

Bodycare Practice — Mettā towards the Body

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 44:55

Greetings.

This afternoon we're going to practice body care. I'll explain what we're going to do and then we'll do it.

The first thing is to get the right relationship to the body. The Buddha has offered us lots of exercises to do that, two main ones. But as we go through, you'll see it's all about the usual thing about me and mine, attachment and identity. Once we've corrected that relationship to the body, we can turn the *mettā* that we did yesterday afternoon towards the body itself. Then we can open up very much like Reiki. In fact, I would say it's the same. The practice is taken from the Tibetan tradition of the Medicine Buddha. Then we can share it. If you've got people in the house, you can share it with them, whether they know that or not, or your neighbours, and then we can share it to all beings in all directions.

Let's get into a nice contemplative posture to make sure that your body is the expression of the enlightened mind of the awakened one. Just that energy coming up the spine. Spending a moment just relaxing. For both this exercise and *mettā*, it's good to feel comfortable, so feel free to move your position.

Our first contemplations are to undermine the sense of "my body," possessive. I will say something like, "I have a headache," but "I am ill." So sometimes we have a body and sometimes we are the body. One of the reflections that the Buddha gives us is on the foulness of the body. What I'm going to do is mention some of the obvious ones, and as I go down through the body, just catch your reaction. The reaction, of course, is one of disgust. Now disgust is natural when it comes to taste—if you put something in your mouth which is off, then we should be able to tell it's bad for us and we want to spit it out. But disgust as a relationship to the foul parts of the body, that's something we learn. If you were in the medical professions, of course, you'd have to get over all that.

I'm just starting at the top there: tears, wax in the ears—as soon as I mention it, you see, you've got to catch your reaction. Nasal fluid, saliva, catarrh, blood, contents of the stomach which if they came out we'd call vomit. Diarrhoea in the lower intestine, the intestines. Stools. Urine. Sweat. Not a pretty list.

Go back to the one which, you know, you just felt that bit of disgust for. Just stay with that for a moment and just keep asking yourself, is this necessary? And I just see it as a natural product of the body.

We have another relationship to the body and that's to do with beauty. Often, unless you happen to be supremely beautiful, a Hollywood star or something, most people would not be satisfied with their bodies one way or the other. Just catch your face in the mirror. What do you say about it? What's your opinion? Can you change your view and just see it as holding virtually all your senses? That it's doing a job of work.

This is what we are born with. Just accepting it. The importance is, of course, that our self-esteem is often affected by how we feel we look in other people's eyes. What about the whole body? Your whole body in the mirror? Can you just accept it? This is the way it is. Be happy in your skin, as they say.

Beauty is a social construct. It's we who decide what's beautiful and what's not. Can we lift ourselves above all that and just see the body as an organism and that it's doing the job? The legs are to carry us about. This contemplation helps us just to accept the body as it is and, of course, as it grows older.

The final contemplation is how much pleasure the body gives us from what we see, feel and so on. What do you fear the most? Going blind? Going deaf? Paralysis? Something else? Now that's the fear of loss of something we're dependent on for happiness. But we know from people who are disabled that this doesn't have to upset their quality of life. But for an able-bodied person to become disabled is a huge challenge, depending on how bad the disablement is. And there's the suffering.

Using these contemplations to undermine this false idea of the body being mine, somehow I possess it, control it completely. But more the sense of working with it.

The next contemplations are to do with coming to terms with sickness, ageing and death. These, of course, were the so-called messengers from the gods that awoke the Buddha to his search. As the tradition goes, he was out on various days seeing a person who was extremely ill, one who was extremely old and a corpse, and an ascetic sitting under a tree suggesting that there may be an escape from this. So these contemplations are really getting down to the nitty-gritty, the sense of identity, this body as me, I am ill, I am well.

Just repeating these phrases to ourselves and accepting their truth value, that's all. Feel the resistance. Just let it be there. Just receive the truth value of these statements, repeating them gently to ourselves.

This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness. This body is subject to ageing. This body has not gone beyond ageing. This body is now in a process of ageing. This body is subject to death. This body has not gone beyond death. This body will die.

Now having undermined this wrong relationship of possessing and identifying with the body, we have to have the right relationship. The Buddha reminds us that this is a very precious rebirth. Here we have this combination of joy and woe and the intelligence to make our way out of it. Of course, you can't be here without a body—it's as simple as that. It's through the senses that we experience the world, that we learn, everything comes towards us. It's through the body we relate, we communicate, we express ourselves. It's through the body we work for the benefit of ourselves and others. In this way we create *kamma*, consequences. Finally, in vipassanā techniques, but virtually all meditation techniques, the body comes in at some point or other.

What we have to do is turn to the body and apologise for any harm we've done it. Whatever harm I have done to you in thought, word or deed, by way of greed, hatred and delusion, intentionally, unintentionally,

habitually, I'm sorry for it and I determine from this day on to treat you with due care and respect.

Now having corrected in some way our relationship to the body, we can now turn that mettā, that goodwill that we were practising yesterday, towards the body itself. Remember, what is this body but a collection of billions of cells, each one quite individual, all doing their little tasks? All we're going to do is saturate and drench them with our goodwill. This is done so infrequently, and I'm sure that when they do feel our love towards them, they want to just jump up and down with joy.

Let's begin now. First of all, you have to find a phrase which expresses for you healing or invigorating. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong. It could be that or just choose one of your own. Then just put it at the heart centre there in the chest and just radiate it out first of all to the whole body. Now you might find using colour helpful or sending out a sense of warmth, or it's just good enough just to say the phrases. Let's take our time.

Let's start at the top of the head there and let's come down the protective skin of our bodies and just shower it with our loving kindness, all the way down to the toes. Coming back to the top of the head. Now when you do this exercise by yourself, of course, you can take as much time as you wish.

Just come down into the skull—don't frighten yourself, it's just a piece of bone—and saturate it with your loving kindness and then down the spine, the arms, all the way down to the toes. Just following the skeleton all the way down. All the way down to the toes.

Coming back to the top of the head and, of course, remembering that it's in our bones that all the blood corpuscles are being manufactured. Drop down now into the brain and pour your loving kindness into that area. Brighten it up, light it up. Then just follow the nervous system, higgledy-piggledy, all the way down to the toes. Just like a big jellyfish, all the way down to the toes.

Coming back now to the head and moving into the muscles, the jaw, the cheeks. Massage them with your loving kindness. Then just make your way down the musculature of the body, all the way down to the toes.

Coming back now to the head and blessing the senses. Offer your blessings to your eyes. Into your ears. To your nose. Your tongue and teeth. Coming into the throat to the voice.

Coming down into the chest area. Spend some time there. Turning towards the heart, pour your loving kindness into that organ. This is the one muscle that never tires. Then follow the blood any which way round the body, bringing its warmth and love to all parts.

Coming down now into the midriff, the liver, stomach area. If you know the individual organs, you can bless them individually or you can just see it as a felt space and just pour your blessings, your loving kindness into that area. Moving down into the abdomen with its various systems. Again, you can spend time with each system or just see it all as a felt space. Pour your loving kindness into that area.

Bless your hands. Bless your feet.

Now we've touched every part of our bodies with our loving kindness. Perhaps there's a part that needs special attention. Spend a little time there now.

Now we can open up to other energy. This is much the same as Reiki. Here we have to invite the energy into us—that's much the same as the way Brian was doing it. What we imagine doesn't have to be an amazing visualisation, just an image in the mind, just a shaft of light coming down from above.

Down onto your head. Now you have to give it a colour, one that you feel is healing or invigorating. You have now this shaft of light, having chosen a colour, coming down and forming a ball just above your head. As it pours in, the ball takes on a quality of liquid, or if you prefer, oil. It's either cool or warm. It slowly begins to rotate.

Here we have the image pouring down from above, this shaft of light, which has a colour, pouring into this ball, which has a feel—liquid, oil, warm, cool—and it's just gently rotating. Can we now lower it slowly just on the scalp and see if we can feel those sensations? Just let the ball now just come down into the head, deep into the head. Into the throat. The whole head is this ball gently rotating. Still pouring down from above, the shaft of light.

Let the ball lengthen out over the shoulders and slowly make its way down the chest. Don't forget the spine and the arms. Deep inside the chest. Still pouring down from above, down through the head into this ball, gently rotating around the chest.

Let it sink a bit deeper into the liver, stomach area. Don't forget the spine and the arms. Still pouring down from above, down through the head, down the chest into this ball, gently rotating around the midriff.

Let it keep going down into the abdomen. Don't forget the spine and the arms. Still pouring down from above, coming right the way down through the body to this ball now gently rotating around the abdomen.

Let it complete its journey all the way down to the feet. All now is gently rotating around our feet or legs if you're sitting cross-legged.

Now with the in-breath, just draw the energy up from the ball, up the body to the top of the head with our own energy. Then with the out-breath, with new energy from above, just let it all cascade down the body. Just breathing in and up. Breathing out and down. The feel of a wave motion. If there's a part of the body needs special attention, let it go through that like water through a sponge.

Now we can offer this energy to others. If you're living with somebody in your house, you can include them. If you're by yourself, you could include your immediate neighbours. Here we're just breathing in that energy into the heart centre. It's the energy from above and our own energy. We're offering it out to whoever is close to us. Again, just breathing in and breathing out. With it, you can offer blessings. May you be free of sickness. May you be well. May you be strong.

We can also bring to mind anyone we know who's having a hard time, but especially physically. I'd like to mention Rob Berbier, who seems to be approaching his final days. With people who are dying, of course, the offering is a painless, peaceful death, a letting go.

Since this is uppermost in our minds at the moment, we can also include all the victims of COVID-19.

Finally, we can offer our blessings to all beings in all directions. May all beings be free of physical pain. May all beings be free of mental distress. May all beings be liberated of all their sufferings. May all beings live in contentment and joy. May all beings live together in peace and harmony. May all beings experience the bliss of Nibbāna. May all beings be happy.

Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu. Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu. Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

Very good. Do continue your practice. Those of you who want to join me on Zoom, I'll be here at four o'clock. Otherwise, keep putting in those hours and hours of meditation. When Milarepa, the great Tibetan saint, was asked by his student what it took to become fully liberated, he took his pants down and showed him the calluses on his bottom. So we have a lot of work ahead of us.

I shall leave you to your meditations and hopefully see most of you, or some of you anyway, at four o'clock. Thank you.

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