended it.

The Buddha gives Maha Kassapa this very brief teaching which contains an enormous amount, but he makes it clear: the role of the body is absolutely central, and within that, the role of pleasure is absolutely central.

I was reminded of this through my work with Kit Laughlin, who is my bodywork guru. When he's teaching, he demonstrates a posture, and as he does it, he makes these strange sounds. He goes, "Ah, that feels great!" He ties himself into some impossible knot. "Ah, fantastic, that feels fantastic!" I used to look at this and think, this guy, he's just laying it on. He's trying to encourage us because when we try anything like that, it's excruciatingly painful. At some point I realized it's actually the truth—he genuinely does feel this pleasure. And as I've come to know him, I've realized this is a man who is constantly feeling pleasure from the body. It's just his normal state, because he fully inhabits it. And therefore, it's pleasurable.

We do that when we go to our cushions in the morning. Also, when we do a heavy massage, for example, it's sometimes quite painful, but it feels really pleasurable at the same time. It's physically painful, but it's pleasurable mentally somehow—it's very satisfying. It's like when you get a really deep massage and it really hurts because it's fantastic.

But to me, bodywork is very largely the task of finding pleasure and ease in the body. If I'm doing bodywork, that's what I'm trying to do. It has to do with the relationship with habitual tension and the relaxing into it. And that has to do with the quality of the awareness.

Take the example of massage. Getting a deep massage is painful but pleasurable. I find that as soon as I start to resist, it's just painful. But if I'm not resisting, if I'm surrendering to it—yes, there's a painful

quality, but there's a deeper pleasure. I find the same thing in stretching, in bodywork. This is why the standard instruction you get from me is: find the tight line, breathe, and relax. It's about putting the body in a particular form and then relaxing the awareness into it.

If there's a relaxation and a sensitivity of the awareness, first of all the sensation becomes clear. We can actually hear what the body is saying and not get it mixed up with the perception. And by relaxing into it, the pleasure which is available emerges. With that, the body stretches out. It gives way, it surrenders, it lets go. It recognizes the absence of threat. And in that recognition, it relaxes.

The function of pain, of course, is to recognize threat. It's like when I was a chasseur, for example—there used to be a difference between playable pain and painful pain.

And I know I'd be going in somewhere and you could see from the response of the individual I was massaging, or just feel it, that it was painful pain. It wasn't right to go in there. And if you're feeling it, you're feeling the tension, the resistance. Well, I was feeling the tension, but I was also feeling resistance. But it was a healthy resistance. It was the body's response saying, this is painful because pain is the response of the body to danger. If you go in more, it's going to cause harm.

And for practical purposes you've always got to be able to distinguish between these two. Certainly sometimes people who are too keen in adopting the right posture don't recognise this. They have the underlying tension unconscious and so the body is tight. Pain comes up and people cause damage. So it's always about the quality of the awareness. And if you need to back off, you know you need to back off. And that's what you do. You back off, particularly in the stretching, when you recognise the danger signal. This, again, is the language the body is speaking. And so you just back off just a little bit. Just enough. And then relax.

Finding the right point at which to relax is absolutely central, and that requires the sensitivity of the awareness. If you find the right point, the relaxation will occur. The body will drop its defence mechanism and just do what it naturally can do. So Kassapa must have become an expert at that. Yes, I would say so. I suspect he would have been a good masseur.

There's also this quality of fierce joy. You can be fiercely joyful. In our current culture you might think of an evangelist—someone who is very evangelical about spreading the word can be very fiercely joyful, really having a good time whilst being extremely fierce. So fierceness doesn't necessarily have to be a negative thing or an unpleasant thing or a painful angry thing. Footy players—we need say no more.

So this work of tracking the body is foundational, not in the sense that we do it first and then move on to something more esoteric, but foundational in the sense that the floor is foundational. Here we are on the floor, and it's not that we're going to at some point start floating above it. Well, you might. But the rest of us, it's unlikely.

Actually I met a monk in Thailand who taught mettā meditation and he claimed that one day he was

sitting with his eyes closed radiating mettā and he started to develop a headache. And the headache progressed. And he noticed that the headache was strangely located only at the top of the head. He opened his eyes and he realised he had floated up and was pressed against the ceiling, and the spell was broken and he fell to the floor. I have to admit I didn't believe a word that he said. I was a bit suspicious of this particular monk.

So I can be working with the citta, with the mind, in very subtle ways, but when I'm doing it—where am I doing it? Here. When am I doing it? Now, in this body. There's a groundedness to the relationship to the body.

Take for example thinking. There's a world of difference between thinking of the future knowing, sensing that I'm doing it here and now, versus thinking of the future when I'm actually doing it in the future. It's a world of difference between the two. The body provides this here-now groundedness to our experience, which is completely foundational.

Let's take the whole project of meditating. Let's say that I'm told what you have to do is sit down and watch the breathing—this being a not uncommon instruction. Now I hear this through and as concept. So I've got a concept of the job that I'm supposed to do.

First of all, I have to sit down and follow my breathing. That's the job. But notice: the "I" that has to sit down and follow the breathing is itself a product of concept. There's someone who inhabits this body, quite mysteriously, who now has to attend to some aspect of this body—the breathing.

So here I am, more or less floating around this body, reaching out for my familiar world, which is the world of concept, where breathing intrudes only as an occasional visitor. I speak from experience in this case. And from that world, I have to make contact with the breathing and then stay with it over a period of time. It's bloody hard work. I know from experience. It's quite difficult.

But what if I simply allow the body to be sensed? It's already speaking to me. There's already sensation. What if I simply allowed a sensing of myself to sense this body? And this sensing includes the movements within the body that we call breathing.

So this is a whole different project. This is the project of, first of all, blocking our conceptual preoccupations, dropping the preoccupations that block intimacy with body. It's the concepts that are getting in the way, including the concept of "I'm supposed to be sitting here meditating." That too gets in the way.

And it comes about through relaxing tension. Because tension represents the basic way of separating from the body. Or look at it from the other way: the body withdrawing, because it's closed in on itself. And the only messages coming out are danger, danger, danger—don't go there, don't go there, don't go there.

So the way in is through intimacy. Intimacy requires relaxation, and when there is intimacy, breathing

appears. And so does everything else, for that matter. And intimacy cannot be forced. It comes about through relaxation into tension. Find the tension and relax into it. Tension is resistance, and resistance is fueled by fear and rejection. So the practice of finding the clinging, finding the tension, the holding, and relaxing into it dissolves that sense of paranoia, essentially, and the clinging that's associated with it. And this leads to intimacy.

This whole relationship to body—for example, establishing a meditation posture—we have to learn to do it from the inside out. What we normally do is we do it from the outside in. I have a concept, an image of what the body should look like, and I then try to force the body into fitting that image, to conform to it.

So, for example, one obvious case: I'm told I should not move. So I force myself to be still. And this very force increases tension in the body and increases a sense of alienation from the body. I actually find myself complaining about it: "My body won't do what I want it to do." So here's me and there's the body. And they're obviously separated.

What we want is to create a posture from the inside out, feeling our way into sensation and the ease that's available, that's characteristic of the body that's fully inhabited by awareness. In other words, mindfulness immersed in body. So the way in is through feeling and relaxation, finding the sensation and a sense of ease and balance from inside, and then making adjustments from there—not thinking about what it looks like, not looking at it from the outside, but feeling it from the inside.

And the whole role of the bodywork that we've been playing with in the morning—it's not something that we do to aid the meditation. It is meditation. This is really a fundamental point. We bring the same sensitivity and the same awareness to these movements as we do to the formal sitting meditation practice. It's not something that we do before the first meditation period. It's something that we do before the first sitting period, yes, but it's not what we do before the first meditation period. It is a meditation.

And the more it becomes that—the more we feel it as a meditation—the more we find awareness starts to actually spread out and inhabit the body. And when that happens, the body relaxes, and everything flows from that.

Is that any different than what you mean when you say, when you sit, the first thing you do is establish a posture?

Yes, establishing the posture is part of this whole process. Sometimes I like to ask students: When does the sitting period begin? In my early days, when I did Zen, we had these elaborate rituals of the bells. And you could always time the exact moment that the sitting period began. It was like when that final bell hit.

Because the rule was, from that point you can't move. They'd have three bells to begin a period with a certain number of seconds between each bell. And the first two bells, that period, was the time you could kind of get yourself settled. The third one goes, that's it. No more movement. So I had this sense that that's when the sitting period begins.

These days, for me, the sitting period begins the moment I begin to sit down. Because from that moment onwards, I'm constructing a posture. By the time I've done it, I am already meditating. There's nothing to begin. I've already started. And it's quite a natural and seamless flow. Similarly, the moving meditation begins as soon as I start to move out of the posture. I'm already doing the moving meditation.

A student raised a dilemma about pain in meditation, particularly knee pain, and the question of whether to continue going into painful sensations with awareness—which can be very productive—or whether one might be causing damage.

This is the essential point: if there's injury or the threat of injury, then it's ludicrous to go through the pain. And that's why, as a practical matter, a meditator has to learn to distinguish between the two.

As a rough rule of thumb, be really careful about knees. They're easy to damage. The pain we feel in the knee in most cases, if we're sitting cross-legged, is because of inadequate flexibility in the pelvis, the hip, and the ankle. So if I'm sitting cross-legged and I've got pain in the knee, this is referred pain, and it may be that I'm not actually addressing where the stiffness actually is, that I can't feel it. It's vanished. It's so deep, it's completely absent.

So in practice you've got to be particularly careful about knees, and especially if there is in fact already an injury. I've got an injury in the left knee, and I'm very cautious with it. There's always got to be that care—if there's an injury you've got to be really careful. And in practical terms you've got to learn when the sensation is telling you to back off or when the sensation is an invitation to keep going. How to make that decision, you develop over a period of time.

The first lesson I got in this was when I was doing my first three-month retreat at the Mahasi Centre. We sat for an hour, which was hard for me, and it got to the point where the last ten minutes of every sitting was really painful in the knees—actually, mostly in the left knee. But I would religiously not move until the period ended and just note pain.

And then one day, instead of pain arising, bliss arose. The legs felt blissful. And I thought, that's it, I've got it. So I would just happily sit there. The retreat ended, and I was running around, organizing my way out of Burma, flying to Bangkok, finding a hotel. And the first time I sat down to meditate, as soon as I crossed my legs, it was excruciating. I had definitely damaged something. But it was covered over with the bliss of samādhi.

Someone asked if the damage might have come from all the running around rather than the sitting. But all I was doing was just normal movement, so I don't see why that would have caused damage. I suspect I just pushed it too far. But all the danger signals of the body had been obliterated by the power of the samādhi.

that convinced me there was no problem. A false message. So it can be really tricky. In practice, you've got to be very, very careful. You've got to pick your ground where you choose to stay. And also, the whole thing about backing off is important.

If the awareness is clear enough, you can move forward to a position where you're getting a sensation, and the language, what you're being told, is "back off." You back off just enough and then stay there. But how much is just enough? At what point do you hear that message correctly? It's not automatic. There's a sensitivity that you have to cultivate around this. I think there's an art to it.

I haven't sat cross-legged for years, but I've been sitting a lot in this retreat and getting a lot of the time without any pain at all—less pain than I've had for years, actually. And I think there's a reason why I developed a problem with my knees. In a way, those things are coming out in the meditation, often in relation to sensation. I think it's been a really productive process, and I think my knees are improving through this process of doing all this cross-legged sitting. But I'm doing it differently—I'm coming from a different place emotionally. So is the emotion attached to the sensation important?

Well, I think factoring the damage was all of this sort of over-determined, effortful approach and everything associated with that. So it's all part of the package.

I find—and we talked about this before—how the basic model is dependent arising, which is multi-dimensional. The thing is to find a way in. Once you're in, then everything starts to open up. Different people have different ways in, but once in, different people will find themselves heading along different trajectories.

And certainly in terms of body-mind connection, what we call the emotional aspect of sensation is really important. Because the body locks in certain patterns, and these can be associated with particularly held emotions. Plus, the quality of effort is always really important. Too much effort smothers the sensitivity that you need for this kind of work.

I have a question about body pleasure and finding a way in. It's probably conditioning, but most body pleasure that I can recall in my life has to do with things like massages or other activities I don't do anymore. It's hard to find a way in to pleasurable sensations in the body. Pain is really obvious, but can you suggest any ways to notice or find pleasurable sensation in the body?

Is there anything pleasant about sitting there now?

No.

Nothing at all?

No.

When you step out and look up at the night skies, is there anything pleasant there?

The seeing is pleasant.

And that's part of body?

Oh, okay.

So the pleasure of the environment can kind of filter into the body if we let it.

There's a very good book by Rick Hanson called "Hardwiring Happiness." It's all about noticing pleasure, noticing joy, how to cultivate that. We tend to—he's a neuropsychologist, and he's talking about how we have a mental filter. We tend to look for pain and fear, look for things that are dangerous. Instead of that, we need to look for things that are enjoyable. I remember hearing someone say that a key to jhāna, for example, was to notice something pleasant about your meditation sit. Like if you're breathing, to notice something pleasant about the breathing. And then as you notice that, it gets stronger and stronger, and it starts to develop your concentration. It's about taking in the good, focusing on the good, focusing on the pleasure, even if it's just a minimal thing in the distance. The more you focus on it, the more you can see. Rick Hanson talks about that. He's a Buddhist, and he's quite good.

Yes. But can I recommend you start enjoying the place, the environment and the situation of being here. No particular stress. Nothing particularly you have to do.

It's quite an interesting place. Quite beautiful. The weather is pleasant. Really good showers here—a nice warm shower is wonderful. And sitting in the same room as the Buddha is nice, isn't it? Yes, that's nice.

So basically, it's like learning to retune the radar. If the radar is habitually seeking out danger and pain, then you've got to redirect it toward pleasure. And this pleasure isn't necessarily in the fifth sense of touch. It could be more in seeing, hearing, smelling, or minding—overall vedanā. Not necessarily touch sensation, but it can start to filter into that domain as well.

I once was seeing quite deeply and I read Ajahn Sumedho's book, and he said something about welcoming dukkha, and something really clicked. It wasn't just understanding dukkha, but *welcoming* dukkha. That was pretty amazing for me.

You said something, Patrick, about letting go of resistance in relation to physical tension. But it applies to everything, doesn't it? The process works in the same way?

Yes, and letting go is interesting because it's not doing something—it's ceasing to do what we habitually do. I can't let go in the sense of "I'll just do letting go." It's actually a kind of waiting. There's a certain quality of waiting, and at some point I stop doing what I normally do. And that's the letting go.

Does it come back to not being afraid of pleasure?

Yes, we're going to get to that in the not too distant future. We're going to have a talk about that.

You mentioned it already, didn't you?

Yes, but I'm going to talk about it more.

Why is the sutta called "Jīvaka"?

Because Kassapa had a robe that he had brought from home—he had ordained himself. And the Buddha had this old rag robe that he'd sewn together from cloth found in a charnel ground. When the Buddha was giving Kassapa his ascetic practices, he said, "Take this robe. Use this robe." And Kassapa said, "Oh no, you need a robe, so take mine." So they swapped robes, and it's the only recorded instance of the Buddha giving his robe to someone.

This was taken up in the Zen tradition, where the reception of the robe became a sign of transmission. In Zen they have the story that he received the robe and the bowl, and of course in the Pāli tradition he did receive the bowl.

Do you remember when that was? When the Buddha died, word was sent to Mahākassapa, and he came as fast as he could from the forest, but the Buddha died before he arrived. All the lay people gathered to burn his body, but the devas wouldn't let the fire start because Kassapa hadn't turned up. So Kassapa arrives, circumambulates the pyre, bows to the Buddha, and it spontaneously bursts into flames. You can see the traditional paintings of Kassapa bowing to the recumbent Buddha with the pyre and flames.

Then Kassapa collected the ashes in the bowl, and he was the one who distributed the relics, but he kept the bowl. And of course, to complete the story, he didn't actually die as an old man when his life was naturally coming to an end. He entered a mountain—the mountain opened up and he walked inside, sat down, and the mountain closed. When the next Buddha comes, the mountain will open, he'll emerge with the bowl and the robe, and offer them to the next Buddha.

It would be good to witness that encounter and to question Kassapa about his experience.

Okay. Thank you very much.

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