Preliminaries, Regarding Voice, Movement, and Gesture (Part 5)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 12:51

Here's another exercise. Remember, it's only an exercise, like some of the other things we've done. It reminds me of a variation of something we did on the retreat—some of the movement exercises where we just moved the body in almost micro-movements and held a posture. We saw what that did to the energy body, to the emotions, to the soul sense, if images arose or if not. Just an exercise.

What we're doing here is training sensibility, training sensitivity.

There are many possibilities. You can start with an image and then let the body, let the voice move from the image, move into the voice, express, manifest through the voice, through the posture or the movement. Or we can start with the movement and see what happens in the soul. There are two ways to do it.

So there are all kinds of variations. We're going to combine voice and gesture or posture. This is just an exercise. I don't think we've done it before with this combination, but you can get to think in a certain way about exercises. It's not a big deal. It's like a screw on an airplane—if it's missing, it might be a big deal, but in terms of the bigger structure of the aircraft, how it works, it's not such a big deal. It's not a central component.

So these exercises, occasionally or for a while emphasizing them, are filling out cracks that have not been filled in the soul-scape.

There are two elements: a sound element—sonic, a voicing element—and a gesture or posture element, a movement element.

For this, if we start with the sound, with the voicing, it goes with a little melody. I'll try and sing it more strongly. It's just repeating. I'm singing it more clearly than you need to—it's part of your variation, how you sing it. It's just that fragment repeating with the syllable, for instance, "ma, ma..." Something like that, something rhythmically close to that.

I'm holding roughly the long note for a count of three or six, and the rest is one each—six eighth notes. That's a vague thing that you voice with the syllable "ma," just to stop.

As you do it, you can do it standing up. What are your arms going to do? You can open them wide, spread your arms down to the tips of your fingers to either side, parallel to the floor. So it's a very open posture. You sing it like that.

Maybe there's a slight movement, like rotating just very slightly, slowly, side to side, so that the angle of your arms—the angle your arms make with the body, with the feet, which are stationary—changes slightly as you rotate, slowly and slightly. Really, your job is to feel into this, feel into what that combination feels like—that movement, that gesture, that posture, and the sound, the sounding.

Maybe you have another posture gesture: your hands crossed, one hand up by one shoulder—the right hand up by the left shoulder, the left hand up by the right shoulder—and then hanging down from there so they cross over the abdomen, over the torso. And the same melody. You don't have to sing it like I'm singing it; I'm just trying to make it clear for you. You do that together.

What happens if you fold your hands like people commonly fold—cross your arms across your chest? Play with different postures of your hands, different slight movements, with the same sounding melody.

Maybe you want to vary the syllable, so it's not "ba," but "pa," or "ta," or "oo," or "ee"—exploring the different vowels. There are all kinds of combinations you can discover with what you're sounding and with your gesture, posture, and movement.

Go slow, take your time, but really repeat one variation for several minutes so you can truly enter into it and feel what it's doing, if it's doing anything. Some of these effects might be very, very subtle.

You can vary your posture, your position, your movement, your gesture—that's the first dimension of exploration. You can vary the pitch and the range at which you sing. Not the melody itself—keep roughly what I've been demonstrating—but it could go much higher in your range where it's more comfortable for you. Or it could stretch into the very heights of your vocal range. Or low, deep in the body, stretching down into those lower registers. So play with the register of what you're singing, the pitch of what you're voicing. That's the second variation.

The third variation is volume—all the way from really loud to moderate to a whisper, to internally where only you can hear it inside yourself. Throughout all of this, you keep exploring the other aspects: the gesturing, the pitch. There's tremendous variation possible here.

Your task is really an exercise in sensitivity. Your job is to feel into it deeply. How does it feel? What happens in the energy body? Remember our expanded understanding of energy body now. What happens emotionally, in the emotional body? And what happens, if anything, in image or soul? The soul responds.

It's very simple, with lots of variations. It's really about sensitivity—it's an exercise in attunement. Don't expect too much. Your job is simply sensitivity. Sensitivity.

You can do this whole exploration with another melody that comes to you, that occurs to you spontaneously, or a fragment that you know from something that touches your soul. What happens when you sing it, when you voice it, when you sound it in these different ways while your body moves and gestures in these different expressions? Put them together.

It's just an exercise in sensitivity. So that's another addition to our collection of contemplative practices. I hope that's clear enough.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.