

Body as Meditation Object

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 22:02

Greetings, I trust you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Today we practiced this body care and it's been substantiated by Brian, who's been doing the Reiki. So I thought we'd have a look at the body from the Buddha's point of view.

In the Buddha's teachings, the body and mind are two different, for want of a better word, forms of energy, whatever. But it's not the awareness, the *satipaññā*, the Buddha within. This was made more plain in Mahāyāna, where they talked about the three bodies, Yogācāra.

So the first was the body of the Dharma, which is the unconditioned Buddha. Remember, he said that he had achieved the unconditioned *citta*, *citta* here meaning the awareness, he's pointing to the awareness, not the mind. And there's the Sambhogakāya, which is the body of bliss, which is the mental body, which for the Buddha, of course, becomes one which is heart-based happiness. Somebody who's fully liberated doesn't suffer as such. And then there's the Nirmāṇakāya, which is the body of appearance, which is this physical body.

And this physical body can only give us pain, right? It can't make us suffer. The suffering has come because of a wrong relationship to the body, which is identity. It's me. I am sick. I am well. And possession, right? I have a bad knee, which I do have at the moment. And I have a headache, things like that. So the suffering comes from a relationship to the body. The body can only offer us pain and pleasure, of course.

The Buddha, of course, made this mistake in his training. After he had achieved all these *jhāna* states, his absorption states, in the first part of his training for about two years or so, he then went into the process of self-mortification. So there the understanding was the body was the product of your unwholesome actions, your *kamma*. And you had to let go of the body. So there was this process of eating less and less and less. This seemingly was the doctrine of the Jain leader, where the saint is one who finally just stops eating, just lets go. So he found that to be just more pain and he left it highly disappointed and very thin. And that's when he went off to sit under the tree where he became fully liberated.

So somewhere along that line, moving away from self mortifications and reflecting upon his practice, he came upon the insight into what was really causing the problem, really causing the suffering and the escape from suffering. And that was his big insight. And it's, as we've mentioned before, to do with our

relationship, to do with ethics.

Now, so we have that dualistic relationship with the body. It's me and it's mine. And it's interesting to note, I've got this book called *The Human Body*. And occasionally I open it and very quickly close it. And there are astounding little facts, you see. For instance, if I were to ask you now, have you any idea what your liver's doing? It's a mystery. And there are many little things that this book mentions which are astounding, really.

For instance, the brain contains 12 billion neurons. 12 billion neurons. And there are 50 billion supporting glial cells, wherever they are. 50 billion neurons. I mean, I've never seen a single neuron. And if it's to do with my thinking, I've probably lost a few.

And then there's the blood. Now, this is amazing. This is coming out of the marrow of our bones. Every second, every second, I can't believe this, frankly, but every second, two million oxygen-bearing red blood cells die. But they are replaced at the same rate by new ones generated in the process within the marrow of the bone. Can't be right, can it? Two million. Two million oxygen. I should be dead. So it just shows, when you get all these facts, they are quite astounding. And how the body works and what the little parts of it do, the pancreas, the liver. You wonder that you live so long and that you can remain so healthy because anything can go wrong. The minor thing and you're sunk.

So it's actually good to reflect on the fact that actually, we don't really know the body. We don't experience the body. What we experience of the body really comes through the sense of touch, the sense of movement. And just that sensual divide between what's pleasurable and what's unpleasurable.

Then we have to accept that there's a changing nature. The body's never the same. They tell you that every seven years you've got a new body. I just wish the renewal would be a little bit more enhancing. It just seems to get worse. I don't know why. So this changing nature of the body, every seven years a new body. I mean, every seven years. It's ridiculous, isn't it, when you think about it? To think that when you're standing and you're looking at your hand, you didn't have this hand. I did not have this hand seven years ago. It was a completely different hand.

The sheer dependency of the body on food, on air, any of that becomes denied us before we know it. We're dead. The body just dies. You can live without water, I think, for about nine days.

And the control we have is minimal. It's more like somebody driving a car. You get in a car, you drive it, you feel you're in control of the car and then the car comes to a stop or the wheel blows or somebody hits it and that's it. And that's the end of the car as far as you're concerned, at least its mobility.

So this idea that we're feeling of being in control of the body, actually the control is quite surface, quite minimal. Of course, when you see these athletes, the woman gymnast in the last Olympics was just unbelievable what she can do with the body, but it's still only a surface control of the body, just through actions and movements.

So what we were doing was a practice whereby we undermine this wrong idea of possessing the body and being the body. Just like any objects, what you can do is use it, right? There's no point in possessing an object. It's just going to cause a lot of suffering. Emotionally, I mean. Obviously, legally, the mobile might be yours. But when the thief takes it, it's his. It's no good. Going around saying somebody's taken my mobile, it's no longer yours.

So it's getting rid of the idea of somehow possessing the body. Somehow we're in it, we're in it, but not of it. What is that we referring to? It's awareness. The awareness is in it, but not of it.

And then we went through this relationship that we have with the body, part of it we like, part of it we're disgusted by. So these relationships are not particularly needed at all. I mean, you need it for food. If you put something rotten in your mouth, then you need to know this is rotten, it's going to poison me. So then that is a sort of sensual disgust. But the actual emotion of disgust is not necessary, is it? And, of course, it displaces itself to being disgusted with people.

And the wrong relationship, of course, forms an attachment to the body as a place where we're using to create happiness. So that's where the suffering really lies because, for instance, if you go blind, if you go deaf. If you suffer from an accident and become paralysed, I mean, the suffering involved in that will be as much as your dependency on those faculties for your happiness. Now, we know from disabled people that the quality of your life need not be undermined, but the change, going through the grief and the sense of loss and all that is obviously due to this psychological dependency we have on the body for happiness and that's what we mean by attachment.

And then the contemplation of sickness, aging and death which we do every evening. See that's to try and undermine the fact that we are the body, this peculiar identity.

So we went through all that of course. Death. In the, well, the body turns up in two major discourses, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, the discourse on how to establish awareness. And then there's a whole discourse which is devoted to the body. I think it's mindfulness of the body, he translates it as.

And what the Buddha says is that mindfulness of the body, by which he means a right relationship with the body, is one way of stopping Mara getting in, by which he means unwholesome and unskillful thoughts. And he gives a couple of examples. He likes metaphor. He loves metaphor.

"Anyone who has developed and cultivated mindfulness of body has included within himself what wholesome states there are that partake of true knowledge, just as one who has extended his mind over the great ocean has included within it whatever streams there are that flow into the ocean. So too, anyone who has developed and cultivated mindfulness of the body has included within himself whatever wholesome states there are that partake of true knowledge."

So the true knowledge, which is to do with the three characteristics, seeing things as they really are, begins with the body. The body is obvious, right? The mind isn't so obvious. Emotions can be obvious.

Thoughts are not so obvious. They're sort of, in a sense, intangibles when compared to the body. The body has that sort of sense of reality, inverted commas, and it's not real, but it has that groundedness in the earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

And then he says, anybody who's not developed a cultivated mindfulness of the body, Mara finds an opportunity and a support in him. "Suppose a man were to throw a heavy stone ball upon a mound of wet clay. What do you think? Would that heavy ball find entry into that mound of wet clay?" "Oh, yes, venerable sir."

That's so he gives these lovely examples. "Supposing suppose there were a dry sapless piece of wood and the man came with an upper fire stick" — so remember they're rubbing sticks together — "I shall light a fire and I shall produce a fire. What do you think? Could a man light a fire and produce heat by rubbing the dry sapless wood with an upper fire stick?" "Yes, Venerable Sir."

And he gives lots of these little examples to show, to sort of get across to people that if you're not aware of the body, if you're not within the body, have a proper relationship to the body, then it can cause you suffering. And the suffering is through attachment, through indulgence, and through aversion to the body.

And then finally he has the benefits of the body. Some of them are about extrasensory perceptions and all that, and remembering past lives and all that. But the first ones we can relate to, I think, easy enough.

So one becomes a conqueror of discontent and delight and discontent does not conquer one. One abides overcoming discontent when it arises. This, of course, is the discontent from the body, feelings of hunger, etc.

One becomes a conqueror of fear and dread and fear and dread do not conquer oneself. One abides overcoming fear and dread whenever they arise. So, of course, fear and dread to the body arise whenever it's in peril, whenever it's in danger.

One bears cold and heat, hunger and thirst, the contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, the creeping things, and of course coronavirus. So those are the physical things that we can endure. But one also endures ill-spoken, unwelcome words, especially when people make comments about your body. And arisen bodily feelings that are painful, wracking, sharp, fierce, disagreeable, distressing and menacing to life.

So if we can get the right relationship to the body, then yes, pain is part of the process. Pain comes with life. What can you do? But at least we won't have this second arrow, as the Buddha talks about it, the second dart, which is the suffering, which is our reaction, which is how we relate to the body as me, mine, etc. And all the fears of sickness, of aging and death arise because of that.

So yes, there's a whole discourse here on how to establish that mindfulness. And the sections are the same as in the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse.

So first of all, there's the breath itself. The breath and emotions are intimately connected, as you know. And therefore, when we sit with the breath and quieten the breath, it has an effect on the heart. It quietens the heart. And it stills the mind and the body feels good when we allow the body just to breathe. In fact, he says, "I shall breathe in, tranquilizing the body formations. I shall breathe out, tranquilizing the bodily formations." So there's an effort there in the practice to use the breath to just feel relaxed, to feel at ease.

And when you're doing that you can feel the tension sort of slough off as they leave you, these tensions that might be in the body, overactivity or something. It can even be invigorating, if you especially if you use the breath, just put a bit of energy into it, you can lift the energy right up.

Now these exercises are not *vipassanā*. So you have to be careful that. You have to know you're using the breath to bring about calmness, to calm yourself or to lift energy. And that's fine. What we don't want to do is confuse *samatha* or breath techniques with *vipassanā*. *Vipassanā* is letting things be and seeing the three characteristics.

He talks about the four postures, which are the four postures of meditation: walking, sitting, lying down. They're your major postures. Full awareness. And here he talks about doing things mindfully. So he acts with full awareness, going forward and returning. Full awareness, looking ahead, looking away. Full awareness, flexing and extending his limbs. Full awareness, wearing his robes, wearing your clothes. Full awareness while eating, drinking, consuming, tasting. Full awareness while defecating and urinating. Fancy. And who acts in full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking and keeping silent. So in other words, the whole moment to moment mindfulness, as the Mahāsi would say, is the secret of success.

Then he goes on to the foulness of the body. So here he's got a great list that just goes on and on: bone marrow, kidneys, heart, large intestine, small intestine, faeces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil in the joints. That's quite a list really, isn't it?

So and he says, "Just as though there was a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grains such as hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millets and white rice, and a man with good eyes were to open it and review it thus: 'This is this, this is this.'"

So it's really getting that sense of equanimity, that getting that sense of non-reactivity to the body and its foulness because we tend to put our attention on its beauty, surface beauty.

Then, of course, there's the elements. Now, the elements, remember, fire, earth, water and air, or wind, fire, earth, water and air. Well, wind is movement, you see. These refer, of course, to pressures, solidity, to water, elasticity, cohesiveness, fire, heat, any form of heat or cold, and, of course, wind, which is movement. And this is pointing to how the basic sensations that come in from the body into the mind, that's what they are, right? They're not objective physics, right? They're about how they are the subjective

experience we have within ourselves of matter. So, I mean, this is what you can explore a bit in your practice.

And then finally, there's the charnel grounds. I think there are nine. There are nine where you go and sit at the charnel ground, because in those days, they would just leave the body out, dressed in white robes. And it was these white robes that the ascetics would take, the *samaṇas* would take, and make robes out of them. And the Buddha himself would have done that. So they're on the charnel ground devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, worms, etc.

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