Energy Body: Instructions (1)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:34:11

Good morning everyone.

Just a general word about the instructions on this retreat before we get into them. There's a lot of material in the instructions. Part of the reason for that is because people are different. People need different things, and different ways of working work for different people, better or worse, or at different times. So I want to be quite generous in what we're putting out so that hopefully everyone can find ways of working that work for them, that are useful.

The material is not only quite extensive, it's also quite different. Some of you, at least, will be encountering the kinds of material that we're working through for the first time or are quite new to it. Just the fact of it being new and unfamiliar also makes it seem like quite a lot. So please don't get overwhelmed with the instructions as we go through. I'll be repeating quite a lot, putting material out and recapitulating it at some point, perhaps the next day or later on. Do ask questions and do take notes, as I mentioned last night, if you like to. There are also the recordings, so you can listen again in due time and glean more as time goes by.

I mentioned last night that we're going to start with and really establish as a basis for the work that we're doing what I'm calling practicing with the energy body. So let's talk a little bit about mindfulness of the body, which the Buddha emphasized, to set this up and put it in context.

We could delineate three modes of mindfulness of the body—three kinds or types of mindfulness of the body. They're actually not really separate, but let's separate them now just to try and make something clear about the direction we want to go in.

*The first is what we might call mindfulness of sensations.** This is, in the insight meditation tradition, by far the most common when people talk about mindfulness of the body and also in the mindfulness movement. For example, if you take your hand right now and gently reach down to the floor by your side and just press gently—just touch and then press gently into the floor at your side—bringing your mindfulness, bringing the attention to the sensations that this gives rise to in the hand. What does that feel like right now in terms of the sensations of warmth or coolness or pressure? Notice how if you slightly move your hand around or at least move at the wrist while keeping the hand in place, there's a shifting texture, almost kaleidoscopic shifting of the sensations in the hand, through the fingers, in the palm. This is very simple and what most people can very easily relate to or have a lot of experience with—mindfulness of sensations.

Or, for example, if you're familiar with the raisin exercise, you put that raisin in your mouth or some other food in your mouth, and the sensations of taste, but also of texture in the mouth, touch—we can bring mindfulness to those sensations. Or washing your hands, the hands under a running tap of cold water or hot water—what does that feel like? The coldness, the heat of the water, the liquidity, the wetness, the sensations there. You're walking barefoot in your bedroom and you stub your toe against the foot of the bed. Again, mindfulness can come to those sensations, that throbbing, that pulsing, those unpleasant sensations. So most people are very familiar with that first type, mindfulness of sensations.

*The second type or mode of mindfulness of body we could talk about is mindfulness of the materiality of the body.** For example, I mentioned this yesterday as well. In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Buddha talks about contemplating one's death or actually the decomposition of the body at death, this body or other bodies. Also in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Mindfulness Sutta, the Buddha talks about contemplating one's body parts. So again, this is to do with materiality. It's contemplating the hair on the head, the hair on the body, the teeth, the bones, the liver, the blood, the spleen, the bile, all the different body parts, the muscles, the tissues, the fat that make up the body. So contemplating the materiality of the body in terms of its parts.

And again also in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta the Buddha talks about contemplating the materiality of the body in terms of what was then known as the four elements: earth, air, fire and water and their presence in the body, throughout the body—the element of liquidity, the element of solidity.

Now these are in the second mode of mindfulness of the materiality of the body. This is actually a contemplation if we think about it. It's different from the contemplation of the mindfulness of sensations, the first mode. It's a contemplation. It actually includes the imagination and conceptions of the body. So it's less, if you like, direct in some ways than the mindfulness of sensations mode. It's a contemplation that includes the imagination and conceptions of the body.

And those conceptions might include conceptions such as "unclean." So the body parts in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta are generally—most people interpret what the Buddha means there as contemplation of what's unclean in the body. And this serves the function of reducing clinging and attachment and also lust. Clinging and attachment to the body and also lust in terms of other bodies.

So this kind—the second mode of mindfulness of the body, materiality—will include conception of the body. Sometimes it's the conception of something unclean or not unclean, but it could also be the conception of beautiful and holy. That would be quite a different spin on it than what you're generally used to in the Theravadan tradition, the Pali canon.

With regard to the four elements—the earth, air, fire, water—again, what's the sort of tone and direction and conception of that? I know someone who every morning gets up and, as part of her practice—it's almost a quasi-shamanic practice—goes outside and bows to the four elements present in nature, throughout nature, throughout the natural world and also in one's body. There's a sense in that practice of reverence, of holiness for these four elements.

But one can also spin or direct that practice in a very neutral way. It's just a kind of deconstruction of the body into its elemental parts, much as we might these days deconstruct—instead of talking about four elements, more modern science would talk about molecules or atoms, and that would be a similar sort of scientific materialist deconstruction. It's more neutral, and again, it's designed to let go of attachment and identification with the body.

So there's the mode of mindfulness of the body of sensations, the mode of mindfulness of the body regarding materiality, the material body. And then the third one is what we're going to focus most on in this retreat, and that's the mindfulness of the body—the mode of mindfulness of the body, the mindfulness of what I'm going to call the energy body, the space of the energy of the body.

Now, to some of you, that will sound very abstract and a bit like some kind of hypothetical thing that you're being asked to believe in or some kind of new age concept. But actually, I really do not mean it in that way. What I'm talking about is just a way of sensing, a way of sensing body and body space that we can shift in and out of, but that with practice can become very, very familiar to us. This way of sensing this energy body—very accessible and actually very normal.

So philosophically, we're talking about a phenomenological reality, if you like. This is actually a way of experiencing the body. It's actually how we experience if we don't necessarily layer too much on in terms of concepts. It's a style of attention, that's all, that reveals, opens the experience up in a certain way. So rather than a whole big construct and hypothetical sort of new agey thing, it's not that.

Actually, if we just think about this for a second, the mode of mindfulness of the body in terms of materiality actually needs, for example, years of high school biology to know all the body parts and all this. And it's quite culturally determined as a view. So for instance, whether we tend to see matter and materiality in terms of the four elements, as they did in the time of the Buddha, or whether we see matter and materiality in terms of molecules and atoms, etc., as we do culturally in our time and age—which is just something that we've received from the culture, from our education.

So that—not to say it's wrong or right, it's important, it certainly has its truth—but the point is that it's actually informed by conceptuality, this contemplation of materiality. So when I talk about this third mode of mindfulness of the body, the mindfulness of the energy body, I'm really talking about experience, not talking about some elaborate sort of religious belief or something like that at all.

When I talk about the body, the energy body, I really mean the whole space, actually a little bit bigger than the physical body. When I say the whole body, the whole body space—I'm going to use this over and over and over in this retreat—I really mean, as I said, a little bit bigger than the body. If for instance you're sitting on a chair, it would include even the space underneath your bottom, beneath the bottom of the chair, between the ground and the floor and the bottom of the chair.

So it's almost like an oval or an ellipse or something, or an egg shape. It doesn't necessarily have fixed

borders. It can be quite amorphous or nebulous in terms of where it ends. But the experience then is this region, this area of what we could call—let's call it energy. That's the name I'm giving to it. But what I really mean is the tone of that space, the tone of the whole body space, the vibration, the feel, the texture of it, if you like.

As I mentioned last night, this is something we're going to emphasize and keep as a basis for the work of this retreat throughout the retreat. So we're going to really emphasize it at the start and then we're going to keep it as a thread and a foundation for all the other work that we do—this sensitivity to the whole body space, its energy, its vibration, its feel, its texture, its tone.

Now, why? Why place so much emphasis on this energy body experience and the sensitivity to the whole body energy? Well, there are a few reasons.

The first is that we can practice relating to this energy body in a certain way, which I'll explain and go through today, to cultivate what we call samādhi. S-A-M-A-D-H-I is a Pali and Sanskrit word, samādhi. Now, oftentimes that word gets translated as concentration. But I don't really want to use that English word. I want to keep it in the Pali or Sanskrit—samādhi. And what I really mean is not simply a focusing of the mind, a steadiness of the attention, a concentration on some small point or something. What I really mean is an awareness, a sensitivity to this whole body space, a little bit bigger than the whole body.

When the samādhi is developing and cultivating, there's a whole range of experience of the way that energy body feels. Well-being starts to permeate to different degrees—maybe not that remarkable, to different degrees—it permeates that energy body space. Restfulness permeates it. This is an aspect of samādhi, but also energization. So it feels like a very restful kind of space, but it's also energized and bright. The energies may feel sometimes soothing and healing and harmonized.

So the whole body is involved. There's some degree of comfort or well-being or pleasure even. Why is that important? Because not only is that a lovely space to inhabit, it's also very good for the mind.

This samadhi, to whatever degree—and there's really an almost infinitely deep potential there—forms a resource, a deepening resource for the whole being. To cultivate that samadhi, to have that direction in practice at times, that intention to develop this well-being, this sphere of harmonized, comfortable, perhaps even pleasant energy that is bright, awake, energized, yet restful—this is a really important resource for the whole being. So that's one reason why we're going to emphasize it. And that resource pays off in all kinds of ways in one's practice and in one's life.

The second reason is that we want to develop a general deepening sensitivity to the energy body and the feel of the energy body, so that this kind of experience—of an energy body, of the energy of the body in that space—becomes more and more familiar to us. We're developing our sensitivity to it and its experience, its changing experience. Why? Because that sensitivity to the energy body will form another kind of resource for us. It allows us one very helpful way to be aware of our emotions, because they reflect

in the energy body, and also ways of working with difficult energies or difficult emotions through the energy body. So the sensitivity is important in itself because it brings awareness, which is very important, and it also enables us to work skillfully with all emotions, but especially the more difficult ones.

The gradually developing sensitivity to the energy body, which we can cultivate in practice, is very important as a basis and a kind of mainstay, a thread in regards to imaginal work, imaginal practice—as I'll explain all these different parts as we go through the retreat. It turns out that sensitivity to the energy body allows us to pick up on the resonances of different images and how they resonate in the being, both emotionally and energetically. This allows us to navigate with images, navigate the practice in different directions, and also discern which images are helpful for us, helpful for the being, for what I'm going to call soul-making.

Sensitivity to the energy body as we practice imaginal work also keeps us connected. There's always a kind of mindfulness of the body involved in imaginal practice. Without that, it's daydreaming. What's characteristic of daydreaming is I'm not in touch with my body—I don't feel the body and the energy body. So the sensitivity to the energy body also allows a greater degree of sensitivity in general with regard to images. And again, that differentiates imaginal practice from just daydreaming.

Today we're going to focus on samadhi, on this aspect, this deepening resource in terms of shaping the energy body. Now we could easily spend a very long retreat just on that—it's a huge thread of our path. I would say almost infinitely developable, so it could be a very long retreat. But this is the primary focus for today's practice. And again, if you're listening and doing this at home and have longer, you may want to spend longer developing the samadhi. We'll keep coming back to it.

So again, what does this word mean? Samadhi doesn't just mean focusing the attention or steadiness of attention or concentrating on one point somewhere. A steadiness of attention, a focusing of the attention is one element of what I'm calling samadhi, but it's just one element. What's more characteristic or more important in the samadhi, or as important, is this whole body awareness, this space. So awareness is permeating this energy body space. And there's some degree—to some depth, with a lot of range here—some degree of comfort or well-being or pleasure even in that space. The mind wants to fill that space because it feels relatively comfortable. There's well-being, there's pleasure there sometimes. And the energies in that space feel harmonized and bright and energized and restful.

This is not an on-off thing—I have samadhi or I don't have it, I'm in it or I'm out of it. It's more a spectrum, a range of deepening possibility that shares those characteristics for much of that range.

So can we practice tending to, just gently shaping and caring for and nourishing the body energies, the feeling of the body energies, and tending to a sense of well-being? What is it in our way of practicing—which I'll explain soon—that will tend to and nourish and support a sense of well-being through the body or somewhere in the body, a sense of energy, a sense of pleasure even? And can we tend to that in practice? This is the intention of samadhi practice: to tend to this well-being, this more open

energy, the pleasantness. Can we do that tending? Can we take care of that and have that direction of intentionality without grasping, without getting tight?

One of the things that really helps us not get tight is to approach this with genuine playfulness. We're playing with this experience of the energy body, exploring the energies in a way that can be deeply creative. There's no right or wrong way of doing it—you can experiment freely. This playfulness and experimentation opens up countless possibilities, helping to lighten the whole endeavor and keep it alive rather than falling into that constricted success-failure mentality. This playful quality itself becomes one of our supports.

I think what would be most helpful now is to do a guided meditation together. I'll take us through some of the possibilities for tending to and being aware of the energy body, exploring different ways of caring for these energies as I've mentioned.

Take a few moments to settle into your meditation posture. We can discuss posture more later if anyone needs guidance, but what's essential now is that you feel relatively comfortable. The body should be upright without being rigid—balanced and simultaneously open. We're establishing an ideal balance of the whole being, mind and body together, through the posture itself.

The posture both reflects and expresses this beautiful balance: uprightness, wakefulness, brightness, while at the same time manifesting openness, softness, receptivity. This ideal balance of heart and mind finds expression through the body, and we simply set things up this way from the beginning.

You might want to very gently roll the pelvis forward and allow the rib cage to lift up and out—but nothing forced here. It's quite subtle, just opening up the posture, bringing in a touch of uprightness while remaining completely relaxed, soft, nothing tight or rigid.

Now take a moment to engage the first mode of mindfulness of the body. Feel into your hands and the sensations there right now—the flickering, dancing quality of sensations, perhaps warmth in certain areas or coolness. Notice how they feel if they're touching each other or resting on your legs. Can you sense any tingling in the fingers or palms?

Staying with this first mode of mindfulness, tune into the sensations where your body meets the cushion, chair, or bench. How does that contact feel? Perhaps warm or cool, pressure, hardness—simply notice these basic sensations of contact.

And your legs, feet, whatever is connecting with the floor right now—what are those simple sensations of contact there? Can you feel that?

You might scan through the body now, beginning with the face and head. Notice any tension, any holding or tightness. With the mind, simply relax. See if you can soften as much as possible—perhaps around the eyes or mouth, any holding in the jaw. Just feel it and relax.

Move to the throat and neck. Again, tune into the sensations and release, letting go, letting be. It doesn't matter whether all the tension dissolves—just this movement of relaxing.

The shoulders—feel if there's any tension or holding and let them drop toward the floor. The arms, upper back, sensing into the sensations. If there's tightness or holding, just relax. The upper chest, and the belly—sensing in, tuning in to whatever sensations are there, and if you feel tension, simply relaxing as much as you can.

Now, is it possible to open up the awareness so that it stretches to fill a region or space that's just a little bit bigger than the whole physical body? The awareness is expanding now, not focusing on one particular point here or there in the body, but expanding to fill a space larger than the physical form.

Within that expanded awareness, perhaps you can sense the tone of the body's uprightness—a very subtle feeling that pervades the entire space, this quality of uprightness.

The awareness will keep shrinking over and over again. I'll talk about this more later. It will keep contracting, so simply notice when it shrinks and gently stretch it back out. Some people find it helpful to imagine filling a balloon, expanding it, filling it with air, filling it with awareness. You're stretching the awareness and then permeating that whole space with this quality of mindful presence.

With sensitivity. This will happen many times. The awareness will shrink. Just open it up again. Stretch it out again and fill it with awareness. Fill it with bright mindfulness. Presence. Sensitivity.

How does it feel? How does that whole space, the energy body, feel? The tone of it. The vibration of it, in it. The feel, the energy, the texture.

So is it possible for the awareness, for the delicate attention to pervade that whole space, the whole body a little bit bigger than the body? It may feel body-shaped, it may feel more amorphous or more kind of oval, egg-shaped, ellipse, circular. Pervading that whole space with a kind of sensitivity to the way it feels, the texture, the vibration, the energetic quality of it. Bright mindfulness, sensitivity, alive awareness filling that space, sensing the whole space, open to the whole space.

Sometimes the feeling is really quite subtle. In fact it's often really quite subtle, so just very delicate with the attention, not forcing anything, just being present throughout the space of the body, sensitive to that whole feeling of energy there.

For some people, it helps to imagine or feel that the awareness is actually centered somewhere in the body, perhaps at the heart center, in the center of the chest, the upper chest. And from there, the awareness expands and fills, or that's the center of this space of awareness and this space of energy. It could be a little lower in the solar plexus. Some people like to feel or are helped by feeling the awareness centered there and then permeating the whole space. Or perhaps down in the hara, the tan tien, a few finger widths below the belly button. Some people find that a helpful place to feel the awareness center.

So what's helpful for you now? Is it possible to stay with this whole body, this whole space awareness of the energy body and just stay open? Keep stretching it when it shrinks—it will shrink many times—and just keep opening it up again, stretching it out to cover that space, staying with that and then beginning to become aware of the breath within that space.

So how does it feel with the breath, the in and the out breath? How does that ripple through the whole space? How does the breath, the in breath, the out breath, feel? How does it affect the energy of the whole space of the energy body?

It can be really, really helpful to gently lengthen the breath, both the in and the out breath. Slow, comfortable, long breaths. As long and as slow as is comfortable. You don't need to move a lot of air, necessarily. So a very gentle breath, but slow and long and smooth. Not forcing, just encouraging the breath to open up, keeping this whole energy body in awareness, this whole space sensitive to the way the breath feels, ripples, affects the whole space. Long, slow, smooth, in and out breath, whole body awareness, whole space, filling the energy body with the energy of the breath, filling it with awareness, filling that space with bright awareness.

Some people notice with the in-breath that the whole body, the whole energy body expands a little. They can feel it expanding, the whole body. In a very subtle way, perhaps, the whole body is kind of expanding, the whole energy body. And with the out-breath, there's a kind of opposite movement, a kind of collapse or contraction, if you like. And one can just remain sensitive to the whole space, the whole energy body, and feeling this expansion and contraction with the in and the out breath. And how does that feel? Really alive and sensitive to that. Keeping the breath long and slow and smooth and comfortable as much as you can without forcing. And aware, sensitive, filling that whole space with bright, present sensitivity.

So tuning into that expansion and contraction, that feeling in the whole space may be very helpful for some people. Or as well, some people might also notice that with the in-breath, there's a feeling of energization. The whole body space feels energized with the in-breath. And how does that feel? Can we tune into that feeling in the whole body? Notice, become sensitive to what that feels like, this energization of the whole space with the in-breath. And with the out-breath, a kind of organic, natural relaxation that happens just by itself with the out-breath. How does that feel? Sensitive to that energization, relaxation, letting go, tuning into these qualities in the whole space with the breath.

It could be the expansion and contraction, could be the energization, the relaxation, could be a mixture of the two. Filling the body, filling that space with awareness, stretching it every time the awareness shrinks.

Now for some people, or sometimes, it can be helpful to feel or imagine—imagine even and then feel—the breath as if it's originating, for example, in the heart center. So that there is a point in the center of the chest—doesn't matter exactly where it is—and the breath expands from there outwards and fills the whole body and then just retracts a little bit back to that.

So instead of a sense of the breath coming in and out of the body, it's as if the breath is centered in the body at a certain center, for example, the heart center. And that's expanding. The energy expands with that. Perhaps the awareness is centered there as well and contracts and expands, and one's feeling that, sensitive to that rippling through and affecting the whole body, the whole space.

It doesn't matter at all if you feel you're just imagining that. If you're imagining it, we want to feel it too. So you can use your imagination, but see if you can really get a felt sense, a kinesthetic sense of that breath energy and how it affects the energy of the whole body.

Now you may feel, if the breath is centered like that, that it no longer wants to be very long, or it may want to stay very long. Just see if you can get a sense—what kind of breath, long or short or smooth or very subtle? How does it want to be breathed? What kind of breath wants to occur when I feel it centered there at the heart center, having the breath center at the heart center and expanding from there?

So be playful. See if you can sense what breath feels the best, feels the most comfortable, the most enjoyable even.

Maybe you want to experiment with the breath energy being centered in the solar plexus, just a little bit lower in the center of the body. And again, sensitive to the whole space, the whole energy body. What kind of breath expands from the solar plexus, fills the whole space with its energy, and then draws back there, collapses down there again? What kind of breath? How long, how short, how smooth, how coarse or subtle? Feeling the whole body, the whole energy, the whole space.

I'm just moving quite quickly just to give you an idea of the possibilities. Is it possible to feel the breath originating within the lower belly center, the hara, the tan tien, down a few finger widths below the navel? Just feel that as the center of the breath energy expanding from there to fill the whole space and then collapsing again. What kind of breath feels the best there? How does it feel to imagine and conceive of the breath being centered there?

Or how about trying in the center of the head, that that becomes the center of the breath? And we're still filling the whole body space with this awareness and sensitivity to the feeling, the energy, the tone of it. Just noticing—how does it feel if the center of the head is actually the center of the breath? The breath expands from there through the whole space of the body. What kind of breath? How should the breath be? Might the breath be so that it feels most comfortable, most enjoyable even, when it's centered there?

How about let's try something else, just to give you an idea, a sense of things you can play with. How would it be to imagine the breath coming in and out from the heart center? Again, sensitive to the whole space, sensitive to the whole energy body, but the breath is coming in and out through the heart center and the center of the chest. And then how does it move? How does it feel? How does its energy expand or affect the whole energy space, the whole energy body? And what kind of breath feels good, feels comfortable or right or even enjoyable there? In and out. Imagining it, but feeling what it feels like to

imagine it that way. Sensitive to the whole body.

Play with all kinds of points in the body this way. For example, how would it feel to imagine the breath energy entering the body at the base of the spine, right down there in the lower back? Again, feeling how that breath energy, imagined that way, coming in and out there, affects the whole body space, the whole energy. Feeling what kind of breath feels good and helpful there.

Or how about imagining the breath coming in the top of the head, the crown center at the top of the head? Just imagining that breath energy entering and going out there, but then feeling what that feels like. What that feels like in the whole space, the whole energy body space. Sensitive. Sensitive. Alert to the whole tone, texture, vibration of the whole space.

And what kind of breath feels best there. So be light, be playful with this. Let the whole body be involved.

Now let's try something else, still keeping this whole body awareness, the sensitivity to the whole energy body experience. Let go right now—keeping that wider awareness—but let go of the breath or any attention to the breath, any deliberate attention to the breath. Just let the breath be. Don't focus on it or make it prominent in the attention. Let go of the breath.

Still with this whole energy body, let's play with the imagination a little bit with regards to the energy body. So is it possible within this sensitivity to the whole space of the energy body to imagine a line of energy from deep down in almost the perineum or right down in the lower belly, all the way up the center of the body, a straight line up the center of the body and perhaps from there, from the perineum or the lower belly all the way up to the crown of the head?

And perhaps even out beyond the top of the head, beyond the crown and even lower than the perineum. So does it want to extend in either or both directions, or does it want to just stay in a certain space? Imagine that line of energy. Maybe you see it visually. Maybe it's a certain color, perhaps white or gold. Maybe it's more kinesthetic. You're just imagining a line of energy.

How does that feel? So there's that line there that we're imagining and we're noticing how that presence of that image, whether it's visual, kinesthetic or whatever, how that affects the tone, the feeling, the energy of the whole space.

And then keeping that wider awareness as always, stretching it out when you need to, keeping that vertical line there of energy, can we add two more lines from that point down in the perineum or right in the lower belly, a line from that point where it meets the vertical line that we've just described, a line going out, radiating out through each leg? So you now have three lines meeting at a point in the lower belly or the perineum.

And these lines that go through the legs, they don't need to necessarily bend at the knee if your knees are bent right now. They might want to extend more in a straight line, again, beyond the edges of the physical

body. How does that feel, those three lines of energy imagined? How does it affect the feeling of the whole space?

Sometimes, for some people, imagining or feeling certain flows of energy in or out of those lines—for example, in through the legs and out through the vertical one, through the top of the head or the other way around or out through all of them—that can be helpful or feel as it just arises by itself. How does it feel? What's helpful with this imagination?

Maybe you want to stay with that and that feels helpful and supportive to the whole energy, or maybe you can also try again—sensitive to the whole space, it's more open stretched awareness over the whole energy body, the whole space—and actually imagining that that whole space is a cloud of light, a cloud of energy that's luminous, perhaps white or golden or golden white light. The whole energy body is really a cloud of light. And how does that feel? How does that feel in the whole space? So this cloud is by nature quite amorphous.

Or we could try a third thing and imagine a body of light—that your body, your energy body, is a body of light, of light energy. So this time, it actually has contours similar to your physical body. And what color does this body of light want to be? Imagining it, but feeling what it feels like to imagine the body this way. A body of light, perhaps again white or golden, perhaps blue, perhaps red, but it's the feeling of the energy, it's the feeling of the space that's important, that's significant. Is it possible to imagine a body of light and to feel what that feels like throughout the body, throughout the energy space?

So these are some of the possibilities we move through very quickly, throwing out different possibilities for you to play with, for you to try. Right now, just staying with this whole body, whole energy body awareness, sensitivity, just return to whichever felt the easiest or the best for you. Perhaps it was just being with the space of the energy body and sensitive to that. Perhaps it was with the breath in a certain way of relating to the breath or feeling the breath or the breath centered in a certain place or in and out a certain place. Or perhaps it wasn't with the breath and it was just more with the images of energy, lines of energy or a cloud of light or this body of light.

Just for a few minutes right now, go back to whichever attracts you the most, whichever felt easiest or best for you. Whatever it is, the awareness is stretched through to permeate, to pervade the whole space, really inhabiting that whole space with bright sensitivity, a live awareness.

And then whatever you've been playing with, see if you can just go back for a few moments to just the awareness pervading that space, just inhabiting, filling that whole space, the energy body, with this bright, luminous sensitivity to the energy, the feeling, the texture, the tone, the vibration of that space.

And when you're ready, slowly opening your eyes, seeing if you can stay in contact with the experience of the body of that space just as much as possible.

Just to be very clear, what we just went through in the guided meditation was really some options, a few

of the options that it's possible to play with. It's not that one would go through all that in that order in a meditation, or even all of that in any order. All of what we did is really a survey, if you like, a taster of possibilities. But I hope it's clear that the breath may or may not be involved.

As I mentioned, you might also bring loving-kindness practice into this work for those familiar with it. While we don't have time to explore metta in depth on this retreat, if you already know the practice, you can beautifully integrate it with the energy body meditation. Begin by feeling into that whole energy space, really establishing sensitivity to the entire field. Then perhaps the metta becomes a kinesthetic imagination - sensing that energy radiating outward as kindness, as well-wishing and healing energy, or wrapping yourself in that cloud of benevolent energy.

You might imagine it as light - again, really feeling it as energy rather than just visualizing. You may choose to use the traditional phrases or not, but the essential point is integrating the loving-kindness into the felt sense of the energy body itself.

Similarly, you might work with visualizations - Quan Yin, Tara, Jesus, whoever resonates with you. But what remains primary, absolutely primary, is to feel the energy body, the energy space, maintaining that sensitivity to the whole body as the Buddha describes.

When working with imagination - those lines of energy we explored - they might want to extend much, much further than the physical boundaries. Out through the top of the head, perhaps extending quite high, and downward, deep down through the perineum or feet if you're standing, reaching far into the earth below. Really remain open and playful, discovering what works for you.

Sometimes it feels wonderful for people to imagine the lines of energy extending out the crown at the top of the head and then curving back in a great arc, forming a large circle with a generous circumference. This energetic circle curves back to enter at the base of the body - the perineum, or the feet if standing. This creates a complete energetic circuit in the imagination.

But remember - it's not merely visual imagination. When playing with these images, I really want to feel how they feel energetically. Perhaps I imagine fire moving through the central line of the body, out through the crown and back down in that great arc. The key is always the felt sense, the actual energetic experience rather than just the mental picture.

And that might be helpful. So if it's helpful, go for it. But feel into all this, play with it, and see what feels helpful.

Sometimes you can turn things completely around. Usually we feel and sense consciousness facing forward because the eyes face forward, and we're accustomed to that. But actually in meditation you can play with the whole feeling of facing out of one's back—the entire back of the body. Feel the energy body turned around that way, whether with the breath, breathing in and out through the back, or with a center in the back, or without the breath at all.

You can really be very playful. It's not always predictable what will feel good at any time, what will feel helpful. But always there's this sensitivity and tuning, this awareness sensitizing to the texture of the energy body space. Sometimes we won't have a word for that texture—"I don't know, it feels like this." It doesn't matter. The labeling is not important. What's important is feeling that whole space. And if there's something enjoyable in feeling that, then enjoy it if possible.

Now, of course, sometimes in meditation—probably everyone knows this—it's definitely not enjoyable. There's discomfort of some kind in the body, or pain. Very, very common. So there are a few things I want to say about that—six things, in fact, that you can go through as a kind of list when there's discomfort or pain with this kind of meditation.

The first thing is that when there is discomfort or pain, the awareness will shrink. This is a very normal part of what goes on. So the awareness shrinks when there's discomfort, and you really just need to notice that's happening. Open it out, widen it, stretch it like that balloon stretching so it's really the whole body. This in itself will help, and sometimes that's all that needs to happen. You keep the awareness wider, it shrinks again, you keep it wider. Sometimes that's all that's needed, but sometimes we need more. Anyway, opening out the awareness is number one.

Number two: sometimes we have discomfort or pain in one area of the body and we get kind of sucked into that. The attention gets drawn there and we fail to notice, we neglect to notice, that some other area of the body may feel relatively okay, relatively comfortable, sometimes even pleasant. What can be very helpful in this kind of samadhi meditation—still tending to the energy and well-being in the body—is staying a little more with the area that does feel okay. So for example, maybe something in my heart center or around my throat feels tight and uncomfortable, but I notice that down in the belly actually feels quite okay. I relax and find that it feels quite warm and comfortable. So staying with the good instead of getting so sucked into where it feels difficult. That's number two, and it can be very helpful. Without fighting, just gently resisting the dragging of attention toward what's difficult, just gently trying to keep it more centered in what feels more okay.

The third option would be to imagine the breath or breath energy or just energy moving through the area of discomfort or pain in the body. For example, I might have pain in my knee when I'm sitting, and I just imagine that the breath energy moves through that place, down through the length of the leg, through the knee. Or I might be contracted in the throat again, and I imagine the energy flowing freely, unobstructed, through that area—perhaps even out the top of the head, or the other way, down through the top of the head, through that constriction in the throat. Imagine the breath energy moving that way, or just energy, these lines of energy. This can be really helpful—imagining the breath or breath energy or energy flowing through the area of discomfort.

A fourth possibility is imagining the breath energy or just energy moving in and out of that area of discomfort. So again, if there's tightness in the throat, discomfort there, something contracted painfully,

just imagine the breath energy coming in at the throat. You might say, "Well, how does it get in?" A bit like in the guided meditation—well, it's okay, don't worry about the anatomy of this. It's just coming in and out, the energy, the breath energy at the throat where it feels contracted. This can sometimes be very, very helpful.

Or if you're doing the metta practice, you can actually—and this may seem counterintuitive—station the center, the origin, the source of the metta right there where it feels contracted. So this tightness in the throat, imagine that this is actually where you're radiating the metta from. It's radiating outward from there. Or again, you could do it the other way around and imagine the metta radiating toward that point of discomfort.

The fifth possibility would be to imagine a white or golden-white or golden light, like a ball of light centered at the center of the discomfort or pain and radiating its light through the whole body. So again, you're aware of the whole body, not letting that awareness shrink—or when it does, opening out again. And then just with the imagination, imagine a ball of light centered where it's difficult.

And see how that feels. It's radiating through the whole body. You're feeling the whole energy body, the space, and feel how that feels.

Now, if none of those work—opening the awareness, staying where it's a little easier, imagining the energy move through that place of discomfort, or imagining the breath energy come in and out there, or metta radiating from it, or a light centered there in the middle of the discomfort and aware of the whole body—if none of that works, you can actually just bring a very light, steady attention on that area of difficulty in the body.

So just holding it in the attention as steadily as you can, but with a real lightness to the attention. And then, as you do that, really allowing—so really as fully as possible—allowing the feelings there, the feeling of discomfort, the unpleasantness, just to be what it is from moment to moment. Again and again, holding it in the attention lightly, steadily, and just allowing it, this moment, this moment—just let it do its thing. Really, really emphasizing the allowing as fully as possible. One hundred percent opening the doors to this moment, to moment opening the doors, allowing, welcoming the actual sensations, the difficult sensations. And that can be very, very helpful. We'll revisit that probably tomorrow.

And again, actually not just discomfort and pain, but also emotions and mind states—both lovely ones, pleasant and positive emotions and mind states, and also more difficult ones, negative ones, afflictive ones, hindrances. All this affects the energy body. This is part of what we want to investigate. I'm going to get into this more tomorrow. But it's something we really want to give attention to, notice, and also learn to work with, and I'll come back to that.

So there's discomfort or pain and what to do with that. And then there's also quite the possibility, as many of you will know, that this energy body can feel quite a lot of pleasantness, or even just a little bit of

pleasantness at different times. So this is something—if that's the case, there's a feeling of well-being or comfort or ease or pleasantness somewhere in the whole body or just one region—we really want to include it. It may not be remarkable. It may be quite a subtle sense of well-being or comfort, not ecstatic, but it can be the whole range, in fact. But even if it's not remarkable, we want to include it in the awareness and actually become a little bit intimate with it.

Now this is especially the case if that pleasantness or well-being is not just in flashes. If it's just in flashes, like a flash of pleasantness or well-being, you just have to kind of open to it and let it wave through. But if it's a bit more steady, like it's around for some minutes that there's this comfort or well-being somewhere or pleasantness, then actually we can begin—in the whole body space, still keeping that larger space—we can actually begin to focus on the feeling of the pleasant energy itself, wherever it is, and kind of nuzzle the attention into it. The attention, really get inside that pleasantness, trying to enjoy it.

Open to it. So one modality might be to penetrate it with the attention; another modality might be to open the being to it, open the body to that pleasantness. So we're not just talking about focusing the mind if we say focus on the pleasant energy—we're also talking about opening the body to it, dissolving the body in it sometimes. As a sense of like dissolving that into the body, or dissolving the body into the pleasantness, sometimes dissolving the mind into—all these are possible, but ways of being intimate and really getting into the pleasantness if it's there, or any pleasantness if it's there and it's a bit more steady for some minutes. And the key thing there is really to just enjoy.

So for some of you, that will be a very new instruction—the permission and the encouragement even to enjoy well-being when it's more than momentary. To really incorporate it, literally incorporate it. Open to it, feel it, enjoy it, relish it. Very important.

Okay, one last thing, just again by way of setting this in a larger context. I suppose we could talk about three sizes of attention that we can employ at any time. We can employ—the mind has this capacity to sort of set its aperture like a camera lens or something. So we can certainly employ at times as human beings a very narrow attention. And many of you will be familiar with concentrating on the breath, say at the tip of the nose or the upper lip or just inside the nose. It's a very small point and we narrow the focus, the attention down there, and we pay attention to that. Or some point in the abdomen where we can feel the rising and falling of the abdomen. It's a narrow, spatially narrow focus of the attention. Or when you sweep the attention through the body, for instance, if you know the Goenka practice, the attention is moving, but it's moving in a narrow way. In other words, a narrow focus of attention is mobile through the body. It's still narrow. Or like when we began the guided meditation, I said pay attention to your hands and the tingling in your hands or the sensations in your hands. It's quite a narrow area of attention. So that's one modality, one size of attention that we can employ in practice at times. Very helpful.

A second is this bigger attention. The whole body, and as I said, even a bit bigger than the whole physical body. And that's what I call the energy body. We're really sensitive to the tone, the feeling, the texture in

that. Of course, I could be sensitive to that in terms of the sensations as well. But we're emphasizing that size and also a kind of sensitivity in there that's more about energy. But that size, that sort of medium size—this whole body and a bit bigger—is the second one.

And the third one is very, very big, vast attention, a vast awareness, like the sky or the size of space. Sometimes it can feel infinite, just huge. And with practice, that's something that one can get very skilled at as well. And also with practice, one can get very skilled at just moving between these sizes of attention, these modes of attention, the apertures, and very skilled in all of them. They each give something different. They're each helpful in different ways.

On this retreat, we're mostly practicing that middle one—the whole body and a bit bigger, that size. That's the size of attention that we're mostly employing for this retreat.

Again, awareness will tend to shrink from that size, from that medium size. It will tend to contract because of certain conditions. When there's an afflictive emotion—fear, ill will, or sometimes even sadness, though that's a more complicated emotion—these afflictive emotions have in common that they shrink the awareness. The awareness contracts with those kinds of emotions.

Awareness will also tend to shrink, as I mentioned earlier, when there's pain or discomfort physically. That will also result in a contracted awareness. It will also shrink whenever the mind is distracted or caught up in thought or thinking. Have a look at what's become of the awareness—it's shrunken when that happens.

More generally, awareness shrinks from that slightly larger middle size of whole body and a bit bigger whenever there's any clinging or craving—any significant clinging or craving of a certain degree. It will shrink the awareness. They go together.

And lastly, we might say that awareness will tend to shrink just out of habit. For most of us, we need to train and develop a habit of slightly larger attention as we develop the practice. So we have a habit of the attention, the awareness, being slightly shrunk or quite contracted, in fact. That's very, very normal. Through practice, we can change that.

The important point here is that it will shrink again and again. As I'm practicing, I need to notice that it shrunk many, many times and expand it, stretch it out again to the whole body and a little bit bigger than the physical body—over and over. Notice, expand, over and over. Really, really helpful.

So today we're going to emphasize this samadhi, this quality of tending playfully, creatively, lightly to the energy body and whatever sense of well-being, of comfort, of ease, of pleasure even is possible there. Lots of options are possible for working with that, things you can play with. That's really the movement, the intention, the direction of samadhi: we're tending playfully, creatively, experimentally to the energy body and how it feels, helping it move in the direction of more and more well-being and enjoying that when it feels relatively good.

That's the focus for today. Again, if you're listening to this course at home and want to stretch it out longer, take longer with this part if you wish. Take a few days at least. We'll be emphasizing it throughout the retreat, so we will never lose this aspect of samadhi that we keep coming back to.

One last thing—I want to re-emphasize what I said last night to encourage you to slow down and let your movement of the physical body be gentle. The way you walk, the way you go up and down stairs, the way you close and open doors and handle things—let that be gentle and a little bit slower. Not to repress anything, not because we're interested in microscopic analysis of sensations there, but because that slowness and gentleness really helps develop and allows a kind of sensitivity and awareness of the whole body, but particularly of the energy body—this quality that we want to cultivate sensitivity to.

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